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How Rural Educators Implement Common Core State Standards

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MA, Valley City State University, 2008

BS, Montana State University-Northern, 2001

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Implementation of the common core state standards began in 2010 for public school districts across the United States, and research about the impact of these standards on teaching and learning in smaller rural schools is limited. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to describe how K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote schools integrated the common core state standards into curriculum, as defined by Aoki's theory about planned and lived curriculums, which formed the conceptual framework for this research. Participants included 8 K-12 English language arts teachers from 2 rural remote public school districts located in a western state. Research questions addressed curricular and instructional alignment, and data were collected from individual teacher interviews and reflective journals, observations of instructional lessons, and curriculum documents. Data were coded and categorized to determine themes and discrepant data (Charmaz, Merriam, and Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña). A content analysis was used for documents. Results indicate that teachers aligned curriculum with common core state standards by using previously adopted textbooks, developing alignment documents to address standards, creating unit and lesson materials independently, and participating in limited collaborative planning with colleagues. Recommendations include continued investigation into rural teachers' professional development needs, collaborative planning practices, and use of curriculum materials within and across grade levels. This study contributes to positive social change because improved rural education impacts rural remote students, communities, and educators, who play a valuable role in developing a national curriculum.

How Rural Educators Implement the Common Core State Standards

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Curriculum development and implementation pose unique challenges within rural school environments, particularly in the current era of standards-based curriculum reform (Nelson, 2010). Educators in rural school systems operate with limited funding, resources, and personnel, yet they strive to prepare students adequately for college and career (Howley et al., 2014). In exploring how rural teachers develop goals for their work, Vaughn and Saul (2013) found that rural teachers become vested, not only in their teaching responsibilities, but also in the visions they develop for student and school success. Rural educators are concerned with designing curriculum that is considerate of rural student needs. In an investigation of rural teachers in Australia, Roberts (2014) found that rural teachers question the relevancy of national curriculum to rural settings, especially when there is little evidence that educational leaders considered rural contexts during the development of national standards. The role of place is principally important to rural educators, and Avery (2013) and Budge (2010) advocated for the inclusion of place-based content within rural curriculum. Given the influence of the rural landscape on rural education and the significant student population enrolled in rural schools worldwide, Stelmach (2011) argued that the global need for rural education expertise is apparent, yet rural education remains an area of limited research.

This study was focused on the curricular experiences of K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote school districts who integrated the common core state standards into school curriculum and classroom instruction. The National Governors

Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) led the common core state standards initiative for English language arts/literacy and mathematics (2010). The discipline of English language arts was selected for this study because it is a core area of study in the United States and because English language arts teachers are already engaged in curriculum reform efforts related to this initiative. Additionally, the literacy standards included within the common core English language arts standards target other content areas, making English language arts curriculum reform relevant to all other content areas.

Aoki (1993), a renowned curriculum theorist, theorized that educators view curriculum in two realms: "curriculum-as-plan" and "curriculum-as-lived" (p. 257). Through professional debate, discussion, and reflection, educators develop personal philosophies of how these two curriculum components interact, as described by Beghotto (2013) in an investigation of creativity as a product of lived curriculum and Powell and Lajevic (2011) in an examination of the planned and lived components of an art curriculum. Such curriculum processes are challenging for rural teachers and administrators because of situational limitations in personnel, resources, and funding (Howley et al., 2014), yet Vaughn and Saul (2013) investigated the goal-setting practices of rural teachers and contended that the personal visions rural teachers create for curriculum are powerful. Therefore, this study addressed a research gap in understanding how K-12 rural remote public school English language arts teachers implement the common core state standards when professional collaboration is limited, especially in

relation to aligning the personal curricular philosophies of teachers into a cohesive K-12 standards-based curriculum.

This chapter is an introduction to the study. This chapter includes background information that is a summary of the research literature related to the scope of the study, a description of the research gap that this study addressed, and an explanation of why this study was needed. In addition, this chapter includes a description of the research problem, the purpose of the study, and the conceptual framework in relation to the research questions. A description of the nature of the study and terms relevant to the research are also included. This chapter also includes a description of the boundaries or scope of the study, its delimitations, and the assumptions and limitations of the research. The significance of the study is described in relation to advancing knowledge in the discipline, supporting professional growth, and motivating positive social change within rural communities.

Background

Research literature specific to rural education is diverse in subject matter, yet limited in depth. Identifying trends in rural education research is difficult because research in the field has been diverse and addresses many aspects of rural school district operations. Coladarci (2007) reviewed rural education research and found that it is limited, particularly in defining the context of rural schools. Without an established notion of what common characteristics define rural education, Coladarci maintained researchers cannot identify thematic trends in rural teaching and learning. Similarly, Howley et al. (2014) and Greenough and Nelson (2015) agreed that the classification of

rural schools is inaccurate because schools are grouped together according to size, which does not consider other community characteristics that diversely impact school organization and function. While size is a commonality in rural schools, researchers have also found significant diversities in the organization and composition of rural schools based on the unique needs of the communities they serve, particularly when rural schools and communities are isolated from larger population centers (Morton & Harmon, 2011). In a discussion of rural education research, Coladarci advocated for the use of descriptive narratives within rural education research to further clarify the conditions specific to a research study, since significant diversity exists across rural settings. Similarly, in a discussion of how rural education is defined, Koziol et al. (2015) emphasized the need for researchers to clearly articulate the rural perimeters they use to guide their research.

In a significant study, Burton, Brown, and Johnson (2014) conducted a narrative analysis of the literature on rural education and presented storylines about rural teachers in the United States from 1970 to 2010. They found the characteristics of rural teachers are distinct from urban and suburban teachers, especially regarding professional development, collegial interaction, and adaptability (Burton et al., 2013). Burton et al. concluded that rural isolation contributes to limited professional development opportunities for rural teachers, which in turn limits teachers' knowledge and awareness of current reform movements within the field of education.

In another important study, Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, and Dean (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of research on rural education from 1991-2003 and found studies during this time frame did not provide a clear construct of the challenges in rural education.

Arnold et al. found that major topics in rural education included supporting special needs students, classroom instructional strategies, establishing school safety and security, and supporting high school students' goals and future planning. Curriculum planning, development, and implementation were not prominent themes in the research that Arnold et al. reviewed.

Researchers have presented diverse views about the identification and classification of rural areas, communities, and school systems, which has contributed to discrepancies in rural education research (Semke & Sheridan, 2012). In reviewing rural education in an international setting, Pini, Moletsane, and Mills (2014) and Preston, Jakubiec, and Kooymans (2013) contended that researchers identify rurality by varied characteristics, including geographic boundaries, population densities, or social grouping. In the United States, federal and state agencies have defined rural classifications differently, which contributes to confusion within rural education literature. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), rural communities are areas where the population falls below 2,500 people. The National Center for Education Statistics (2006) further separated rural school identification into three subcategories: rural fringe, distant, and remote areas.

Educational researchers have also documented the geographic and financial limitations of rural school districts. In its 2014 report of rural schools, the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE) reported that rural administrators in School Improvement Grant (SIG) schools adopted the SIG transformation model for school improvement because other reform models were not

feasible options within the rural setting (Rosenberg, Christianson, Angus, & Rosenthal, 2014). Additionally, rural administrators and teachers have concerns with the professional learning community (PLC) structure outlined within SIG participation requirements, citing diversity in the professional development needs of rural school staffs. Similarly, in a discussion concerning rural school improvement, Nelson (2010) emphasized the need for rural school educators to approach curriculum improvement creatively, since the unique conditions of each rural school and community influence how teachers plan and implement instructional change.

A significant portion of rural education research focuses on the knowledge, training, and experiences of rural school administrators. Morton and Harmon (2011) examined frontier schools in Montana and found rural school administrators are concerned with student enrollment, strained financial resources, and meeting federal regulations. Clarke and Wildy (2011) conducted a case study in Australia to investigate how district level administrators support the work of rural classroom teachers and found teachers working in remote schools need regular professional support from regional and district leaders to improve student learning and performance.

Based on a review of the research literature, a research gap was found concerning how rural teachers align the common core state standards with curriculum development and implementation to effect positive social change in rural education. While instructional practices are prominent in current rural education research, Arnold et al. (2005) noted that most studies focus on the use of technology as an instructional tool and fail to address more complex issues of rural curriculum and instruction. In their analysis

of the literature about rural teachers in the United States, Burton et al. (2013) found rural education research in specific curriculum areas to be unbalanced, with a notable lack of research in rural literacy and social studies curriculum. These findings highlighted the need for this study because researchers have conducted limited research on the specific curricular approaches that rural educators use to integrate the common core state standards into curriculum, instruction, and assessment at the classroom level.

Research related to the common core state standards initiative was also limited because the implementation of these standards had only recently begun across the United States. The NGA and the CCSSO first published the common core state standards initiative for English language arts/literacy and mathematics in 2010, and individual states have approved state standards related to this national model in subsequent years (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). In the western state where this study was conducted, the common core standards for English language arts and literacy were adopted in November 2011.

Some limited research was found about the implementation of the common core state standards. In exploring educators' experiences in implementing the common core state standards, Porter, Fusarelli, and Fusarelli (2015) found teachers want additional guidance from school administrators concerning the goals and process of changing curriculum while district administrators voice the same need for guidance from state level educational leaders. Stewart and Varner (2012) articulated similar concerns, noting that rural school districts are working to integrate common core state standards into local curriculum, but state departments of education have not provided specialized support to

educators in rural school districts. Marrongelle, Sztajn, and Smith (2013) also found that the timeframe for successful transitions to the common core state standards requires significant changes in school curriculum, instruction, and assessment to be effective. Thus, these findings indicate that additional flexibility may be needed regarding the implementation of the common core state standards, given the limited personnel and resources often available in rural school systems.

A gap in the research literature was found specific to curriculum development and implementation within rural school districts. This research gap was of significant concern, given the hesitation of rural school administrators to engage rural educators in aggressive curriculum reform connected to the standards-based movement, as Budge (2010) described in an analysis of rural education leadership. In a discussion of problems with recruiting and retaining rural administrators, Wood, Finch, and Mirecki (2013) contended that school administrators are instructional leaders within rural school systems by default, since rural districts do not typically fund separate curriculum or instructional leadership positions. In their reluctant role as curriculum leaders, Budge suggested that rural administrators are likely to direct steady and progressive change, rather than forceful school reform as a means of maintaining staff and community support. Given the lack of strong curriculum leadership within rural districts, ongoing research in rural education is needed to clarify the roles of administrators and classroom teachers in rural curriculum reform.

Problem Statement

Curriculum development and implementation are critical to program improvement in K-12 education, and supporting curriculum development in rural remote schools is an ongoing problem. While the common core state standards initiative has unified curricular goals and standards, curricular change is especially challenging for rural educators, who balance many roles and responsibilities within rural schools. Instructional leadership is only one responsibility of rural school administrators, who find themselves balancing daily school operations, facility needs, and community connections in addition to providing curriculum leadership (Preston et al., 2013; Wood et al., 2013). Without clear administrative leadership, rural teachers may not be able to adequately integrate the common core state standards into existing district curriculum. In an investigation into the recruitment and retention of high quality teachers in rural areas, Monk (2007) found that rural teachers manage diverse class schedules with limited financial resources and curriculum materials. In examining how rural school districts manage resources, Howley, Howley, Hendrickson, Belcher, and Howley (2012) found that rural districts can share services to support students' learning needs; however, educators in collaborative school districts may still struggle to coordinate curriculum and instructional goals. The curriculum challenges found in rural education are compounded by limitations in personnel, finances, and resources (Howley et al., 2012), yet rural educators must create feasible methods of implementing curriculum reforms related to the common core state standards.

Much of the current research in rural education is concerned with leadership and operational challenges within rural settings, but does not specifically investigate how rural educators address curriculum reform. In reviewing rural education research articles, Arnold et al. (2005) found that curriculum ranked 11th among rural education research topics, with only 16 of 498 research abstracts addressing curriculum development in rural school settings. Educators across the United States have experienced significant curriculum changes as they integrate the common core state standards (NGA & CCSSO, 2010) into established state education standards, yet understanding the unique challenges that rural educators face in developing and implementing curricular changes within rural remote school districts is a gap in current research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe how K-12 English language arts teachers in two rural remote public school districts aligned the planned curriculum, represented by the common core state standards and district curricular materials, with the lived curriculum that they implemented in their courses. In order to accomplish that purpose, I describe how K-12 English language arts teachers in two rural remote public school districts updated curricular materials and instructional practices to align with the common core state standards. In addition, I describe how these English language arts teachers collaborated vertically to connect their curriculum across grade levels and with teachers of other content areas. I also describe the professional development activities that these English language arts teachers engaged in concerning the integration of the

common core state standards into their planned and lived curriculums at the classroom level.

Research Questions

The following research questions were based on the conceptual framework for this study and a review of the research literature about rural public school education.

Central Research Question

How do K-12 English language arts teachers in two rural remote public school districts align the planned curriculum, represented by the common core state standards and district curricular materials, with the lived curriculum that they implement in their courses?

Related Research Questions

1. How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts adjust curricular materials to align with the common core state standards?
2. How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts adjust instructional practices to align with the common core state standards?
3. How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts collaborate vertically to connect their curriculum across grade levels while aligning their curriculum with the common core state standards?

4. How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts collaborate with teachers of other content areas to support the implementation of common core literacy standards?
5. How do English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts engage in professional development activities concerning the integration of the common core state standards into their planned curriculum and instructional practices?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Aoki's conceptualization of curriculum. Aoki (1993) theorized that curriculum consists of two essential components: "curriculum-as-plan" and "lived curriculum" (pp. 257-258). Aoki identified *curriculum-as-plan* as an external and formal component of the curriculum, articulated by state and national authorities. In the case of the modern education reform, the curriculum-as-plan refers to the common core state standards, developed at a national level and articulated into state-approved standards. The *lived curriculum* emerges as teachers and students experience learning in real time. According to Aoki (1993), the lived curriculum experiences of students are valuable because they indicate how youth connect concepts across personal experiences and content areas.

The processes of curriculum development and implementation in K-12 public schools connect directly to Aoki's (1993) notion of a planned and a lived curriculum. In the context of this study, the planned curriculum includes the common core state standards as well as district-level curriculum materials featuring learning objectives and

outcomes. The lived curriculum relates to the instructional experiences of K-12 English language arts teachers as they work with students in their classrooms. By examining the curricular experiences of rural educators according to curriculum-as-planned and lived curriculum, this framework will provide a structure to use in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of rural curriculum reform efforts. Chapter 2 includes a more detailed explanation of Aoki's planned curriculum and lived curriculum theory and how current researchers have applied Aoki's theory as a framework for teaching and learning in the field of education.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was qualitative. The planning and reflection activities of K-12 educators are well suited for descriptive investigation, which makes qualitative methodology appropriate. More specifically, the small numbers of participants often limits studies involving rural school systems, and therefore, qualitative researchers need to gather evidence of rural school experiences from a limited participant pool (Coladarci, 2007). Qualitative approaches encourage a focus on meaning and understanding through rich description, which is an appropriate approach for this study (Hyry-Beihammer, Estola, & Syrjälä, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Smit, 2013).

The phenomena that were the focus of this study were the curricular and instructional experiences of K-12 teachers who were implementing English language arts curriculum related to the common core state standards into their classrooms. The research design for this study was a multiple case study, involving two K-12 school district sites located in the western region of the United States, in order to allow for cross-case

synthesis and more robust findings. Yin (2014) defined case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in depth and within a real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (p. 16). The power of case study research is that it enables researchers to capture the phenomenon as it occurs in the natural setting of the classroom, rather than isolating events for academic study. The interactions of teachers and students engaging in teaching and learning cannot be isolated for study, so case study research design is a fitting research methodology for educational topics. Additionally, the field of education is a social construct that is constantly evolving, and as Yin articulated, contemporary, real life conditions can be investigated effectively through case study research because researchers include situational descriptors within the case study design. In this construction, researchers articulate the conditions surrounding the research topic through narrative descriptions so its complexities can be analyzed thematically.

Yin (2014) also noted that case study inquiry "copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points" (p. 17). As a result, Yin noted, case study research relies on multiple sources of evidence, "with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion" (p. 17). The work of classroom teachers is diverse because the unique professional history of each teacher contributes to the decisions he or she makes in curriculum design and implementation and in classroom instruction. It would be impossible to trace teacher decisions to specific data points, so investigating how teachers' decisions frame their work inside and outside the classroom creates a more complete representation of current educational practices.

According to Yin, adequate context must be provided for a case study, including a description of the study setting and the background of the participants. Yin also explained the importance of triangulating data to construct a complete representation of the research phenomenon. Education is an evidence-rich field, including operational information, state standards documents, curricular and instructional materials, student products and teacher reflections, so there is adequate data for case study triangulation.

In relation to the methodology, a multiple case study design was used. The case was the K-12 English language arts program at a rural remote public school district in a western state, and two cases were presented. Potential participants were purposefully selected to obtain the richest data possible, and they included English language arts teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school levels for each school district. Data were collected from multiple sources. The first data source was interviews with K-12 English language arts teachers about how they engage in curriculum development, specifically related to the process of integrating the common core state standards into their planned and lived curriculums at the classroom level. The second data source was observations of instructional lessons in English language arts that included integration of the common core state standards. The third data source was online reflective journal entries from participating teachers about how their knowledge of the common core state standards has changed and what professional development support they have received regarding the standards. The fourth data source was curricular documents related to the K-12 English language arts program at each district. Data analysis included coding and construction of categories for each data source, using a two-cycle coding process that

Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) recommended. The cross-case synthesis involved an examination of the coded and categorized data across all sources and cases for emergent themes and discrepant data, which formed the key findings. These key findings were presented in relation to the central and related research questions.

Definitions

Curriculum development process: The process of curriculum development includes a sequence of steps, which Huizinga, Handelzalts, Nievenn, and Voogt (2014) related to "analysis, design, development, implementation and evaluation skills" (p. 35). For this study, the curriculum development process is the planned and purposeful procedures that classroom teachers and district and school administrators use to construct curricular products at the course level that are aligned with the common core state standards.

District curricular materials: In describing curriculum, Aoki (1986) described the collection of curricular materials adopted by a district as the planned curriculum and noted that these materials include "a set of curriculum statements" (p. 160) outlining goals as well as specific resource materials for helping students and teachers to reach these goals. For this study, these materials are developed or adopted at the course level and include (a) national and state standards in English language arts, (b) scope and sequence, (c) unit guides, and (d) lessons.

District instructional materials: According to Ball and Forzani (2011), teachers utilize instructional materials in order to identify and present content to students, with the goal of "opening content for a wide range of students from many different backgrounds"

(p.20). For this study, these materials include both core and supplemental materials at the course level, including commercially prepared materials that school districts adopt, under the leadership of district administrators, to support English language arts instruction.

Lived curriculum: In the context of this study, this term refers to Aoki's (1993) theory of the actual, interactive curriculum that teachers and students experience in the classroom.

Planned curriculum: In the context of this study, this term refers to Aoki's (1993) theory of the predetermined, written curriculum that district educators establish prior to student-teacher interaction within the classroom. In this study, planned curriculum will include the common core state standards and district curricular materials that relate to the common core state standards.

Rural remote school systems: Arnold et al. (2005) explained that studies use inconsistent definitions of rural situations, and as a result, the body of rural education research has significant variations in student populations, teacher positions and responsibilities, school configurations, finances, and educational resources. In research related to the challenges faced by rural school systems, Greenough and Nelson (2015) and Preston et al. (2013) defined rural according to the perimeters set by the U.S. Census Bureau. However, Greenough and Nelson noted that educational divisions based solely on population fail to account for student diversity and surrounding economic conditions. In current classifications, the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) identifies all communities with populations under 2,500 as rural. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2006) also noted that rural areas can be further separated into rural fringe areas (up to 5

miles from an urbanized area), rural distant areas (up to 25 miles from an urbanized area), and rural remote areas (more than 25 miles from an urbanized area). This study addressed the curriculum experiences of rural remote school districts and involved two case study sites that were at least 25 miles from identified urban areas and 10 miles from identified urban clusters.

Scope and sequence: Targeted learning skills as well as a predetermined order and timeline for the instruction of these skills compose the scope and sequence for curriculum. In researching scope and sequence mapping, Arafeh (2015) advocated for teachers to actively use curricular scope and sequence practices for individual courses as well as program scope and sequence mapping in order to ensure alignment across a group of courses. For this study, scope refers to the breadth of the K-12 English language arts curriculum, which includes the content and skills that students are expected to master for each course at each grade level in the instructional program. Sequence refers to how the content and skills are ordered.

Standards-based curriculum reform: In recent years, national and state education departments have identified essential skills and knowledge for content areas, organizing this information into standards-based curriculum guides. McDonnell and Weatherford (2013) explained this reform movement as an effort to link educational policy with research and evidence of effective educational practices. In the context of this study, standards-based curriculum reform refers the purposeful integration of national and state standards. Most recently, the NGA and CCSSO (2010) have led the development of common core state standards, a standards-based curriculum reform movement. In this

study, the specific standards-based reform was referred to as the common core state standards initiative.

Assumptions

This multiple case study was based on several assumptions. First, I assumed that the study participants were familiar with the standards-based movement, given that the relevant state education agency had adopted standards based on the common core state standards for English language arts and mathematics. This assumption was important because the purpose of this study was to describe how K-12 English language arts teachers in two rural remote public school districts aligned the planned curriculum, represented by the common core state standards and district curricular materials, with the lived curriculum that they implemented in their courses. The second assumption was that participant responses, oral and written, were honest, representing the knowledge and understanding they had about curriculum development and implementation processes used in their rural remote school district. This assumption was important because honest responses are critical to the trustworthiness of qualitative research. The third assumption was that district curriculum documents were current and representative of the English language arts program for each school district. This assumption was important because district documents should reflect the expectations for instructional practices of participants.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was the curricular and instructional experiences of K-12 English language arts teachers employed in rural remote school districts. Within rural

schools, English language arts teachers are likely to lead common core state standards implementation since state-approved versions of these standards are established and marked for implementation by state education leaders (Porter et al., 2015). A conceptual framework based on Aoki's (1993) theory of a two-structure curriculum, with a planned curriculum component as well as a lived curriculum component, guided this research.

This study was further delimited or narrowed by the participants, the time the study was conducted, and resources. Concerning participants, K-12 English language arts teachers were selected because of their involvement in the planned curriculum as well as the lived curriculum and their engagement in the implementation of the common core state standards. Rural school administrators were not included in the scope of this study since their involvement in curriculum design often focuses only on the planned curriculum. Similarly, K-12 rural public school students were outside the scope of this study because of their involvement with only the lived curriculum in the classroom setting. In order to compare the implementation of the common core state standards as part of the planned and lived curriculum, participants must provide insights into both constructs. Classroom teachers, therefore, were uniquely qualified to fill this role. While this study targeted the experiences of English language arts teachers, the discussion of curriculum reform in rural remote school districts may be transferable to other content areas, such as mathematics, where educators have implemented common core state standards. Regarding time, this study was conducted during the 2015-2016 school year. As a single researcher, I also had limited time and resources to conduct this study.

Limitations

The limitations of a study are often related to the research design. This case study was limited in both its literal and theoretical replication because of its small sample size (Yin, 2014). Participants were purposefully selected, based on their employment at rural remote schools in the selected state in the United States where educators were engaged in implementing the common core state standards initiative. According to Maxwell (2013) and Yin (2014), purposeful selection is appropriate for case study research, because the goal of case study design is to inform researchers about the experiences of a particular population. However, Maxwell and Yin also cautioned that purposeful selection limits the applicability of research to larger populations because the participant pool is not a representative sample of a larger population. The intent of this case study was to explore how a small group of K-12 rural remote English language arts teachers aligned the planned curriculum and the common core state standards with the lived curriculum in their courses, rather than describing how all K-12 rural remote English language arts teachers have implemented the common core state standards.

Another limitation of the study related to data collection. As a single researcher conducting a dissertation study, I was not able to conduct multiple interviews with participants over an extended time, but instead, I had to rely on data collected over a shorter period of time from a single interview, a classroom observation, online reflective journals, and documents. Multiple interviews with each participant might have provided richer data.

A third limitation was related to the potential for bias. As a single researcher responsible for all data collection and analysis, the potential for bias existed. However, I monitored and reduced this bias by triangulating data and maintaining a reflective journal throughout the research process.

Significance

The significance of this study related to advancing knowledge in the field, to improving practice in the field, and contributing to positive social change in rural communities. This study advances knowledge in the core academic area of English language arts because it provides educators and researchers with a deeper understanding about how rural remote K-12 English language arts teachers align their instructional practices and curricular materials to the common core state standards. In a discussion about the challenges and sustainability practices of frontier schools in Montana, Morton and Harmon (2011) found rural school administrators view unrealistic federal expectations as a major concern for rural school improvement. This finding suggests a gap between the goals of educators at the national level and the operational realities of remote rural school districts. In addition, Babione (2010) researched how rural teachers view state-mandated standards and found that rural public school teachers vary in their interpretation of established standards and in their perceptions about how thoroughly to present all standards in classroom instruction. This study is also significant because it provides insight into how English language arts teachers align their instructional practices and curricular materials with the common core state standards, clarifying the gap between planning and operationalizing curriculum in remote rural public school settings.

Additionally, this study contributes to educational knowledge about the curricular experiences of K-12 rural remote English language arts teachers. These experiences may be similar to those of rural remote K-12 teachers implementing common core state standards in other content areas, most notably mathematics, which is also a core curricular discipline.

This study is also significant because it supports the improvement of professional practice in English language arts, especially in rural school settings. Research has shown that rural teachers lack the supportive personnel and resources needed for established curriculum reform models. SIG school administrators, who have access to additional funding resources, contend their options for implementing significant reforms are limited (Rosenberg et al., 2014). Even in the absence of curricular supports, however, rural remote educators continue to implement the common core state standards. Nelson (2010) presented a series of recommendations for school improvement in rural school systems and suggested that rural school educators can structure appropriate improvement plans, but such plans are unique to each school district's personnel and resources. Rural remote educators are not only limited in their improvement capabilities; they are also limited in the ways they communicate curricular solutions. This study provides an additional discussion for rural remote teachers to consider in their curricular communications.

In relation to positive social change, this study contributes to the ongoing national and international dialogue on standards-based learning and the emergence of national curriculums. Current research findings indicate that educators in the United States are divided in their support for a national curriculum, especially in rural areas where

educators feel excluded from larger discussion on curriculum reform (Cuervo, 2012). This study gives voice to the ideas, concerns, and recommendations of rural remote teachers, expanding current conversations on the use of the common core state standards as a national curriculum model.

This study also makes several contributions to positive social change for rural culture and communities. In researching rural educational practices, this study focused attention on the role of schools in rural remote communities and how rural educators make decisions about the planned and lived curriculums that they implement in their classrooms. Over the course of this study, rural remote K-12 English language arts teachers had the opportunity to engage in meaningful professional reflection on how the integration of the common core state standards into their courses impacts curriculum and instruction. These reflections support teachers' efforts to improve curriculum and instruction in their classrooms. By extension, students' lived experiences within these classrooms impact their future success, not only as learners but also as contributing members of their rural communities.

Summary

This chapter was an introduction to this study. Additional clarity is needed in rural education, especially related to curriculum development and implementation. Therefore, this study considered only the curricular experiences of K-12 English language arts teachers, because these educators were engaged in the development of both the planned and lived curriculum, as theorized by Aoki (1993). As a qualitative case study, this research provides insight into the practices and experiences of K-12 English language arts

teachers at two rural remote school districts. While this research cannot be generalized to larger rural teacher populations, it contributes to what is known about how rural remote teachers design and implement curriculum. Assumptions that guide this study included participants' knowledge of standards-based curriculum reform, honest response data, and district curriculum documents that reflect instructional practice. Limitations of this study included the use of a small group of participants and a short timeline for data collection. This study is significant because it makes a meaningful contribution to advancing knowledge about instructional practice related to the integration of the common core state standards into K-12 English language arts courses. Additionally, this study supports positive social change within rural remote school districts by emphasizing the role of standards-based teaching and learning in preparing rural youth for future college and career opportunities.

In Chapter 2, a review of the literature related to this study is presented. In relation to the conceptual framework, the planned and lived curriculum framework that Aoki (1993) developed is described as well as how that framework is articulated in current research and how it relates to this study. Current research is also analyzed regarding standards-based education reform, especially related to English language arts and the common core state standards initiative and how such reform impacts the development of planned and lived curriculum. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the major themes and discrepancies found in the research and how this study addressed the research gap.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Rural school districts face challenges in implementing standards-based curriculum reform, due to limited personnel and resources. While the prominent standards-based movement in the United States, the common core state standards initiative, has supported the development of common curricular goals across the country (Conley, 2011), its implementation is still reliant upon established school district resources, which places additional strain on struggling rural school districts (Howley et al., 2014). In a discussion of rural school improvement lessons, Nelson (2010) noted that educators in rural school districts face many of the same difficulties as districts in other settings, but they also encounter additional challenges that are specific to rural conditions, such as geographic separation from professional and instructional resources, limited staffing to deliver required state curriculum, and regional poverty that limits educational funding. Therefore, this study focused on the integration of the common core state standards within rural remote school districts, which has not been well researched. The purpose of this study was to explore how K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts aligned the common core state standards, representing the planned curriculum, with the lived curriculum that they implemented at the course level in their classrooms.

This chapter is a review of the literature. It includes a description of the literature search strategy used to identify current research and the conceptual framework for the study. Additionally, this chapter features a review of the literature for the study, including a discussion of the rural context, descriptions of the conditions that are unique to rural

education and current research into planned and lived curriculums. A discussion of how current research unifies planned and lived curriculums within rural school settings is presented. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the major themes and gaps that emerged from this review.

Literature Search Strategy

I began the literature search by reviewing relevant peer-reviewed journals that I identified through Google Scholar searches. I extended my search to additional scholarly databases, including Academic Search Complete, ProQuest Central, and the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) for current research addressing rural education. Initially, I previewed each journal article by reviewing the abstract and then located full versions of those journal articles that addressed rural education and curriculum topics. I also expanded my search using CrossRef.org and was able to identify several other academic journals that included articles specific to rural education topics. I considered not only rural education research pertaining to the United States, but I also reviewed journal articles investigating rural education internationally. In doing so, I was able to identify common issues in rural education within diverse settings.

In a narrative analysis of rural education literature, Burton et al. (2013) were critical of current research publications related to rural education and noted that journals specific to rural education are responsible for a majority of the published peer-reviewed research articles concerning rural education issues, rather than in more prominent educational journals. I found a similar challenge in locating research articles related to rural education, and I ultimately chose to review the entire collections of two journals

that specialize in rural education to complete my literature review. I performed a detailed review of all articles published within the past 5 years in two scholarly, peer-reviewed journals that are dedicated to rural education in the United States: *The Rural Educator* and *Journal of Research in Rural Education.*

Regarding other strategies, I also investigated published reports from government agencies concerned with rural school improvement and rural education reform within the United States, including the United States Department of Education, the SIG Program, the NCEE, the Midwest Regional Educational Laboratory and the National Center for Education Statistics. I used the following terms in the course of my literature searches: *rural education, rural school(s), rural teacher(s), rural school improvement, global rural, common core, common core state standards, common core implementation, standards-based reform, rural curriculum, curriculum-as-planned, curriculum-as-lived, planned curriculum,* and *lived curriculum*.

Conceptual Framework

Aoki's (1993) theory of the planned curriculum and lived curriculum phenomena serves as the conceptual framework for this study. According to Maxwell (2013), the purpose of the conceptual framework is to construct perimeters for research methodology. Aoki believed that curriculum design is a complex process, which is more clearly understood when framed according to educators' experiences with curriculum design. Aoki envisioned two realms of curriculum design: the planned curriculum and the lived curriculum. Therefore, the research questions that I posed for this case study investigated how rural remote K-12 English language arts educators experienced these

two curricular constructs. The notion of lived curriculum is well-suited for qualitative research because it addresses the complex, personal experiences of teachers and students. Researchers cannot numerically score the dynamics of a functioning classroom, so researchers have endorsed the use of narratives to develop a deeper understanding of rural education issues (McHenry-Sorber, 2014; Smit, 2013). Similarly, in research concerning rural settings, Hyry-Beihammer et al. (2013) argued that "narratives are crucial…when studying and representing such complex phenomena as place and people's relation to place" (p. 1063). By conducting a case study, I was able to gather data from multiple sources of evidence that included insights into how educators understand their experiences with planning and instructing curriculum based on the common core state standards.

Conceptualizing Planned and Lived Curriculum

In theorizing about curriculum planning and development, Aoki (1985) articulated a fundamental shortcoming in established curriculum belief. Aoki (1993) questioned the legitimacy of defining curriculum as a planned and rigid component of teaching and learning. Instead, Aoki (1993) suggested that curriculum functions in a more fluid and dynamic way, consisting of two constructs: the traditional, planned curriculum and "the lived curriculum" (p. 257) that teachers and students experience in classrooms. According to Aoki (1986), the planned curriculum is an established priority in the work of educators, as planned curriculum exists as the written guide for teaching and learning. The development of planned curriculum frequently involves educators who have specialized in curriculum planning; an expertise that Aoki (1986) viewed as valuable, but

somewhat distant from classroom teachers who are implementing the curriculum. In a discussion about the current challenges in curriculum reform, Aoki (1999) described the difficulty educators have in interacting with a set, printed curriculum. This planned curriculum, Aoki (1999) explained, is rigid, and while it may outline specific skills, it does not capture the teaching or learning processes. According to Aoki (1999), an established curriculum format that does not acknowledge the complex processes of teaching and learning is incomplete.

In discussing the lived curriculum, Aoki (1993) described the relationship of his theoretical constructs to curriculum design, especially as school faculty members determine the particular vision they have for their district curriculum. In one context, Aoki explained how educators imagine the power of lived curriculum to deliver "humanity" (p. 255) to science content. Lived curriculum generates depth in content study, Aoki theorized, while also providing personal and meaningful connections for learners. Aoki referred to the diverse personal experiences of lived curriculum as invaluable in generating "a multiplicity of curricula" (p. 258) in which both students and teachers can individually excel. Thus, lived curriculum includes not only planned content, but previous teacher and student experiences impact it.

Another construct of lived curriculum is an emphasis on the interconnectivity among content areas. Aoki (1993) contended that content areas often operate separately within the educational structure and suggested that this established practice limits the depth of thinking and debate that could occur among educators and their students. Aoki endorsed the notion of cross-curricular interaction in methodologies as well as content.

When educators share how thinking occurs in one specific content area, Aoki suggested they can generate new thinking in other content areas.

After reflecting on research related to planned and lived curriculum, Aoki (1999) maintained that both constructs must be integrated into the curriculum development process to support teachers and students in "the plannable and the unplannable" (p. 180) experiences that occur within a classroom. Aoki maintained that teachers cannot solely exist in one realm or another, but continually need to navigate between the two realities. Such practice, Aoki (1993) believed, helps teachers to grow in their professional pedagogy.

Aoki's (1985) notion of a dually functioning curriculum has led curriculum theorists to imagine curriculum as an ideology rather than a process. In his theoretical analysis of curriculum theory, Wallin (2011) argued that the notion of a structured and defined curriculum is a narrow interpretation of what curriculum entails. Rather than limiting curriculum to the current needs of learners, Wallin contended that aspects of curriculum should focus on the potential of what learners could become at any point in the future, based on the accumulation of varied learning experiences. Wallin's interpretation is particularly relevant to learner-centered curriculum and to rural classrooms where teachers and students often develop close relationships.

Theorists have differing conceptions of the relationship between planned and lived curriculums. In discussing the presence of planned and lived curriculums within education, Lewkowich (2012) believed educators exist in both realities, regularly drawing from planned curriculum materials as well as lived curriculum experiences to design

meaningful learning for students. In a discussion concerning Aoki's theory, Yoshimoto (2011) described the need for a curricular balance between planned and lived curriculums. Yoshimoto suggested that teaching involves a search for balance between the expected and unexpected within a learning environment. In this context, Yoshimoto argued that teaching and learning are less linear, encompassing a conglomeration of experiences rather than following a preset path. Even though Lewkowich and Yoshimoto both presented sound explanations of the interactions between planned and lived curriculum, they failed to recognize students as influential participants in the curricular process.

Magrini (2015) and Zhang and Heydon (2014) agreed with Aoki (1993) that the features of planned and lived curriculums are notably different. In an investigation of Aoki's curriculum design, Magrini described the planned curriculum as a sequential arrangement of documents, created by educators with curriculum expertise, and passed on to classroom teachers. In contrast, Magrini hypothesized the lived curriculum relates to the spectrum of learning possibilities that may emerge in learning situations. Zhang and Heydon (2014) examined lived literacy curriculum in a globalized schooling context and interpreted lived curriculum in a similar manner, suggesting that each student and teacher experienced lived curriculum uniquely. Therefore, as Zhang and Heydon explained, the lived experiences of teachers and students within structured learning environments generate significant diversity. The distinctions that researchers have established between the design and function of planned and lived curriculums are critical

to this study because these distinctions establish two relevant components to curriculum, which I investigated in this study.

Guiding Research with Planned and Lived Curriculum Theory

A review of the research literature indicates that researchers are interested in how teachers and administrators understand the planned and lived curriculums, especially related to how lived curriculum expands student learning beyond the goals outlined in planned curriculum. Using practitioner inquiry, Wissman (2011) explored how secondary students access lived curriculum when reflecting on literature and generating reflective writing based on these experiences. Wissman found that lived curriculum experiences contributed to students' creative writing experiences. However, when teachers are unaware of lived curriculum potential, curriculum plans are less dynamic, as Gibson (2012) and Latta and Kim (2011) found in their research concerning educators and lived curriculum. In a study of social studies curriculum in Canada, Gibson (2012) found preservice teachers are not aware of the existence of planned and lived curriculums unless they are specifically trained to think in this context. Gibson found teaching candidates are aware of the planned social studies curriculum, due to personal experiences as students, but they often fail to consider how social studies knowledge contributes to the lived development of personal citizenship. In investigating how teachers in graduate level classes understand lived curriculum, Latta and Kim (2011) found educators must first understand how personal identity influences the lived curriculum they facilitate within the classroom before they can effectively support

students in lived curriculum experiences. Such findings confirm a need for educators to be trained in implementing both the planned and lived curriculum.

Researchers have also characterized planned and lived curriculum constructs differently in educational studies, describing planned curriculum as federal, state, or school district curriculum mandates. In discussions of standards-based curriculum, Breakstone, Smith, and Wineburg (2013), and Flint, Holbrook, May, Albers, and Dooley (2014) questioned the clarity of standards-based curriculum and the reliability of current standards-based assessments, indicating that studies about planned curriculum are often focused on evaluating the effectiveness of the mandated curriculum. Lived curriculum, however, is a phenomenon concerning the unique experiences of teachers and students within their structured learning environments, so the narrative accounts teachers share about these experiences are valuable in investigating lived curriculum. In researching lived curriculum, Kissling (2014), Latta and Kim (2011), and Powell and Lajavic (2011) employed narrative inquiry to explore the rich nature of lived curriculum experiences and found teachers were able to articulate students' learning benefits and challenges as well as reflect upon their own personal experiences with lived curriculum. Aoki (1999) did not anticipate a research focus on lived curriculum and instead theorized that the planned curriculum is a leading interest for educators, therefore, a focus of research investigation. However, this study focused on the dynamics of lived curriculum as well as planned curriculum in two rural public school districts.

As an educational theory, lived curriculum is a phenomenon well suited for qualitative study. At the core of Aoki's (1993) argument is the belief that curriculum is a

sophisticated experience for students and teachers that educators cannot explain as a defined list of skills and abilities. Aoki further proposed that educators are unable to separate the dynamics of learning into individual courses, driven by isolated written curriculum. Instead, Aoki suggested the "humanity" (p. 256) of learning requires that teachers and students engage in integrated thinking about complex and realistic topics. The design of the common core state standards is a dichotomy in this context. The common core state standards are structured as a concrete listing of skills and abilities (NGA & CCSSO, 2010), yet encourage complex learner engagement and interaction on the other. The standards identify specific skills for English language arts and mathematics, yet the English language arts state standards also feature a collection of literacy standards designed to guide complex literacy instruction across secondary content areas (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). Thus, the common core state standards can motivate lived curriculum as well as planned curriculum.

For this study, I investigated the planned and lived curriculum in relation to how K-12 English language arts teachers in remote rural school districts integrate the common core state standards into course curriculum. Similar to other researchers, I included separate reviews of the research literature on planned and lived curriculums, discussing how goals, communication, and support within planned and lived curriculums apply to education. However, my application of the planned and lived curriculums specifically to rural education research was unique. While current rural education research does not identify the theory of lived curriculum in the context of rural education, there is evidence that rural teachers value the personal experiences of rural students as part of their course

curricula. Budge (2006) and Burton et al. (2013) acknowledged the supportive bonds that exist between rural educators and their students. Burton et al. also contended that rural teachers remain dedicated to the individual success of their students, which creates a school culture of positive community support. In researching educators' views of the role of place in rural education, Budge found rural educators seek to establish a sense of belonging for their students. Similarly, Aoki (1993) emphasized the importance of lived curriculum, because it draws attention to the value of the collective learning experiences of teachers and students. Therefore, I investigated how rural educators engage students in lived curriculum experiences as a means of ensuring their comprehension of the planned curriculum, identified as the common core state standards.

Literature Review

In this literature review, current research is discussed relating to both planned and lived curriculum, the implementation of the common core state standards, and curriculum practices in rural education. The prominent methodologies used by researchers focused on rural education are case study designs and narrative analyses. Given the limited number of educators working at a remote rural school site, these methodologies are suitable because they enable a qualitative researcher to focus on the personal stories and experiences of educators within their teaching environments. In some cases, researchers have also used a mixed methods approach, which includes surveys that are analyzed to determine rural trends and identify study participants for further qualitative inquiry.

Understanding the Rural Context

Hyry-Beihammer et al. (2013) found that the nature of rural life and rural education is unique. This understanding of how rural life impacts the structure and function of rural schools frames much of the research literature. In a narrative analysis of rural education, Burton et al. (2013) argued that a significant flaw in rural education research is the characterization of "rurality as 'the problem' to overcome rather than as the setting to understand" (p. 8). Anttila and Väänänen (2013) identified a similar tradition in Finland's rural education systems, explaining that teachers entering rural education have traditionally considered their role to be "a mission to civilize the uneducated rural masses" (p. 183). Although Anttila and Väänänen believed this tradition is changing, the negative perception of rural teaching is a troubling reality. In a review of rural education research, Arnold et al. (2005) and Pini, Moletsane, and Mills (2014) determined that research can be identified in two contexts: those studies in which researchers investigate an issue specific to rural education and those studies that researchers conduct within a rural setting. In reviewing inclusion, education, and rurality, Pini, Carrington, and Adie (2014) reached comparable conclusions, noting that rural research literature may often include cases from rural settings, but note that researchers are not centrally interested in investigating rural education itself. Semke and Sheridan (2012) also cautioned that studies simply occurring within a rural setting provide no investigation or analyses into the role of rural conditions on the phenomena at the focus of the study. Due to this division, Semke and Sheridan argued that the field of research specific to rural contexts is even more limited than the literature suggests.

The connection between rural educators, their work, and the surrounding rural context is prominent in the research literature and, as Wood et al. (2013) contended in their research of rural administrators, rural educators are satisfied and productive when they establish bonds with the local community. Such connections were also identified by Goodpaster, Adedokun, and Weaver (2012), in a study concerning rural teacher perceptions. Goodpaster et al. reported that teachers identified numerous positive aspects of establishing social connections with the surrounding rural community, as well as articulating a number of concerns related to social acceptance in the local community. In a study of rural education in South Africa, du Plessis (2014), found rural principals are concerned with the fit of teachers to the local community and emphasized that teachers who are not able to establish this fit are unlikely to remain at rural schools. According to du Plessis, this fit relates to the flexibility of new teachers in adapting to rural living, including isolation from urban conveniences and limited comfort and resources. Thus, understanding the relationship of rural teachers to the rural community has been prominent in previous research because identifying the reasons why teachers choose to remain in rural settings can help rural school educators strengthen the appeal of rural teaching.

Social issues that affect rural communities are also likely to impact the schools that serve those communities. Stelmach (2011) conducted a synthesis of international rural education and found out-migration, high levels of poverty, and gender inequalities are societal issues that impact rural education in numerous countries. In a case study investigation of rural leadership, Budge (2006) found low population and geographic

isolation were prominent social challenges of rural living. Bana (2010) conducted a rural case study in Pakistan and identified common educator challenges in rural settings to be high levels of poverty, lack of adequate basic services, limited instructional materials, financial strains, and inadequate teacher preparation. Similarly, Heeralal (2014) described limited school facilities and supplies as problems facing rural schools in South Africa. Thus, while the specific goals of rural research are often diverse, studies indicate that geographic differences are common influential factors in rural living.

The classifications assigned to rural areas by government entities also contribute to the economic and social challenges found in rural areas. In an investigation into rural leadership, Howley et al. (2014) found that rural communities rely on prominent resources at the center of the local economy. This unbalanced economic state generates significant stress on the local infrastructure during cycles of economic boom and bust, Howley et al. noted, which in turn impacts the function of surrounding rural school districts. Budge (2010) and Williams and Nierengarten (2011) maintained that declining conditions in the surrounding rural landscape negatively impact the wellness of rural school districts. In areas where population is in decline, as commonly occurs in rural locations, infrastructure is likely to diminish, which increases the financial and resource strains on small, rural schools (Halsey, 2011). In a discussion of science curriculum within rural schools, Avery (2013) argued that it is important for rural districts to develop curriculum that is considerate of economic resources and materials to increase the stability of the school district. Even so, the ability of schools to function with limited resources is still in question, given the current push for the implementation of common

core state standards. Hess and McShane (2013) acknowledged that this implementation process is likely to cost state education departments "hundreds of millions of dollars" (p. 65), and rural school districts are often not able to manage these financial burdens. Therefore, it is important to consider how the local economy impacts the resources and materials available to rural teachers.

In a review of rural conditions, affected student populations, and the performance of students attending rural schools, the need for increased educational support is evident. In *Why Rural Matters 2013-2014*, a regularly released report on rural education in the United States, Johnson et al. (2014) analyzed rural demographics and how states manage rural education school systems. In this report, the need for increased awareness of rural realities is apparent. Johnson et al. noted that 32.9% of students in the United States attend a rural school, with 49.9% of this number enrolled in small rural districts. Across the country, more than 9.7 million students are impacted by the curriculum and instruction of rural school districts. By comparison, Johnson et al. reported that about 20% of students in the United States attended rural schools in 2010-2011. This population shift indicates that the unique challenges of rural education are growing, so there is a need for current and future educational policy to consider the unique nature of rural education.

Because this study will involve teachers at two public school district sites in a western state, I was particularly interested in the status of rural education in that state. According to Johnson et al. (2014), 75.3% of schools within this state are classified as rural schools, which highlights the need for rural education research given the high

percentage of students within this demographic. Small rural schools are identified as an important subset within the rural school classification because small rural schools are likely to face additional rural-specific challenges. In this category, this western state is identified as the leading state with small school districts, which compose 96.1% of the state's total rural school demographic. There is a clear need for state-mandated curriculum to be reasonable and feasible for implementation in small rural settings because the majority of schools in this state are part of this demographic subset.

In conjunction with demographics, student performance is also discussed in the research as evidence of rural district performance. The National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) establish national and international measures of student performance. According to *The Nation's Report Card: 2013 Mathematics and Reading* produced annually by the National Center for Educational Statistics (2014), rural students tested in Grade 4 are not making measurable academic reading progress in the NAEP assessment, which measures students' comprehension and understanding of core concepts on a 0-500-point scale. In both rural and urban settings, Grade 4 students have demonstrated consistent scores from 2007 to 2013, with rural students scoring 222-223 and urban students scoring 215-216. At the Grade 8 level, however, NAEP results show that urban students made a six-point growth in reading, from a 2007 score of 257 to a 2013 score of 263. Over the same time, rural students made only a four-point growth in reading, from a 2007 score of 264 to a 2013 score of 268. While rural students in the United States maintain a higher overall score in reading, NAEP scores from 2013 indicate that rural

students have not made the same gains in reading as urban students in recent years (NCES, 2014).

Internationally, the PISA, administered by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), provides a common performance evaluation of student learning in reading, mathematics, and science. In a 2013 summary report, the OECD addressed a significant learning gap between urban and rural students, noting that on average, rural students across the globe score an average of 20 points lower on the PISA than their urban counterparts (OECD, 2013). In analyzing the demographics of PISA participants, OECD found socio-economic differences cannot account for the learning gap, which is "the equivalent of half-a-year of schooling" (p. 1).

Rural educators have voiced differing views about how to support the academic success of rural students. In examining the goals of rural educators, Budge (2010) and Vaughn and Saul (2013) found rural teachers hold consistent beliefs about the need for rural education to prepare students for experiences beyond the local community. In addition to preparing students for life, Vaughn and Saul reported that rural teachers also hope students are ready to respond to opportunities in diverse settings. In contrast, Wang and Zhao (2011) investigated curriculum in rural China and described mixed ideas concerning the focus of rural education, including rural students' need for agricultural, vocational, and technical knowledge compared to familiarizing students with citizenship and themes of urban living. In a qualitative case study of rural teachers and reading instruction, Waller and Barrentine (2015) found that at the elementary level rural teachers use purchased reading curriculum, which does not allow flexibility for place-based

connections. Waller and Barrentine described this disconnect as a curriculum frustration for rural teachers. Thus, these researchers have drawn attention to the reluctance of rural educators to abandon tradition, even with the movement towards a nationalized curriculum.

Conditions Unique to Rural Education

One of the conditions unique to rural schools is that the surrounding rural population not only views schools as centers for student learning but also as vital community centers. (Halsey, 2011; McHenry-Sorber, 2014; Williams & Nierengarten, 2011). In a study of rural schools in Montana, Morton and Harmon (2011) found rural school stakeholders viewed the use of school facilities for community events as foundational to the well-being of the surrounding community. Along the same theme, in a discussion of school and community programs, Pitzel et al. (2007) described several unified school and community projects in New Mexico specifically designed to enhance life for rural communities and found that schools can positively contribute to the revitalization of rural communities when school personnel and community members are able to collaborate on projects. Even though Morton and Harmon and Pitzel et al. found a powerful connection between rural schools and the surrounding community, evidence also exists that this cooperative relationship can be damaging to educational operations. In a discussion concerning rural school management, Farmer (2009) described the influence of community special interest groups on rural school districts, explaining that the connections between school operations and community functions are strong components of rural life. These interest groups, Farmer argued, can influence the

operations of an entire school system to accomplish specialized agendas and goals. Equally important, in a narrative study, Smit (2013) described how negative perceptions of education and schools in rural Africa can negatively impact the function and sustainability of rural schools. Given the influence of community on education, as described by both Farmer and Smit, rural education studies should include descriptions of the local community as well as rural teachers' perceptions of how the community influences the school district.

Another condition unique to rural schools is that the social networks of rural communities regularly impact school improvement and reform efforts. In a review of the literature, Preston et al. (2013) investigated common challenges faced by rural principals and found that the social ties of rural educators to the surrounding rural community may negatively impact change efforts because rural educators are hesitant to introduce educational reform that the community may resist. Traditions are difficult to change in school systems, Preston et al. contended, especially in rural areas where community members view the school environment as an extension of the local culture. Similarly, in their review of Finland's rural education history, Anttila and Väänänen (2013) found rural teachers have consistently maintained close social connections with rural community members, which often complicates rural school operations. At times, tensions between the school district and local community can interrupt education, as Hyry-Beihammer et al. (2013) and McHenry-Sorber (2014) found, which suggests that major educational reforms should include students, rural school boards, parents, and community members as well as district administrators and teachers.

The research literature also indicates a need to establish greater support systems for rural school leadership, because diverse responsibilities often discourage rural educators (Versland, 2013). In a study of rural school challenges in South Africa, du Plessis (2014) maintained that, due to the limited personnel found in rural school settings, many rural educators are challenged to take on multiple roles and responsibilities within the school district. In reviewing research literature concerning the challenges of rural leadership, Preston et al. (2013) reported that rural educators serving as classroom teachers may also fill positions as school administrators. According to Howley et al. (2014), educators struggle to balance the job duties of multiple assignments and typically lack the administrative support staff necessary to manage school operations, as well as lack the time needed to develop leadership expertise.

Given the demands of rural leadership, recruitment and retention of rural school administrators are prominent concerns presented in the research literature. Versland (2013) studied rural administrator recruitment and retention and found that, in light of limited external recruitment, rural school districts often use grow-your-own leadership strategies, where school district teachers are encouraged to apply administrative positions as provisional candidates while enrolled in administrative degree programs. In an examination of small schools in Australia, Halsey (2011) found that rural school leaders are not well prepared for administrative positions and may not have adequate professional training for the responsibilities of rural school leadership, especially the demands of meeting local, regional, and national education expectations. Halsey argued that improved administrator training related to managing school district resources and

personnel would generate overall school improvement. Versland also found that many rural administrators are singular leaders within an isolated district, so mentoring programs are not a feasible training option. In similar research, Stewart and Matthews (2015) researched the perceptions of rural principals on leadership and found that these administrators viewed leadership courses as helpful, but leadership conferences as less helpful. Stewart and Matthews suggested these perceptions may stem from the hesitations rural administrators have in leaving their school site, given no other leaders fill their position when they are off-site. These findings indicate a continued need for rural education researchers to investigate the roles and responsibilities of rural administrators so that adequate and feasible training and professional development opportunities are provided to rural education leaders.

Recruitment and retention challenges also extend to classroom teacher positions, and researchers have also explored potential solutions to these staffing shortages in rural areas. In reviewing rural school challenges, Barley (2009) and Qingyang (2013) emphasized the need for rural school district educators to secure highly qualified teachers for regular classrooms and specializations. In a related study concerning rural education and resources, Cuervo (2012) found rural school systems not only have limited staff members, but their educators also struggle to fill gaps in teacher qualifications. Internationally, researchers have documented the challenges rural communities face when trying to recruit qualified teachers for remote rural locations. In a study of rural education in Turkey, Taneri and Engin-Demir (2011) found teachers had earned teaching degrees, but many rural teachers were responsible for teaching classes outside their licensed

content areas. In related research, Tanaka (2012) studied teacher training practices in rural Ghana and found that rural school educators frequently employ untrained teachers to fill employment gaps, though untrained teachers have less job security and receive lower pay than colleagues with formal training. Thus, this international evidence indicates an urgent need for countries around the world to improve rural teacher training and support.

A number of potential solutions have been proposed to fill gaps in teacher qualifications, including multiple certification programs and certification-while-teaching programs (Barley, 2009). Heeralal (2014) researched preservice teaching in South Africa and suggested that teaching internship programs be implemented to alleviate teaching shortages in rural areas. In a study about the recruitment and retention of rural teachers in Alaskan communities, Adams and Woods (2015) found that midcareer teachers continue to benefit from mentoring relationships, suggesting that collegial connections for rural teachers are needed beyond the first few years of teaching. Monk (2007) emphasized the need for legislative support in establishing incentive programs for rural teachers who work in locations and content areas that are hard to fill. These findings draw attention to the ongoing challenges that rural school district educators face in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers, a concern that impacts rural education research because rural teachers may struggle to design and deliver effective curriculum without adequate support.

The pressures of meeting the adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirements found in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act have also added to recruitment and retention concerns for rural administrators. In a study of SIG schools, the NCEE reported that rural

administrators leading low-performing schools may be required to replace high percentages of their rural teaching staff as part of their improvement plans (Rosenberg et al., 2014). NCEE also reported that some rural teachers working in low-performing districts are discouraged at repeated student failure on standardized assessments and choose to leave struggling rural schools. The current practice of replacing teachers as part of a program improvement process, as described by Rosenberg et al., is relevant to the study of rural education because staffing changes impact the stability of district curriculum and instruction.

Another challenge in rural education is addressing gaps in the training of preservice teachers concerning rural schools and communities. In a review of the training of rural teachers, Barley (2009) found universities in the United States often offer courses specific to rural teaching, though such courses are frequently elective options rather than degree required courses. In a study of rural teaching in Australia, Roberts (2013) found that new teachers are critical of their preservice preparation related to rural cultures and meeting the instructional needs of rural student populations. In a related study of preservice training in Australia, White and Kline (2012) found few preservice teachers choose to enroll in rural field experiences as part of their training. Azano and Stewart (2015) conducted a study of preservice teachers and their preparation for rural teaching and found that preservice teachers with rural backgrounds are more confident in their roles and responsibilities as rural educators than preservice candidates lacking this background. Similarly, regarding teacher preparation in South Africa, Heeralal (2014) explained that potential educators attend universities in urban areas, receive no

instruction related to rural communities and rural education, and are completely unprepared for the experience of teaching in the rural context. Even though Heeralal found 67% of preservice teachers were interested in teaching in rural settings, 74% reported that they received no training in rural education. In an investigation of preservice teachers in Turkey, Kizilaslan (2012) found two prominent views: some preservice teachers perceive rural teaching as positive and comfortable while other preservice teachers view rural teaching as lonely and limited by strained resources. Kizilaslan also reported that few preservice teachers have personal experience with rural school settings, which means their judgment of rural teaching is often uninformed. The stereotypes that Heeralal and Kizilaslan identified are relevant to current research in rural education because they expose a negative tradition in the field and an opportunity for positive social change concerning rural education.

Rural school educators may look towards collaboration, even consolidation, as a means of strengthening district resources (Howley et al., 2014; Qingyang, 2013; Xianzuo, 2013). In a discussion about networking for rural school administrators, Hite, Reynolds, and Hite (2010) recommended that rural educators establish professional networks to generate improved professional support. In a study of small schools in Australia, Halsey (2011) advocated for school clustering and partnerships as a means of addressing weaknesses in rural school systems. In a related study, Williams and Nierengarten (2011) investigated the experiences of rural teachers in Minnesota and proposed that educators in rural schools consider grant funding and shared partnerships with colleges and universities as a means of expanding the capacity of rural school districts. Similarly, in a

study of rural school and university collaboration, Eargle (2013) suggested that rural educators would benefit from collaborative professional training as part of field experience agreements with university educators looking to place preservice teachers in rural settings. Eargle believed such an arrangement would supplement a training gap for preservice teachers while also providing seasoned rural teachers with access to emerging educational strategies, opportunities to reflect on their current instructional practice, and space to share their expertise in rural teaching and learning. In related research, Barrett, Cowen, Toma, and Troske (2015) studied the professional development practices of rural teachers and found most rural teachers are trained within the region where they teach, and once they enter classrooms, these rural teachers have limited access to professional development. Cowen et al. suggested alternative professional training structures need to be in place for rural teachers who are unlikely to have access to more traditional professional development practices. These findings are important to the field of rural education because educators and policymakers need to consider the uniqueness of rural education when seeking to establish professional development support for rural teachers. Rural educators require professional development plans that consider the unique circumstances of rural education.

School consolidation is a prominent solution to addressing rural school limitations, and according to Qingyang (2013), the consolidation process requires significant coordination among educators, administrators, students, and communities in order for school rearrangement to be successful. In settings where school consolidation has linked neighboring rural schools, teachers may provide instruction in multiple

locations or through technology communications. In examining rural school consolidation using a case study design, Howley et al. (2012) found that rural teachers within restructured districts made individual decisions about whether or not they could adapt to consolidation plans. In a phenomenological study of consolidation, Nitta, Holley, and Wrobel (2010) found teachers who face physical moves describe their experiences more negatively than teachers who do not face physical moves. Nitta et al. contended that rural educators benefit from consolidation, receiving increased administrative support and professional development opportunities after rural school consolidation. However, in a study of rural school consolidation in China, Qingyang found teachers in newly consolidated school systems experienced an increase in their curriculum preparation loads as well as greater professional pressure to improve student performance. Stewart (2009) and Surface and Theobald (2014) argued against premature consolidation, explaining that larger learning environments can diminish student achievement. Instead, Stewart (2009) advocating for additional research on rural school success before small school environments are eliminated through school reform processes. Current research concerning rural school consolidation is important to consider in relation to this study because educators in low enrollment schools in rural remote areas constantly struggle to facilitate quality teaching and learning while managing limited resources. As Cuervo (2012) argued, the consolidation process should focus on strengthening the potential for students' educational success, rather than on resource allocation and management.

The arrangement of grade levels in rural school districts can also add to the complexity of rural teaching (Pazos, DePalma, & Membiela, 2012). In their examination

of principals as assessment leaders in rural schools, Renihan and Noonan (2012) argued that teachers working with multiple grade levels and students with special needs require additional support to address classroom components such as assessment and accountability. In a study concerning frontier schools in Montana, Morton and Harmon (2011) found that rural administrators are aware that mixed-grade level classrooms limit teachers' abilities to monitor and engage students individually in content learning. Understanding how rural teachers manage mixed-grade level classrooms is pertinent to this study, because rural remote teachers are likely to fill multiple instructional roles.

Research indicates that rural educators are active in supporting rural school operations, especially when gaps appear in instructional roles. Vaughn and Saul (2013) researched rural teacher goal-setting and explained that rural teachers understand the weaknesses in rural school consistency, due to limited staff and high turnover rates. Vaughn and Saul explored rural educators' visions to promote change and found that teacher leaders emphasize the need for rural teachers to work cooperatively to maintain rural school systems. As evidence of this cooperation, Nelson (2010), in a discussion about rural school improvement, advised that rural school staffs can make decisions by consensus since there are a limited number of educators involved. This finding highlights the unified strength of rural school operations, Nelson contended, because all staff members can voice their ideas rather than a small group of teachers representing the entire staff, as is frequently the case in larger school districts. The research of Nelson and Vaughn and Saul emphasizes the need to investigate the roles and responsibilities of rural

teachers. Therefore, in the context of this study, the roles and responsibilities of rural teachers in curriculum development are explored.

Another condition unique to rural schools is isolation, which researchers describe as two different phenomena that affect educators. In one context, rural educators are geographically separated (Brann-Barrett, 2015; Cuervo, 2012) from other communities and school districts. Burton et al. (2013) and Wood et al. (2013) found that geographic isolation is a significant challenge in recruiting and retaining rural administrators and teachers. Geographic separation in the layout of rural school districts, Renihan and Noonan (2012) contended, can also increase administrative challenges. In a discussion of rural school district management, Farmer (2009) found that rural school districts face additional financial challenges due to the geographic space included within rural school districts. In a related study of school administrators in the state of Minnesota, Williams and Nierengarten (2011) found increased student transportation expenses as an additional challenge for rural educators. In a study of rural connections, Hite et al. (2010) found that rural educators working in school districts along major roadways are able to establish wider professional networks than rural administrators working in more remote areas. Because this study involved two rural remote public school districts in a western state, the impact of geographic isolation on rural educators is relevant.

In the research literature, isolation is also related to the mental realities of rural teaching. In this context, Stelmach (2011) suggested that rural educators face psychological isolation since their professional work requires independent teaching. Even though a small group of teachers may serve a rural school district, each teacher typically

has separate teaching assignments and responsibilities. In research concerning rural teaching, du Plessis (2014) and Vaughn and Saul (2013) also identified professional and social isolation as conditions that impact the well-being of rural teachers. According to a narrative literature analysis by Burton et al. (2013), rural educators must travel significant distances to engage in professional development opportunities, acquire instructional resources, or to maintain contact with rural teachers outside their local district. As a result, Burton et al. contended, rural teachers have a sense that professionally, they are isolated in their daily work. Such isolation is also evident in the research of Hite et al. (2010), who examined the professional connections among rural administrators and found that even though administrators in rural public school districts frequently interact with their staff members, connections to other neighboring districts often depend on single, collegial relationships. In contrast, Glover et al. (2016) compared the professional development experiences of teachers in different locales and found that rural teachers have professional development opportunities similar to those opportunities available to teachers in urban and suburban settings. However, Glover et al. noted that travel expectations for rural teachers are different, which can mean professional development is available less frequently. These findings are significant in understanding professional isolation as a reality that negatively impacts the support rural teachers are likely to receive while implementing major curricular reforms.

While rural educators demonstrate dedication and commitment to their school districts, there is a need for additional research into how rural educators accomplish their work. Coladarci (2007) acknowledged that rural educators have strong convictions, yet

he cautioned against identifying this emotional commitment as reasoned decision-making. In a discussion of rural education research, Coladarci contended that heartfelt arguments, while frequently found in rural education contexts, cannot always be validated by research. Similarly, in an analysis of current rural education research, Arnold et al. (2005) described a common belief that "there is a quality inherent in rural communities and schools" (p.1) as a motivator in rural education research, but noted research in the field of rural education is less systematic than in other areas of education. Arnold et al. and Coladarci raise valid concerns regarding the quality of rural education research. While there is merit in documenting personal narratives of rural educators and students, research into rural education issues must adhere to established standards for qualitative research, especially related to narrative inquiry and case study because these research designs are prominent in rural education research.

Current Research in Planned Curriculum

Curriculum development is tied fundamentally to the work of educators, yet it also extends beyond the operating realm of educators. According to Aoki (1986), formal curriculum planning often occurs outside the classroom and involves stakeholders other than classroom teachers. In contrast, autonomy is a theme in rural education, especially related to school improvement and reform. In an examination of rural school improvement plans, Preston (2012) found that school and community councils preferred to develop their own improvement plans, rather than following those plans outlined by outside authorities. In a related discussion about the global movement towards national curriculums, Gerrard and Farrell (2013) explained that teachers are driven to respond to

the mandated curriculum by implementing curriculum, which includes modifying the curriculum to reflect educators' instructional ideals or rejecting the curriculum to refute outside political pressure. When rural school districts follow mandated changes, Preston found local leaders are often discouraged because they feel as though their ideas and viewpoints are not acknowledged or valued by outside authorities. The findings of Gerrard and Farrelll and Preston revealed a long-standing tension in rural education because national education reforms often conflict with rural teachers' expertise in meeting the learning needs of rural students. Additional research is needed to clarify how national, state, and locally-mandated changes are adopted in rural school systems because rural educators are required to adopt these standards-based reforms (Babione, 2010).

Current research also indicates weaknesses in curriculum leadership within rural school systems (Preston et al., 2013), which may limit the success of standards-based reform efforts. In their discussion of rural leadership, Halsey (2011) and Versland (2013) noted that rural teachers with limited classroom experience may be encouraged to fill administrative positions because of a lack of qualified candidates. According to Halsey, when inexperienced educators become administrative leaders for rural school districts, they often lack the expertise to lead complex aspects of the school system, especially concerning curriculum development. The lack of strong leadership in rural settings, Halsey and Versland noted, indicates an ongoing need for rural education researchers to investigate how curriculum work is accomplished, given limited administrative leadership. Even though this study did not include rural administrators as participants, the

understanding that rural classroom teachers have about their leadership role in the development of rural curriculum was included.

Adapting to the changes brought on by curriculum reform can also be a challenge for rural systems. In reporting on the experiences of rural teachers, Budge (2010) and Burton et al. (2013) found rural educators are often critical of new reforms. Gibson and Brooks (2012) also found teachers are aware of resistance to curriculum changes, and they often support this resistance as a professional defense against constant demands for change within education. However, in a discussion concerning the global shift towards nationalized curriculum reforms, Gerrard and Farrell (2013) found that policy leaders involved in national reforms do not view educators' resistance towards unified curriculum as a weakness, but rather as a sign that teachers around the world have not been given adequate support and training in order to implement significant curricular change.

Across the United States, current curriculum reforms focused on planned curriculum are related to the common core state standards. However, research related to the common core state standards implementation is limited, given that many educators are at the beginning the implementation process. A significant concern associated with the implementation process is the increased workload teachers have reported while planning and implementing curriculum alignment with the common core state standards (Porter et al., 2015). In other discussions concerning the common core state standards, Flint et al. (2014) and Noll and Lenhart (2013) explored how the common core state standards are changing teachers' conceptions of literacy, especially across diverse content

areas. Using a Grade 1 literacy assignment as an example, Flint et al. described how the common core state standards have intensified teaching expectations for literacy skills, such as text complexity, themes, and cross-content connections. Similarly, Bambrick-Santoyo (2013) endorsed these literacy changes as teachers have shifted instruction to align with the common core state standards. However, even though literacy skills are important to improved student learning, there is not a clear understanding of how to maximize literacy learning. In a textbook analysis of more than 8,000 texts published between 1905 and 2005, Gamson, Lu, and Eckert (2013) found that text complexity has not systematically declined during the past century, bringing into question the current push to increase text complexity as part of the common core state standards initiative. Instead, Gamson et al. argued that instructional strategies should be at the center of literacy improvement efforts, rather than the revision of print resources. In this recommendation, Gamson et al. acknowledge the central role of teachers in curricular design and implementation, which relates to the focus of this study.

Planned curriculum goals. The goal of the common core state standards initiative is to ensure that K-12 public school students are prepared to enter college and the workforce at proficient levels that will ensure their success in diverse careers (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). The common core state standards for English language arts are structured with core anchor standards that serve as goals for students' future performance in work and education (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). In their discussions about what students need to learn related to the new state standards, Conley (2011) and Phillips and Wong (2012) found that the literacy skills related to the common core state standards provide an

essential link between English language arts and other content areas, including history and social science, science, and technical subjects. In a discussion about literacy and the common core state standards, Hirsch (2011) theorized that teaching reading comprehension is a complex process and differs from one content area to another. In a discussion of new standards and new teaching, Smith, Wilhelm, and Fredricksen (2013) and Phillips and Wong described how literacy changes are also generating increased complexity in students' writing skills, a finding which is also applicable to other content areas. Such findings validate the importance of English language arts as a foundational subject in the process of curricular reform.

As rural school educators work to establish instructional goals that align with the common core state standards, differences in how teachers interpret the standards has complicated the work. In a case study of common core state standards implementation in North Carolina, Porter et al. (2015) found that educators hold different views on how much change the implementation process will bring to classroom instruction and recommended that professional development efforts focus on guiding the implementation process so teachers' efforts in implementing these standards are better aligned. Marzano et al. (2013) explored the historical context of national standards development and explained that teachers have struggled to interpret complex standards and determine how thoroughly each standard should be taught. Similarly, Babione (2010) examined how rural educators respond to standards-based school reform and found that educators hold differing views about how the standards should be addressed in school curriculum. While some educators attempt to address all state standards, Babione explained, others prioritize

the standards and choose to teach those standards that they perceive to be the most important. In some cases, teachers determine which standards are most relevant for their student population. The concerns Marzano et al., Babione, and Porter et al. raise regarding educators' varied interpretations of the common core state standards should continue to be addressed in future research on standards-based reform, because these differences are likely to generate collegial disagreement as educators continue the implementation process. This study, therefore, contributes to an understanding of how rural teachers individually interpret the common core state standards, which may inform future efforts to unify the curricular work of rural educators.

Rural administrators are also divided in their views of standards-based reform and its applicability to rural school systems. In an investigation of rural administrators' perceptions of standards-based reform, Budge (2010) found administrators were critical of how standards expectations applied to rural education conditions. Rural communities and school leaders believe every student has a place in the community, but Budge found that rural administrators do not believe students' community roles necessarily require strong academic performance. In studies concerning curriculum reform in China, Wang (2011) and Wang and Zhao (2011) reported similar concerns in how applicable the new curriculum standards are to rural students, given that rural contexts are significantly different from urban school settings. In a related study about rural school and community relations, McHenry-Sorber (2014) described a sharp division in rural beliefs concerning the purpose and function of education with community members advocating for a school curriculum based on life preparation and rural educators advocating for a curriculum

directed towards college preparation. These contradictory views reveal a troubling philosophical division among rural educators, which educators must resolve before conducting meaningful curricular reforms.

Current research indicates that educators in rural school districts are less able to support specialized curriculum goals than educators in larger school systems, including special interest, accelerated, or remedial classes (Williams & Nierengarten, 2011) as well as specialized curriculums such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programs (Goodpaster et al. 2012). The longevity of these programs is frequently dependent upon the individual commitment of staff members. Vaughn and Saul (2013) cautioned that changes in the composition of rural teaching staffs can eliminate the capacity of rural schools to support specialized programs. This research is important to the field of rural education because it reveals the instability of rural curriculum since the addition or removal of specific teachers often significantly alters the instructional capacity of rural school districts.

The implementation of long-term curriculum reform and school improvement goals is notably absent in rural education research. In a review of the literature related to the challenges that rural school principals face, Preston et al. (2013) reported an increasing need for school districts to implement continuous improvement policies and plans, including the constant renewal of curriculum materials. In rural school systems where staff is limited, Preston et al. suggested such renewal efforts are difficult to maintain. However, in a related investigation into rural school improvement, Nelson (2010) maintained that educators working within small rural school systems can plan and

implement school improvement more quickly than educators working in larger school districts. Given these opposing research conclusions, additional research into the sustainability of rural improvement efforts may clarify how rural educators can successfully formulate short and long-term curriculum goals.

Communicating planned curriculum. The importance of maintaining communication of the planned curriculum is evident in the literature, as Marrongelle et al. (2013) emphasized in their discussion of the changing professional development needs of teachers engaging in standards-based curriculum reform. In an examination of rural educators' visions to promote change, Vaughn and Saul (2013) identified themes of collaboration, respect, and trust in rural teachers' perceptions of school success. According to Vaughn and Saul, rural teachers view collaboration with peers as an essential part of building communication within a rural school setting. In related research, Phillips and Wong (2012) reported on how the Gates Foundation supports the common core state standards initiative, and they identified active communication with teachers and the meaningful inclusion of teachers in curriculum design as critical components of the reform process. These researchers agreed that effective and timely communication is key to generating educator buy-in for curriculum reforms, and therefore, researchers should not only investigate how teachers implement reforms, but also how teachers communicate their reform efforts to others. This study includes questions that address the lines of curricular communication within rural remote school districts.

The communication of rural school goals and curriculum to the surrounding community is also inconsistent, yet Rowe, Mazzotti, and Sinclair (2015) emphasized the

importance of clear and active communication between teachers and parents as a means of supporting students in the mastery of complex thinking skills as outlined in the common core state standards. In an empirical review of the literature related to the influence of family and community on rural school districts, Semenke and Sheridan (2012) found very few studies that investigated this dynamic within rural settings. In a study concerning the implementation of the common core state standards, Maunsell (2014) emphasized the need for school leaders to provide all stakeholders with accurate and relevant information related to these standards. By maintaining clear communication with teachers as well as parents and community members, Maunsell contended that school leaders can generate support for the curriculum changes that are part of common core implementation. However, in a discussion about the educational, social, and political motivations that drive the current common core state standards initiative, Toscano (2013) found that school districts have not included parents and community members effectively in standards-based reform efforts. All of these researchers acknowledged the importance of community support for rural school systems because this support brings a wider, public perspective into the educational debate.

Several strategies emerged in the research literature regarding the improvement of school district communications and collaboration during standards-based reforms. As a condition of SIG participation, for example, educators in rural schools who adopt the transformational model for school improvement are required to establish PLCs that will guide professional development practices (Rosenberg et al., 2014). However, the NCEE found rural teachers are disheartened with PLC work because content and grade level

isolation limits their collegial interactions (Rosenberg et al., 2014). Relevant PLC work in rural schools must be applicable at all grade levels and in all content areas before PLC practices can generate unified reform efforts among rural teaching staffs (Rosenberg et al., 2014). In a study of SIG turnaround schools, Rosenberg, Christianson, and Angus (2015) noted that most schools implemented PLCs as professional supports as well as offering additional stipends for reform. However, administrators still reported challenges in retaining and recruiting teachers. In other research about teacher collaboration, Huizinga et al. (2013) examined the use of teacher design teams as a means of developing in-house curriculum and found frequent collegial planning was effective in facilitating curriculum work. Additionally, Gilmer (2010) investigated the use of vertical teaming as a means of facilitating collegial conversations in rural schools and found teachers see benefits in vertical teaming and its impact on curriculum development and alignment. As another alternative, Allen and Topolka-Jorissen (2014) advocated for the use of "teacher learning walks" (p. 823) as a means of enhancing collegial awareness and collaboration across grade levels. Even though various communication options are available to rural teachers, all of these researchers emphasized the need for direct interaction and conversation among rural teaching staffs, with the understanding that this interaction is critical to investigating rural school operations. Therefore, investigating the communication and collaboration among rural teachers was a major component of this study.

Supporting teachers with planned curriculum. Researchers agree that teachers charged with implementing new curriculum reform need access to adequate training and

support. In a review of the professional development needs of teachers integrating the common core state standards initiative, Marrongelle et al. (2013) contended that the success of current educational reforms in the United States requires a significant and nationwide professional development system. In a study of rural principals as assessment leaders, Renihan and Noonan (2012) found that rural principals recognize that their leadership in professional development is essential to the success of rural school districts. However, realities in rural conditions pose challenges to the delivery of teacher training. Professional development resources may not be readily available to rural teachers unless specifically obtained by the district (Renihan & Noonan, 2012; Williams & Nierengarten, 2011). In some situations, state-led professional development can alleviate training difficulties for rural systems, as Babione (2010) found in investigating a state-initiated curriculum reform movement that provided training for rural teachers regarding multiple aspects of school reform, including curriculum design, instructional strategies, and technology integration.

The research literature indicates that rural educators are aware of professional development shortcomings, and they may be professionally discouraged when gaps appear in their expertise (Burton et al., 2013; Halsey, 2011). In a study of curriculum in rural schools in Australia, Roberts (2013) found that teachers within their first three years of experience are unsure of their expertise and doubt their abilities to instruct students in standards-based content adequately. Similarly, Tanaka (2012) examined teaching traditions in rural Ghana and found that trained and untrained teachers can both be successful in the classroom, even though trained teachers are often critical of the efforts

of new or untrained teachers. In a study of rural schools and the NCLB Act, Powell, Higgins, Aram, and Freed (2009) reported that teachers are discouraged by the demands of the NCLB Act, especially if they are working in low-performing rural districts. In rural areas where teacher shortages continue to be problematic, a clear need for continued access to professional development exists. Thus, the doubts rural teachers have concerning their qualifications are important to recognize as part of the rural education landscape, because professional confidence is essential in situations where educators are asked to lead, develop, and implement curricular change, which is often the situation in rural school districts.

Effective use of planned curriculum. As rural school districts implement the common core state standards, curriculum and instruction reform remains focused on improving student learning, and by extension, fuels the need for educators to address assessment strategies that align with the skills outlined in the common core state standards (Hess & McShane, 2013). In a study of how teachers implement mathematics curriculum, Taylor (2013) found that educators can make meaningful curriculum and instructional changes in their practice when given sufficient time, yet Taylor cautioned that school administrators may not allow teachers the time necessary to make adequate curriculum plans. In analyzing emerging problems in the implementation of the common core state standards, Welner (2014) found that a philosophical shift towards the common core state standards requires not only changes in curriculum and instruction but also in the development of learning resources and assessment systems, which requires adequate teacher planning time. Both Taylor and Welner articulated a prominent concern in rural

education research in that rural educators feel strained by their diverse workload and the limited professional planning time allotted within rural school systems, which was important to this study because such conditions pose relevant obstacles for all education reform plans.

Improving the alignment of instructional resources to the skills identified in the common core state standards is another ongoing challenge for rural teachers, and therefore, educators have mixed responses as they develop curriculum related to the complex skills and understandings outlined in the common core state standards. A primary logistical concern that Vaughn and Saul (2013) described is the role of finances in the instructional decisions of rural teachers. High quality, standards-based curriculum requires a wealth of instructional materials and enrichment sources, but Vaughn and Saul found that rural school educators are not able to reserve funds for both resources. Therefore, when rural teachers update instructional resources, they must frequently choose between updating textbooks, related instructional materials, or enrichment materials. However, Hess and McShane (2013) cautioned that packaged curriculums, which are frequently the financially feasible choice for rural school districts, may advertise their alignment to the common core state standards, but may actually not be updated significantly from previous editions. These concerns are important to the discussion about rural curriculum development because they draw attention to logistical problems, beyond the control of rural classroom teachers, which significantly impact curricular planning and development.

In investigating teacher implementation of the common core state standards, Flint et al. (2014) and Noll and Lenhart (2013) described ambiguity in the literacy expectations outlined in the common core state standards and suggested teachers are left to make personal decisions related to their instruction. In a related discussion, Hirsch (2011) voiced concern for how literacy alignment relates to current curriculum reforms. In the absence of clear instructional direction concerning standards implementation, teachers turn to their local district educators for guidance, which Porter et al. (2015) found can be highly frustrating to teachers, especially if these educators do not provide a clear explanation of instructional expectations related to the integration of the common core state standards. In a related study, Leifer and Udall (2014) examined how educators identify instructional materials that align with the skills outlined in the common core state standards and found that teachers and administrators are generally frustrated at the lack of complex curricular resources that have been published specifically for instruction of the common core state standards. However, Leifer and Udall also found that when teachers take on the challenge of piecing together resources, assessment scores show recognizable student gains in learning complex skills. These findings are important because they indicate that educators are still in need of high-quality instructional materials and assessments to determine how these standards-based materials impact student learning.

The research literature concerning rural student performance is mixed, indicating rural students may perform below, similarly, or above students attending nonrural schools. Budge (2010) researched rural school leadership and reported a systemic acknowledgment of student underachievement within rural school districts, with parents,

teachers, administrators, and school board members all describing concerns with students' academic motivation. Internationally, rural students have performed at lower achievement levels than urban students (OECD, 2013). In an examination of PISA achievement data from 2009, Lounkaew (2013) found that rural students in Thailand score significantly lower than their urban counterparts in multiple curriculum areas, including reading, mathematics, and science. Lounkaew contended that this trend is unlikely to improve unless significant changes are made in the distribution of educational resources because rural school funding is routinely lower than urban school funding. Similarly, in a study of rural education in Turkey, Taneri and Engin-Demir (2011) reported that students in rural schools regularly fail to meet established national standards. According to Wang (2011), the recent curriculum reform movement in China sets unreasonable expectations on students learning; Wang argued that only urban students from wealthy families can reach new standards because their families can afford to support advanced studies. Roberts (2014) also described a learning gap in rural Australia, finding that students attending rural schools have historically demonstrated lower achievement scores than students attending urban schools, which has fueled the drive for the development of a national curriculum that would provide teachers in a variety of school settings with common learning goals.

Research also suggests that rural students in the United States are more successful than rural students in other areas of the world. In a meta-analysis of the literature, Redding and Walberg (2012) argued that studies have not proven that their school setting academically disadvantages rural students in the United States. Similarly, Stewart (2009)

examined student achievement at different sized schools in Texas and found students attending small schools performed better on the Texas state assessment than their peers in larger schools. In another study, Diaz (2008) researched student achievement in Washington and found no statistical correlation between student success and district size, through students' socioeconomic status was a significant factor in student performance. In contrast, both Monk (2007) and Nelson (2010) described assorted criticisms rural educators have of standardized assessment practices and how assessment results label schools based on student performance. In a study of rural schools and the NCLB Act, Powell et al. (2009) found rural administrators are concerned with students' performance on standardized tests and make short-term and long-term curricular decisions based on how these changes can improve student test scores. Yet, the research literature overwhelmingly shows that rural school administrators object to the evaluation of rural school education based on students' performance on such assessments (Preston et al., 2013; Renihan & Noonan, 2012; Williams & Nierengarten, 2011). Common arguments against standardized testing include the statistical uncertainty of assessing a small student population (Nelson, 2010), the unreasonable stress that assessment practices place on students with special needs (Williams & Nierengarten, 2011), and the need for students' various interests and skills to be considered as part of their educational experience (Budge, 2010). Ongoing discussions about the use of standardized assessments are clearly unsettled in the field of rural education, as these contradictory arguments indicate.

Current Research in Lived Curriculum

Research literature related to the lived curriculum is highly diverse because curriculum development driven by lived curricular experiences empowers classroom teachers to become primary authors and agents of curricular change. Taylor (2013) identified three curricular decisions that teachers make during the implementation of curriculum that significantly impact the success of student learning. First, Taylor noted that teachers prioritize the skills they plan to teach, which drives the focus of the lived curriculum. Second, Taylor noted that assessment methods impact the progression of the presented lesson. Third, Taylor noted that the choices teachers make about enrichment opportunities also impacts the success of student learning. In a study of preservice art teachers, Powell and Lajevic (2011) explored lived curriculum, relationships, and knowledge and found that preservice art teachers thrive in teaching situations that allow learner flexibility, even though such teaching situations can be unpredictable. Similarly, in an examination of creativity in the classroom, Beghetto (2013) theorized that teachers and students generate "creative micromoments" (p. 6) as they make connections between academic information and personal experiences. The findings of these studies demonstrate the challenges researchers have in capturing lived curriculum, as it constantly changes while teachers and students interact. Yet, understanding this dynamic of the lived curriculum is critical to educational research because it focuses on the immediate situations where teaching and learning happen.

In the research literature, lived curriculum acknowledges the value of personal experiences as part of the learning framework, even though the attention given to the

experiences of teachers and students varies according to the purpose of the study. In a study of educators taking graduate courses, Latta and Kim (2011) found teachers need to explore their identities before they are ready to support students' lived experiences. Kissling (2014) investigated this concept in depth and argued that teacher identity is composed of educators' life and teaching experiences, which naturally extend to the living curriculum they facilitate within their classrooms. Similarly, Korach (2012) examined educators involved in leadership training and found personal perspectives and values are key components that educators access to process learning and participate in collegial discussions. In studying the development of teacher education condensed courses in Canada, Latremouille et al. (2015) found instructors and students alike thrive in curriculum development when they are encouraged to flexibly add their lived perspectives and ideas into coursework. These findings support the need for researchers to investigate how teachers' personal experiences are likely to impact the manner in which they support students' lived experiences within the classroom. Therefore, for this study, data were collected from individual interviews and online reflective journals concerning teachers' experiences in integrating the common core state standards into their classroom instruction.

Students also experience lived curriculum, and researchers advocate the need for educators to provide rich and dynamic classroom experiences as a means of engaging students emotionally and socially as well as academically. According to Beghetto (2013), teachers and students generate creative and meaningful learning at the point where each is trying to understand the other or is attempting to be understood by others. In a related

discussion concerning lived curriculum, Tilley and Taylor (2012) believed students engaging in the lived curriculum can share their experiences without feeling as though they must align with others' perspectives. Instead, Tilley and Taylor contended, students share personal ideas with their peers to highlight the complexities related to the topic and to enrich the learning of all. Similarly, in a study about designing experiential curriculum, Keshtiaray, Vajargah, Zimitat, and Abari (2012) maintained that lived curriculum does not support the notion of separate and individualized learning, but instead suggests that the individual experiences of all learners within a classroom contribute to the collective understanding of the group. The notion of collective learning experiences is a major theme in lived curriculum research, as Keshtiarary et al. and Tilley and Taylor articulate, although it can be challenging to research because it emerges within the social framework of the classroom. Therefore, for this study, data collection included classroom observations in order to document the lived curriculum.

Lived curriculum research also suggests that teachers can present a wide range of abstract, social concepts as part of the lived experiences of classrooms, a notion endorsed by Keddie (2015), who advocated for the inclusion of social and moral learning within curricula. Tilley and Taylor (2012) examined teaching for social justice and equity goals and concluded that lived curriculum provides a strong framework for investigating social issues, particularly concepts of social justices, within a classroom setting. People may view social topics as highly controversial and uncomfortable, Tilley and Taylor explained, and by employing lived curriculum techniques, teachers can facilitate honest conversations about high-tension topics. In related research of planned and lived

curriculum, Yoshimoto (2011) described empathy as a powerful emotion in lived curriculum, because teachers and students are encouraged to build personal connections and understandings beyond those required in planned curriculum. Even though these researchers endorse the importance of lived curriculum as a social learning tool, social learning remains outside traditional curriculum constructs. However, in rural education research, the value of social connections within rural schools is commonly referenced as a strength of rural learning (Avery, 2013; Hardrè, Sullivan, & Roberts, 2008; Surface & Theobald, 2014). In a study concerning rural student motivation, Hardrè, et al. determined that rural teachers who foster authentic personal connections with their students can motivate students to learn. These findings suggest that lived curriculum experiences are important in rural classrooms and remain influential phenomena that researchers should further investigate in future rural education research.

Even so, evidence exists that educators have not accepted the notion of lived curriculum as a mainstream curriculum planning approach. In an exploration of lived curriculum as a teaching tool for social justice, Tilley and Taylor (2012) found teachers gained an appreciation for lived curriculum, but still maintained a primary commitment to the planned curriculum outlined by their school district. While teachers gained greater awareness of lived curriculum experiences, Tilley and Taylor reported its use was still a minor addition to the traditional written, content-based curriculum already established within school districts. In a study about literacies, lived experiences, and identities within an in-school space, Wissman (2011) encountered similar challenges, explaining that a lived curriculum poetry course was replaced to make scheduling space for literacy skills

courses. In many ways, educators still struggle to understand Aoki's notion of lived curriculum and the transformations it is likely to inspire in classrooms, indicating that educators appreciate lived curriculum as an instructional strategy, but not as a curricular approach.

Lived curriculum goals. In the literature, goals related to the lived curriculum originate at the classroom level, because classroom environments are where educators connect their scholarly expertise with the knowledge they have gained through teaching experience, and in rural situations, experience in rural culture (Avery, 2013). In a discussion about the common core state standards, Ball and Forzani (2011) emphasized the need for curriculum reforms to focus on positively improving the teaching and learning that happens inside classrooms. While policy changes tend to attract national attention, Ball and Forzani argued that only improvements at a classroom level, targeting instructional practice, are capable of generating educational change. While acknowledging the role of individual teachers in activating the curriculum, Huizinga et al. (2013) found that such personalization often leads to collegial discord as teachers work to unify course curriculum. Instead, Huizinga et al. argued, curriculum development is more effective if it not only includes teacher collaboration, but begins with team discussion and planning to establish common thinking among staff before curriculum work begins. Thus, a common theme found in these studies is the recognition that classroom teachers are essential in the development of curriculum planning goals, which was why classroom teachers were selected as participants for this case study.

A central goal of lived curriculum is developing student-centered learning environments. Wang and Zhao (2011) explored curriculum reform in China, and Sriprakash (2013) explored curriculum reform in India; both endorsed a rural school curriculum transformation from teacher-led instruction to student-focused experiences as a method of increasing student motivation. In a discussion concerning Aoki's constructs of planned and lived curriculum, Yoshimoto (2011) explained the use of lived curriculum shifts the classroom emphasis towards learning space, rather than direct teaching. Within a planned curriculum structure, Yoshimoto explained, learners are required to complete a series of identified tasks to become successful in learning. In contrast, Yoshimoto believed lived curriculum challenges students to consider complex questions that have no absolute solution, therefore making students' search to comprehend the question fully the measure of lived curriculum success. Rather than adhering to the belief that all students should master certain knowledge, Wallin (2011) suggested that the power of learning is ensuring that all students contribute unique understandings to content discussions. Rowe et al. (2015) reached similar conclusions in their investigation of self-determination strategies that teachers implement to integrate the common core state standards, arguing that independent thinking is an essential part of the common core state standards which students need to practice regularly to develop critical analysis skills. These researchers found a connection between lived curriculum and student-centered learning, and future research should explore this relationship, especially in rural school systems where teachers and students have established social connections. Student-centered learning was not a focus of this study, but the purpose of conducting observations of classroom

instruction was to collect data about how teachers integrated the common core state standards into their instruction, which provided insights into students' lived classroom experiences.

Lived curriculum conversations suggest a need for individualized learning, but researchers have voiced concerns about over-personalizing instruction and learning. In a discussion of rural identity, Brann-Barrett (2015) suggested that rural youth inherently connect their personal identities with their rural surroundings. Avery (2013) explored rural science learning and found that specialized curriculums like STEM are ideal for place-based instruction because rural students are engaged in their local surroundings as they investigate complex science processes. In related research on rural youth and school experiences, Pazos et al. (2012) maintained that rural students are connected innately to their surroundings, and even though the rural setting is not often the focus of formal education, when rural adults reminisce about their education, place-based experiences are prominent themes in their memories. In researching rural schools and communities, Schafft (2016) also described the strong attachments rural students have to their local communities, which impacts students' interest in remaining in their local communities following graduation. In an investigation into rurality, inclusion, and education, Pini, Carrington, and Adie (2014) argued for the presence of local culture within rural school districts and suggested that positive community influences improve inclusion education. Similarly, in an examination of rural teachers and literacy instruction, Waller and Barrentine (2015) maintained that rural teachers have strong connections to rural life and should actively adjust curriculum to incorporate place-based connections to strengthen

rural students' sense of identity. However, Brann-Barrett also argued that place identity cannot serve as an educational barrier because teachers and students are required to demonstrate standards-based teaching and learning in both rural and urban learning environments.

In effectively implementing lived curriculum experiences, instructional timing is important, as Bambrick-Santoya (2013) indicated in a discussion of the common core state standards. Bambrick-Santoyo asserted that implementing these standards requires a fundamental shift in the way teachers and students conceptualize the learning process; as students practice and gain proficiency in standards-based skills, teachers must provide "the right correction to the right student at the right time" (p. 70). In a related discussion of the common core state standards, Breakstone et al. (2013) theorized that teaching for complex skill development rather than rote memorization will require that teachers restructure instruction, curriculum, and assessment in ways that inspire rich learning experiences. In a discussion about how to move towards more effective teacher and student interactions with mathematics textbooks, Taylor (2013) found that teachers adapt their instructional practice effectively to fit student needs when they have continuous release time to plan and prepare an updated standards-based curriculum. However, Taylor also acknowledged that often teachers in full-time instructional positions are not granted sufficient professional planning time. The instructional guidelines that Bambrick-Santoya, Breakston et al., and Taylor presented are evidence of how instructional planning is changing because of the rigor found in the common core state standards. Because rural classrooms frequently include more frequent interaction between teachers

and students (Surface & Theobald, 2014), researchers need to determine if the introduction of the common core state standards into rural curriculum positively or negatively impacts the ability of rural teachers to adapt to the complex learning needs of their students.

The challenge in using lived curriculum as a district-wide curriculum approach lies in unifying the individual lived experiences of educators because classroom teachers engaged in meaningful lived curriculum experiences often use their backgrounds to design instructional experiences for students. In a case study of a Sino-Canadian transnational program, Zhang and Heydon (2014) found that teachers help students to investigate their identities as well as the course content and that this process is complex because teachers are also experiencing the lived curriculum through their identities as they deliver instruction. At the collegiate level, Latremouille et al. (2015) investigated the integration of lived curriculum in preservice courses through the use of personalized teacher addendums as part of course outlines. They found that the inclusion of lived curriculum experiences along with greater curriculum flexibility facilitates richer academic discussions and investigations among instructors and students. However, in a discussion of the common core state standards, Ball and Forzani (2011) argued that teachers cannot individually structure and implement curriculum because students need comprehensive skill development across K-12 classrooms to develop adequate college and career level skills. Likewise, Vaughn and Saul (2013), who examined the goal-setting practices of rural teachers, contended that the close-knit environment of rural schools is well suited for curriculum collaboration, including the development of cross-curricular

school projects as well as student learning opportunities outside traditional classroom settings. Thus, these studies indicate that rural school educators have the capacity for successful teacher collaboration across grade levels, which is a highly desired trait for educators to possess when implementing the common core state standards. Concerning teacher collaboration in rural remote school systems, one of the goals of this study was to explore how rural remote teachers viewed their collaborative work with other English language arts teachers at different grade levels.

Lived curriculum also extends to the school district level as a structure for reforming school learning environments. In researching rural school districts in Pakistan, Bana (2010) found rural teachers express diverse views about the purpose of public education. While some teachers focus on character building and citizenship as primary goals, others concentrate on academic knowledge. In a case study concerning morality and social learning, Keddie (2015) suggested that a school district's vision for student development directs how teachers and students interact, regardless of content area or grade level. Even though current national and global trends in education focus on content skills, Keddie argued that the development of a cohesive learning environment, with teachers and students working together to build sophisticated understanding, requires that teachers have the autonomy to determine their collective beliefs about teaching and learning. Keddie's research is important because it recognizes the need for educators to have a vision for teaching and learning to guide the work of school districts, including the development of new and rigorous curriculum.

Communicating lived curriculum. Maintaining clear lines of communication across rural school districts is another theme within the research literature. In a case study of rural school improvement, Chance and Segura (2009) described the importance of rural administrators providing consistent instructional leadership through regular and varied forms of communication, including electronic contacts as well as face-to-face interactions. In conducting a participatory case study, Bana (2010) emphasized the importance of continual conversation in implementing improvement plans for rural school districts. While engaging in deep discussions about teaching and learning, Bana argued teachers are able to build professional continuity. Similarly, Babione (2010) examined teacher responses to state-mandated standards and advised that educators need to interact with their colleagues as they revise and align curriculum with current standards. These researchers agreed that the informal conversations and collaboration efforts of rural educators are critical to the success of rural curriculum development, and therefore, researchers in rural education need to explore how rural teachers communicate. For this study, the communication among rural remote teachers that was investigated related to the collaboration that they established with colleagues of diverse content areas and grades levels.

The communication of lived curriculum is less formal than the communication of planned curriculum, yet may be more demanding. In a study of rural education in India, Sriprakash (2013) found teachers engaged in interactive learning experiences with students must expand their communications to be successful. In an examination of lived literacy curriculum in a globalized schooling context, Zhang and Heydon (2014)

contended that students engaged in lived curriculum experiences must also master the verbal communication needed to present their perspective regarding learning topics, which can be challenging in situations where students have assumed the traditional role of an academic listener. In fact, Sriprakash viewed the change in teacher and student roles in lived curriculum situations to be a challenging adaptation for teachers and students in regions where there are long-standing traditions concerning education. In India, for instance, Sriprakash explained that classroom teachers are respected culturally as experts and disciplinarians who are responsible for maintaining strict and structured learning environments; however, Aoki's (1993) theory of shared learning, articulated in lived curriculum experiences, conflicts with the disciplined role that teachers have been trained to play. The communication changes driven by the expanded use of lived curriculum, as Sriprakash and Zhang and Heydon described, are relevant to current rural education research because effective or ineffective communication impacts the comfort levels teachers and students experience during the implementation of significant reform efforts. Therefore, this study's investigation included teachers' views on their experiences with communication and collaboration while implementing the common core state standards.

Supporting teachers with lived curriculum. Literature concerning lived curriculum endorses the role of teachers in guiding students' individualized development. In a study of curriculum design, Keshtiaray et al. (2012) believed that teachers should not only acknowledge students' lived experiences with content, but they should also have training in how to assist students in accessing and reconciling their personal lived experiences with content information. In an examination of curriculum in rural schools in

Australia, Roberts (2013) reached a similar conclusion, explaining that experienced rural teachers are able to access students' local, place-based knowledge and then connect this understanding to broader content ideas. However, Roberts also noted that teachers are not always aware of how local perspectives differ from prominent, national views. As a result, Roberts contended, rural students are given limited exposure to local culture, but are taught content from the dominant cultural point of view, a practice which diminishes rural identity. In a study concerning participatory theater, Kumrai, Chauhan, and Hoy (2011) argued that lived experiences do not necessarily generate meaningful learning unless teachers guide students through reflection activities. Thus, these findings confirm the importance of learning conversations as part of the lived curriculum experience; students are not expected to develop understanding in isolation, but they should gain insights as classroom teachers guide their collective thinking.

The inclusion of lived curriculum within instructional design adds to the complexity of student learning since teachers must predict possibilities in the learning process. Wallin (2011) analyzed emerging theories of curriculum and suggested that multiple realities and meanings are a part of a dynamic curriculum; this multiplicity means teachers must guide students in learning, even as each student reaches different understandings at different points during the teaching and learning process. Magrini (2015) envisioned a more significant dynamic, explaining that teachers must anticipate potential learning connections when teaching. In a discussion concerning lived curriculum, Kissling (2014) recommended the use of "thematic sequences of experiences" (p. 83) in curriculum structures While Kissling acknowledged that each

student internalizes lived curriculum uniquely, Kissling maintained that a combination of rich, social experiences can dynamically impact student learning. Thus, these researchers agreed that meaningful curriculum requires planning for not only the expected learning of students, but also for the unexpected connections that students make, which endorses Aoki's theory of planned and lived curriculums.

Even though rural administrators are at the center of the planned curriculum, they are far less involved in lived curriculum. In researching the views of rural principals, Renihan and Noonan (2012) found rural administrators do not want to micro-manage classroom logistics; instead, they prefer to extend teachers instructional space to develop curriculum as content experts. However, in a case study concerning rural school improvement, Chance and Segura (2009) found that rural administrators who are highly involved in the daily activities of the school can motivated rural teachers who rely on these leaders to provide direction for school improvement. Thus, these findings suggest that the roles and responsibilities of rural administrators in guiding curriculum work remain ambiguous, which is concerning given the curriculum leadership role rural administrators are expected to fill (Wood et al., 2013), especially concerning the implementation of the common core state standards. Given the uncertain role of administrators in supporting lived curriculum practice, this study focused on the experiences of classroom teachers because they are involved directly in lived curriculum development.

Effective use of lived curriculum. In the research literature, a central purpose of lived curriculum is to strengthen the role of learners as part of the learning process. In

examining the potential of lived curriculum to reform instructional practice at the collegiate level, Keshtiaray et al. (2012) believed effective teaching and learning includes individual learning experiences as part of the content knowledge, with teachers and students discussing the connections between academic information and personal experiences. Such a connection, Keshtiaray et al. argued, provides students with deep content connections and expanded perspectives. Similarly, Beghetto (2013) researched creativity as a learning asset and advocated for flexibility in classroom learning so students gain a greater depth of understanding as their lived curriculum experiences are integrated into classroom instruction. Lived curriculum can enhance learning motivation within a classroom, as Hardrè, et al. (2008) found in their examination of the motivation strategies of rural teachers, because students view their teachers' social presence as highly influential in their academic success. Thus, these findings suggest that the manner in which rural teachers build social relationships with their students is central to rural student success. These findings are also significant to the field of rural education because researchers often struggle to define what factors of rural teaching and learning contribute to students' success (Coladarci, 2007).

Experienced rural educators establish close, mentoring relationships with their students, which provides a framework for effective lived curriculum. Budge (2006) and Surface and Theobald (2014) attributed the teacher-student connection to low teacher to student ratios because teachers interact more consistently with students when fewer students are part of the learning environment. Additionally, Chance and Segura (2009) described one rural school's improvement process and recognized the importance of

community closeness in supporting student learning, noting that rural parents contribute to the nurturing culture found in rural schools. In a study concerning student achievement in schools of different sizes, Stewart (2009) suggested stronger performance by rural students may be attributed to the sense of community students feel while learning within rural school environments. In rural school systems, where teachers have established close working relationships with students, learners are engaged in secure learning environments where teachers and students can explore social issues. Given the consistent mentoring support rural students receive from their teachers and surrounding community (Budge, 2006; Chance & Segura, 2009; Surface & Theobald, 2014), positive adult influences are an important component of rural education.

Effective lived curriculum also provides opportunities for students to learn about current and relevant topics. In a synthesis of international rural education research, Stelmach (2011) concluded that rural educators must use curriculum in rural schools to make meaningful connections to the roles and responsibilities of rural living in order for rural students and their parents to embrace the relevancy of formal education. In another discussion of teachers and lived curriculum, Kissling (2014) extended Aoki's original theory concerning lived experiences within the classroom and argued that all students' and teachers' lived experiences, inside and outside the classroom, impact the lived curriculum as it occurs in the classroom. Kissling envisioned all people experiencing a lived curriculum within the context of life, which is an important conclusion because it suggests that a better understanding of how rural communities contribute to and benefit

from the operation of local rural schools is needed to clarify how rural education generates positive social change for the surrounding rural community.

In the context of rural education, the research literature also reveals concerns regarding educators' misunderstandings of rural culture, and by extension, the perspectives of rural students. In interviewing rural educators in India, Sriprakash (2013) found teachers perceive a central problem in rural schools to be students' lack of knowledge and core skills, which leads teachers to complain about the challenges of teaching unskilled youth. Along the same lines, in a study of rural teaching in Australia, Roberts (2013) found new teachers struggle to understand the values of rural youth. In some cases, Roberts reported, new teachers assume rural students are disinterested in education because these students believe they will live and work in the same community during their lifetime, and therefore education has little relevance to their personal goals. Similarly, in a study of preservice teacher preparation for rural teaching, Azano and Stewart (2015) found that preservice teachers reported frustration when they perceived students did not have college aspirations. In contrast, Schaff (2016) investigated rural schools and communities and found that teachers and school personnel did not treat rural students differently based on students' aspirations for the future. Rather, Schaff suggested that students are ultimately impacted by local economic factors as they plan for their futures. In an exploration of mentoring in rural schools, Isernhagen (2010) found that rural teachers were typically unaware of students' plans for the future, yet students and parents were able to articulate students' interest in continuing their education. As a means of strengthening the understanding new rural teachers have of rural culture and the lives

of their students, White and Kline (2010) argued that preservice training must include discussions about rural life as a unique and valuable culture, similar to the ways teacher preparation programs present other cultural diversities. These conclusions suggest a worrisome trend in rural education: if rural teachers are not aware of, or misinterpret students' short and long term goals, then the curriculum developed by rural teachers is unlikely to generate satisfactory student outcomes.

Researchers around the world have presented divergent findings concerning rural students' desire to continue their education beyond nationally required grade levels. In researching college options for rural and urban students in China, Tam and Jiang (2015) found rural students are far less likely to continue their education. In a study about how rural female students view their future, Cairns (2014) found that these students are often hesitant and fearful of moving beyond the local community, especially when imagining living in more urban settings. In contrast, in a comparative study of the life goals of rural students in Russia, China, and Kazakhstan, Abankina (2014) found a significant majority of rural students in all three regions set goals for continuing their education beyond secondary school. According to a 2014 report of rural schools, the NCEE cited limited employment in rural areas as a principal reason students leave their home communities (Rosenberg et al., 2014) since advanced education and career opportunities are available outside the rural context. Cairns described yet another challenge in rural education, noting that rural students believe they will be less successful if they remain in rural locations, yet rural youth also have difficulty imagining life in urban settings that are significantly different from the familiar rural landscape. Stelmach (2011) synthesized

international research in rural education and also found that communities view students who remain in rural locations as less successful than those that leave the area in search of better opportunities. Stelmach contended that out-migration contributes to the economic hardships in rural locations because young adults may leave instead of renewing the rural workforce and economy. Research concerning students' life choices after K-12 schooling is relevant to rural education research because a prominent argument against standards-based reform has been the notion that rural education should relate to students' rural futures (Budge, 2010; McHenry-Sorber, 2014). If rural students are looking to pursue careers in a variety of urban and rural settings, as the findings of Abankina, Cairns, and Stelmach suggest, then this traditional resistance to national curriculum reform is not reasonable. Instead, current research supports the need for rural educators to consider the learning needs of two diverse student groups: those students who wish to remain in rural settings and those students who hope to move to more urban settings as young adults.

Unifying Planned and Lived Curriculum in Rural Settings

Rural school systems strive to balance local needs with national curriculum reforms. In examining rural school challenges, Avery (2013) and Roberts (2013) emphasized the importance of place identity in rural communities and described the struggles rural educators face as they work to balance local topics with national standards. In researching the struggles faced by rural school districts, Howley et al. (2012) and Preston (2012) also acknowledged the connection between rural schools and their surrounding communities. In the case of rural district consolidation, Howley et al. reported that school emphasis on local identity declined as schools expanded shared

services, moving closer to school consolidation. Instead, Howley et al. found that education across locations developed a sense of uniformity as local identity faded in each of the impacted communities. In an investigation of teacher recruitment in rural areas, Monk (2007) explained that newly consolidated rural school systems face the challenge of establishing a unified identity that supports students and teachers from multiple rural areas. Thus, these findings emphasize the powerful role of place within rural school districts, which is important to recognize when investigating rural remote school districts. The influence of place on curriculum work related to the common core state standards was included in this study because participants were asked to share their experiences in professional development and collaboration as teachers working in rural remote locations.

Varied views on the roles and responsibilities of teachers have also complicated the development of national curricula. In an investigation of how global policy makers understand the role of teachers in curriculum, Gerrard and Farrell (2013) found that some leaders view classroom teachers as "curriculum deliverers" (p. 649), while other leaders perceive educators as "curriculum designers" (p. 649). Gerrard and Farrell explained that these two views represent a significant division in the way political leaders recognize teacher autonomy, which complicates how curriculum is developed and implemented across the globe. Toscano (2013) discussed the development of the common core state standards initiative and argued that the skills outlined in the standards do not structure a complete curriculum of its own, but instead, present a framework of essential skills around which educators have the freedom and flexibility to construct complex learning

experiences. Rather than limiting teachers' role in curriculum development, Toscano believed the common core state standards endorse the need for classroom teachers to be actively involved in the creation of school district curriculum. Young (2013) concurred and in a discussion on curriculum theory Young argued that the goal of a nationalized curriculum is to establish consensus on the "key concepts of the core subjects" (p. 110) while still allowing for states and school districts to integrate these concepts into local curriculum that is considerate of the culture and context of a school district's students. These findings are applicable to this study because rural remote teachers were asked to share their views about how they individually develop curriculum, taking into consideration the skills of the common core state standards as well the culture, context, and unique learning needs of their students.

A significant gap exists in balancing place-based education with the current standards-based movement. In research related to rural school leadership, Budge (2010) found rural educators struggle to integrate standards-based curricular changes because this curriculum shift does not support rural identity and localized knowledge; teachers may view the skills described in the common core state standards as unconnected to students' rural experiences. Additionally, Wang (2011) researched curriculum reform in rural China and voiced similar concerns, arguing that rural students are not familiar with the textbook materials because these textbooks are full of references to urban contexts. Along the same lines, Roberts (2013) also found rural teachers in Australia struggle to balance place-relevant instruction with nationally-established curriculum standards and are concerned that standardized assessments do not include relevant rural topics.

Similarly, in a synthesis of international research concerning rural education, Stelmach (2011) also endorsed place-based education as a meaningful curriculum design for rural education, which enables teachers to integrate components of rural culture and tradition purposefully into the curriculum. According to Stelmach, this strengthens the ties rural youth have to their surrounding community, facilitates learning that relates to rural jobs and responsibilities, and preserves elements of the local culture. The arguments that Roberts, Stelmach, and Wang made in support of place-based inclusion in rural curriculum represent a theme in rural education that is not likely to diminish: rural educators, students, and community members believe there is value in rural living and that local education should acknowledge rural experiences as an important part of K-12 education.

In other related research, Pini, Molesane, and Mills (2014) contended that the connectivity of modern society has led to the emergence of global rural communities, where people are working to balance global knowledge with rural traditions. The struggle between local culture and nationally recognized content standards can be described similarly to the relationship between planned and lived curriculums. In each case, one valued component of the system relates to formally recognized content: the planned curriculum and the common core state standards. On the other hand, an informal and socially relevant component is also important to the system: the lived curriculum and local culture. In theorizing about planned and lived curriculum, Aoki (1993) did not envision the two curriculums at odds, but rather as complimentary to one another because teachers access both realms as part of the teaching process. In a similar discussion about

the structure of dynamic curriculum, Wallin (2011) suggested that planned curriculum serves as an important anchor for lived curriculum; lived curriculum explores countless possibilities in the content, and planned curriculum helps keep teachers and students focused on the central themes that standards identify as learning targets. Wallin's argument poses an important possibility in rural education by suggesting that highly effective rural curriculum should motivate rural educators to employ both planned and lived curriculums purposefully as part of their daily practice, so rural students are able to learn from standards-based content as well as from their local rural surroundings.

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter included a review of the literature related to rural education, planned and lived curriculum, standards-based curriculum reform, and the common core state standards initiative. The strategy used to search for current peer-reviewed literature was described. In relation to the conceptual framework, the connection of Aoki's (1993) theory of planned and lived curriculums to rural education curricular research was presented. The literature review included an analysis and synthesis of current research on the nature of rural education, which is influenced by geographic, social, and economic conditions in rural communities. Additionally, the literature review included an analysis and synthesis of current research related to the planned curriculum found in rural school systems as well as the lived curriculum experiences of rural teachers and students. Finally, this chapter included an analysis and synthesis of research related to how rural educators can strengthen rural curriculum by unifying the planned and lived curriculums.

Several themes emerged from this review of the literature. As a field of study, rural education has not been clearly defined, in part because of inconsistent classifications of rural conditions. One major theme was that rurality is viewed as a problem that school systems struggle to overcome, rather than an educational setting that requires continued investigation to be better understood. Research highlights shortcomings within rural school resources, including limited personnel, facilities, educational supplies, and financial support. Isolation is presented as a condition that negatively impacts rural educators, including geographic, professional, social, and psychological isolation. Another theme was that rural educators are skeptical of planned curriculum, especially related to the standards-based movement and standards-based assessments. The commitment of rural teachers to their students and community is another theme prominent in the literature, suggesting that rural educators support lived curriculum. Even though the literature reveals numerous weaknesses in the planned curriculum practices found in rural education, the lived curriculum experiences of rural educators are a valuable strength of rural teaching and learning.

This study addressed a research gap concerning how rural educators integrate the common core state standards into the planned curriculum of a school district and the lived curriculum that rural teachers generate within their classrooms. Qualitative case study design was particularly fitting for this rural education study because the individual narrative experiences of educators reflect the individual and community experiences of rural life.

Chapter 3 is a description of the research method, particularly in relation to the specific research design of case study and the rationale for selecting that design as well as my role as the researcher. This chapter also includes a description of the research methodology of the study in regards to site and participant selection, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis. Issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures related to qualitative research are also discussed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to describe how K-12 English language arts teachers in two rural remote public school districts aligned the planned curriculum, as represented by the common core state standards and district curricular materials, with the lived curriculum they implemented in their courses. To accomplish that purpose, I explored how K-12 English language arts teachers in two rural remote public school districts structured curricular materials and instructional practices to align with the common core state standards. In addition, I examined how these teachers collaborated vertically to connect their course curriculum across grade levels and with teachers of other content areas to support the implementation of common core state standards in English language arts. I also investigated the professional development experiences of rural teachers, especially related to how they integrate the common core state standards into their curricular and instructional practices at the course level.

This chapter is about the research method. The chapter includes a description of the research design and rationale for the study, with an explanation for the selection of case study design and its applicability to rural education research. Additionally, the research methodology for the study is given, including an explanation of participant selection, instrumentation, and the procedures followed for recruitment, participation, and data collection. Finally, the plan for data analysis and a discussion of issues of trustworthiness for qualitative research and ethical procedures are presented.

Research Design and Rationale

The central and related research questions for this study were related to the conceptual framework and the research literature concerning rural education. The central research question was as follows:

> How do K-12 English language arts teachers in two rural remote public school districts align the planned curriculum, represented by the common core state standards and district curricular materials, with the lived curriculum that they implement in their courses?

The related research questions were as follows:

1. How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts adjust curricular materials to align with the common core state standards?
2. How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts adjust instructional practices to align with the common core state standards?
3. How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts collaborate vertically to connect their curriculum across grade levels while aligning their curriculum with the common core state standards?
4. How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts collaborate with teachers of other content areas to support the implementation of common core literacy standards?

5. How do English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts engage in professional development activities concerning the integration of the common core state standards into their planned curriculum and instructional practices?

For this study, a qualitative approach was used. The phenomenon of two separate realms of curriculum existing within educational settings was well-suited for qualitative research because educators are likely to apply personal perspectives and beliefs to the curriculum development process. Creswell (2007) articulated features of qualitative research that researchers must consider when determining a research approach. First, Creswell argued the research topic must exist in an active reality that researchers cannot isolate for study. The design of planned curriculum and lived curriculum within the context of learning environments cannot be isolated for study. Field observations are necessary to capture the curriculum work of educators. Creswell also explained that qualitative research is designed to give voice to the experiences, values, and beliefs of research participants. For this study, K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts grappled with the development of new and rigorous curriculum, requiring them to reconsider their established values and beliefs about teaching and learning. A qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth examination of how teachers in this study adjusted their curricular and instructional practices to align with the new common core state standards.

In addition to a qualitative approach, the specific research design of a multiple case study was used. Yin (2014) presented a two-fold definition of case study, consisting

of the research scope and features. In the first part of the definition, Yin defined case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (p. 16). For this study, the single case was a K-12 English language arts program in a rural remote school district located in the western region of the United States. Two cases were presented. The rural school setting provided a rich context for the study and impacted the educational experiences of rural teachers and learners. Therefore, the context and the phenomena cannot be separated, as Yin suggested in his description of case study design.

In the second part of the definition, Yin (2014) noted that a case study inquiry "copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points" (p. 17). Yin explained that the methodology applied to case study design becomes part of the case study features, so researchers must consider "multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangular fashion" (p. 17). Additionally, Yin recognized that case study data collection and analysis is related to established qualitative research techniques. Therefore, multiple data sources were identified for this case study to support the analysis of the study phenomena.

In order to enrich the findings of this study, two cases were presented, which supported a cross-case synthesis. According to Merriam (2009), the power of a multiple case study is in presenting descriptive subunits and then constructing a common analysis of the research topic based on generalizations that are evident across the subunits. Therefore, for this study, a comparative analysis was presented of how rural remote

English language arts teachers employed in two different public school districts in a western state implemented the common core state standards at the classroom level. Coladarci (2007) recommended the use of multiple research sites to enrich the research discussion of rural conditions. According to Coladarci, the diversity in rural settings inherently impacts the nature of rural schools, so it is valuable for rural education researchers to explore rural diversity as a part of the research process. Because this study was conducted in two rural remote school districts, I was able to investigate the diverse instructional practices that rural remote teachers employed to implement state-level initiatives that functioned within a common national curriculum movement.

Role of the Researcher

For this case study, I served as the sole qualitative researcher, responsible for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting all data related to this study. I collected data from multiple sources, including individual interviews with the K-12 teacher participants, observations of instructional lessons in English language arts at the lower elementary, upper elementary, middle, and high school level at each site, online reflective journals maintained by the same participants, and district curricular documents related to the K-12 English language arts programs at these sites. I also recorded and transcribed all data related to these interviews and observations and conducted a content analysis of all documents. Additionally, I constructed codes and categories for each data source and examined all categories across both cases to determine emergent themes and discrepant data. I analyzed the findings according to the research questions for this study and I

interpreted the findings in relation to the conceptual framework and literature review for this study.

Because I was the only person responsible for data collection and analysis, the potential for researcher bias existed. In qualitative research, researchers need to be cognizant of their personal background and how their past experiences can impact the research findings. In a reflective discussion on rural education, Coladarci (2007) acknowledged that researchers interested in rural education frequently have personal ties to the subject, and therefore, rural researchers must remain aware of how these connections can impact their research findings. Above all else, Coladarci advocated for researchers of rural education to maintain high research standards and to investigate rural topics according to best research practices.

My personal experience with rural education originates from my upbringing in a rural community in the Midwest. The school district I attended was classified as rural remote according to the parameters for this study. As a student, I saw many benefits in rural education. Most importantly, I felt connected to my school, teachers, peers, and community. In a case study of a rural school setting, Budge (2006) believed rural residents develop a personal commitment to the rural setting where they live. I agree with this assessment, based on my own commitment to rural values and beliefs and because of my rural upbringing. My childhood was full of family and community gatherings. I was surrounded by extended family members at home, at school, and in the community. My active involvement in academic opportunities and extracurricular activities also contributed to my connections to place. While I do not live in the same rural area where I

grew up, I chose to provide my children with a rural education. I currently teach in a rural remote public school district, which supports approximately 300 K-12 students in one building. I am also familiar with the isolation and economic strain of rural life because I grew up on a ranch that was 16 miles from the town where I attended school. My family was supportive of my education, and both my parents worked multiple part-time jobs, yet our economic status was within poverty limits. My parents emphasized education as a necessity for adult success and all four children in my family attended college. My past rural experiences have made me aware of many realities of rural living.

As a qualitative researcher, I believe that my background in rural education supports my understanding of education in rural remote school locations. I also believe that my background did not interfere with my ability to objectively conduct interviews and observations and to analyze and interpret all data. To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, however, I selected research sites where I was not employed, and I also used specific strategies to improve the trustworthiness of this study, such as triangulating the data and maintaining a reflective journal of my experiences as a researcher to monitor my perceptions and biases about rural education. These strategies are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Site and Participant Selection

The two public school district sites selected for this multiple case study were purposefully selected, based on their rural remote status in the western region of the United States and their implementation practices related to the common core state standards. For this study, rural remote school systems were identified as those districts

that exist in a community of fewer than 2,500 people and are a minimum of 25 miles from an urban area and 10 miles from an urban cluster. I reviewed United States Census population records and school classifications posted on state education department websites, as well as school websites to identify schools that fit the rural remote classification used for this study.

According to Maxwell (2013), purposeful selection of the cases and the participants is appropriate for case study research because the goal of case study design is to inform researchers about the experiences of a particular population and to obtain the richest data possible. Potential participants, therefore, were purposefully selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (a) participants must be employed as teachers at one of the research sites, (b) participants must be licensed as either elementary school teachers or as secondary English language arts teachers at one of the research sites, and (c) participants must be engaged in common core state standards implementation at one of the research sites. I selected participants who met the inclusion criteria with input from school administrators. In total, eight participants were included in this study, including one lower elementary, upper elementary, middle, and high school teacher for each school district. Given the limited number of teachers working within a rural remote school district, the inclusion of one participant from each education level was adequate to represent the experiences of English language arts teachers at each rural school district. The selection of eight participants was also adequate for case study research because it was essential to limit the number of research participants to ensure that data analysis from multiple sources was manageable (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2013).

Instrumentation

The three data collection instruments I used for this case study included an interview protocol for semistructured interviews, a written questionnaire for online reflective journals, and an observation data collection form for field notes and researcher reflections. I designed these data collection instruments, based on the research of Janesick (2011), Merriam (2009), and Miles et al. (2014). I used the same data collection instruments at both sites. In addition, I asked an expert panel of several of my educational colleagues with advanced degrees in education to review these instruments for alignment with the research questions before I began data collection. I also aligned these instruments with the research questions for this study (see Appendix F).

Interview Protocol

To conduct the face-to-face, semistructured individual interviews, I used an interview protocol that I designed to generate participant responses to interview questions that are specific to the research questions for this study (Appendix C). Following recommendations from Miles et al. (2014) and Janesick (2011), I structured six open-ended interview questions to engage participants in rich dialogue regarding their knowledge and practice of planned and lived curriculum. These questions asked participants about district curriculum processes, their instructional practices, their participation in curriculum work, and their curriculum planning with other educators.

Reflective Journal

Study participants were also asked to write responses to six questions as part of an online reflective journal that they completed over a 2-week period. I designed this

instrument, which included six open-ended questions about teachers' orientation to the common core state standards, changes in their instructional practice related to the common core state standards, their curriculum interactions with other educators, their experiences in developing curriculum in a rural remote setting, and their thoughts on professional development related to the implementation of the common core state standards (Appendix D). In describing effective questions for qualitative research, Merriam (2009) recommended that oral and/or written questions should explore participants' experiences and behavior, opinions and values, feelings, knowledge, and background history. The reflective journal included in this study was designed to address the background, experiences, practices, opinions, and knowledge of rural educators.

Observation Data Collection Form

For this study, I observed an instructional lesson in English language arts for each teacher participant included in this study. I used criteria that Merriam (2009) recommended for observations of qualitative research in any setting to structure my observations. I adapted these criteria to fit this study as follows: (a) the physical setting, which included the physical layout and arrangement of the classroom environment, (b) the participants, which included the number and gender of students and adults in the classroom during the observation, (c) the curriculum, which included the verbal and written content standards and skills targeted by teacher instruction, (d) instructional strategies, which included techniques employed by the classroom teacher to engage students in learning about the content , (e) subtle factors, which included how students and teachers interacted during the learning process as they experienced the lived

curriculum, and (f) researcher presence, which included the location of researcher during the observation and researcher interactions with the students and teacher. Four of the six criteria followed Merriam's recommendations and provided critical contextual information for this study. I added the criterion of curriculum because it relates to Aoki's (1993) construct of planned curriculum, and I added the criterion of instructional strategies because it relates to Aoki's construct of lived curriculum. The intent of these observations of instructional lessons was to document the instructional strategies rural teachers used to transform planned curriculum into lived curriculum experiences.

Recruitment, Participation and Data Collection

Concerning participant recruitment, I contacted the superintendent of each school district, who granted approval to conduct this study, to explain the purpose of my study and to ask them to sign a letter of cooperation (Appendix A), indicating their willingness to be my research partner. I also asked the principals at each school site to sign letters of cooperation and to provide me with a list of potential participants at each site, based on the inclusion criteria that I established. I contacted potential participants through e-mail addresses, as posted in the public domain on both school district websites. I e-mailed each teacher an invitation letter (Appendix B) and consent form to facilitate their participation reply.

Concerning participation, I selected the first participant at each level (lower elementary, upper elementary, middle, and high school) who returned a signed consent form to me. I contacted selected participants by e-mail to confirm their participation in the study, to schedule the individual interviews and instructional observations, and to

describe the process for their online reflective journal responses. In a follow-up e-mail, I confirmed the dates and times for the interviews and instructional observations, and I requested assistance from participants and school principals in locating district curriculum documents, including online and print resources available to teachers within the school district.

Concerning data collection, I visited each school district site for a two-day period to conduct participant interviews, observe instructional lessons in English language arts, and collect related documents. I recorded all participant interviews, with their consent, to ensure that transcription was accurate. I shared clear interview protocols with participants prior to the beginning of each interview, as outlined in the consent form. The established time frame for the individual interviews was 30 to 45 minutes, and they were conducted on-site in a room that ensured the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. I also conducted observations of one English language arts instructional lesson for each participant for the duration of that lesson. During each observation, I recorded field notes and researcher reflections for each criterion on the observation data collection form (Appendix E). In relation to the reflective journal data, I posted the questions featured on the reflective journal (Appendix D) as two SurveyMonkey documents, each composed of three of the questions, and I e-mailed participants the access information the two weeks following my on-site visit. Participants were instructed to spend 5-10 minutes writing an online reflective journal entry for each of the posted questions and then submit their responses as instructed by SurveyMonkey. I maintained a record of data collection on the data accounting log (Appendix G).

In terms of documents, I collected district curriculum documentation in whatever digital or print formats they were found. These documents included national and state common core standards, curricular scope and sequencing documents, curriculum alignment documents used by teachers to support their curriculum development, unit outlines, and lesson plans.

Prior to contacting potential sites, I reviewed curriculum documentation available online from each school's website. Additionally, I e-mailed study participants requesting their assistance in locating district curriculum documents. Pertinent documentation included online resources as well as printed district curriculum materials accessible by participating teachers.

Data Analysis Plan

As the sole researcher for this case study, I was responsible for the management and analysis of all data. I used manual coding as well as ATLAS.ti to help me manage and analyze the data that I collected. ATLAS.ti is well-suited for the types of data sources I collected, which included audio recordings of the interviews, field notes of the observations, digital reflective journals, and district curriculum documents in various digital and print formats. The data coding process followed the two cycle coding process that Miles et al. (2014) recommended for qualitative research. The first cycle of coding involves chunking, a coding process Miles et al. described where segments within the data are identified and labeled with "a single summarizing notation" (p. 72). Miles et al. noted that the chunking process enables researchers to identify key concepts unique to a data source as well as aligning the data with thematic notations that may exist as

commonalities across multiple data sources. To conduct this first level of data analysis, I used line-by-line coding, as recommended by Charmaz (2014), for qualitative research. In the coding process, I also used descriptive, values, and verbal coding, which are first cycle coding systems that Miles et al. recommended. While I generated most of the codes as I reviewed data, I preselected codes for my observations of instructional strategies. Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) identified nine effective instructional strategies, so I began my coding of instructional data by applying these codes first. These strategies included: identifying similarities and differences, summarizing and note taking, reinforcing effort and providing recognition, homework and practice, nonlinguistic representations, cooperative learning, setting objectives and providing feedback, generating and testing hypotheses, and cues, questions, and advance organizers. Miles et al. described the second coding cycle as "a way of grouping those summaries [notations] into a smaller number of categories, themes, or constructs" (p. 86). In formulating thematic clusters within the first cycle codes, I was able to understand the emergent patterns or themes in the data as well as identify outliers and discrepancies in the data.

Because this study included two cases, I first coded and categorized data for each data source for each single case, and I then conducted a cross-case analysis to determine themes and discrepant data that emerged across all data sources for both cases. Miles et al. (2014) and Yin (2014) noted that a cross-case analysis increases the transferability and generalizability of case study findings because the process draws attention to themes that emerge from multiple data sources.

According to Yin (2014), a replication strategy can be used in case study analysis to determine the applicability of qualitative themes across multiple contexts. In this structure, the data collected for the first case are coded and categorized to determine emergent themes, then data are coded and categorized data from the second case to determine if the same themes emerge. I identified common themes, as well as divergent themes or discrepant data, across the research context. Additionally, Merriam (2009) and Yin (2014) endorsed a multiple case study design to increase data variation, which is a process that strengthens theme identification, because repetitive ideas are more apparent as data from multiple cases are compared. Miles et al. (2014) also supported a multiple case study design to increase confidence in the findings, which strengthens the validity of qualitative research. These major themes and discrepant data informed the findings of this study, which were analyzed in relation to the central and related research questions and interpreted according to the conceptual framework and the literature review for this study.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Merriam (2009) noted that all qualitative researchers are concerned with conducting research that is trustworthy. Merriam believed effective qualitative research must exhibit rigor, meaning the research design and investigation must be comprehensive and generate "insights and conclusions that ring true to readers, practitioners, and other researchers" (p. 210). For this qualitative study, trustworthiness is discussed in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Merriam (2009) defined credibility as internal validity or how the research findings match reality. Merriam also recommended that researchers use one or more of the following strategies to enhance the credibility of qualitative research: triangulation, member checks, adequate engagement in data collection, researcher's position, and peer review. Similarly, Maxwell (2013) and Yin (2014) described triangulation as a strategy for establishing qualitative validity.

In this study, I used data triangulation by comparing qualitative chunking, coding, and emerging themes across all data sources, including the interview protocol, written reflective journals, instructional observations, and district curriculum documents. I also used member checks by asking participants to review the tentative findings for their plausibility (Merriam, 2009). In addition, I used adequate engagement in data collection by scheduling 2 days at each school site to give me enough time to collect data from all sources.

Transferability

Merriam (2009) defined transferability as external validity or to what extent the research can be applied to additional situations. Merriam advised researchers to use the strategies of thick description, typicality of sample, and/or maximum variation to maximize transferability of the findings.

For this study, I used the strategy of rich, thick description in the description of the setting, the participants, the data collection and analysis protocols, and the comparison of findings between the two cases. Concerning maximum variation, I

established inclusion criteria to ensure that K-12 English language arts teachers were included in the study, spanning the spectrum of K-12 education at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. I also used the strategy of typicality because I selected two rural remote research sites that were typical of rural education in the western region of the United States.

Dependability

Merriam (2009) defined dependability as reliability and consistency or how likely similar results are to be reached in future research related to the study topic. As with credibility, Merriam recommended the strategies of triangulation, peer examination, and researcher's position be used to determine research dependability. Because qualitative research is concerned with human experiences, Merriam contended that similar research processes could be employed and still generate diverse results, yet there is value in providing sufficient information in qualitative studies that research knowledge related to the phenomenon continues to grow. Additionally, Merriam described the use of an audit trail as a means of establishing research dependability. When qualitative research features a detailed audit trail, Merriam explained, the steps of the research process are evident, enabling future researchers to reference specific steps within the research and structure similar steps into new research.

To enhance the dependability of this qualitative research, I used the strategy of triangulation as I have previously stated. I also used the strategy of an audit trail by maintaining a record of the research process in a reflective journal that I continuously

updated during the course of this study. Additionally, I integrated these reflections into the data analysis and interpretation.

Confirmability

Merriam (2009) related the confirmability of research to the objectivity of the researcher. Merriam explained that qualitative data has embedded bias, not only because of its interest in human experiences, but also due to the role of the researcher in data collection and analysis. The researcher's position is important to analyze because qualitative researchers are engaged as an instrument of the research process, Merriam explained, since relevant qualitative data are generated by researchers as they observe, reflect, and interpret the phenomenon they are studying. The role of the researcher, as a filter for the data, must be examined as part of the research process.

In this study, I maintained reflexivity by composing reflective journal entries related to all steps and processes of the study. In particular, I considered how my own personal experiences as a rural student and rural secondary school teacher in English language arts may have influenced my observations and data analysis. In clarifying the personal perspective or researchers, Merriam (2009) suggested that researchers can better articulate the interpretations and conclusions presented in the research.

Ethical Procedures

To ensure an ethical study, I applied for approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Walden University to conduct this study (07-08-15-0308786). The IRB process ensured that participation in this study would not be harmful to participants. I also needed approval from participating district and school administrators prior to

recruiting potential rural teacher participants, indicating that they were willing to be my research partners. I also conducted data collection according to the parameters outlined in the informed consent form. If any participant wished to withdraw from the study, for example, this request was honored as outlined in the teacher consent form. All participant data were collected, stored, and analyzed in a manner that maintained participant privacy and confidentiality, such as the use of secure storage and the use of pseudonyms for the school districts, the schools, and the participants. In addition, I agreed to keep all data for a period of 5 years, as required by Walden University.

Summary

This chapter included a description of the research method used for this study. In this chapter, the multiple site case study design selected for this study and the reasons for this selection were explained. Additionally, the role of the researcher and background of the researcher, as it related to rural education, were presented. The chapter also included a description of participant selection, instrumentation for data collection, and the data analysis plan. A discussion of issues of trustworthiness, including the constructs of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, was presented. Finally, the ethical procedures that guided the research were reviewed.

In Chapter 4, the results of this study are presented. In providing context for the study, a description of the research setting as it relates to the two school sites selected as the cases for this study and a description of the participant demographics is given. In addition, descriptions of data collection and data analysis procedures are presented. Additionally, a discussion of evidence of trustworthiness during data collection and

analysis is provided. Finally, the results of this study are analyzed in relation to the central and related research questions.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe how K-12 English language arts teachers in two rural remote schools aligned their planned curriculum, based on the common core state standards, with the lived curriculum that emerged during curriculum implementation and instruction at the classroom level. To accomplish this purpose, I investigated the use of planned curriculum at each school site by interviewing participants, analyzing district curriculum documents, and collecting written reflective journals from the same participants. Additionally, I investigated the emergence of lived curriculum at each school site by observing instructional English language arts lessons, interviewing participants, and collecting written reflective journals from the same participants.

The central research question for this study was: How do K-12 English language arts teachers in two rural remote public school districts align the planned curriculum, represented by the common core state standards and district curricular materials, with the lived curriculum that they implement in their courses?

The related research questions were as follows:

1. How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts adjust curricular materials to align with the common core state standards?
2. How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts adjust instructional practices to align with the common core state standards?

3. How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts collaborate vertically to connect their curriculum across grade levels while aligning their curriculum with the common core state standards?
4. How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts collaborate with teachers of other content areas to support the implementation of common core literacy standards?
5. How do English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts engage in professional development activities concerning the integration of the common core state standards into their planned curriculum and instructional practices?

This chapter includes the results of this multiple case study. The setting, participant demographics, and data collection procedures are described. In addition, specific data analysis procedures are described, first in relation to a single case analysis that involved coding and categorizing data for each data source. Secondly, a cross-case synthesis is presented in which the categorized data for all data sources is examined to determine emergent themes and discrepant data across the two cases. In addition, evidence of the trustworthiness of this qualitative research is presented relating to the constructs of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Finally, the results or key findings of the study are analyzed in relation to the central and related research questions.

Setting

Two sites were purposefully selected for this study. Both sites were K-12 public school districts located in the western region in the United States. These sites were chosen because they were rural remote school districts, and participants included K-12 English language arts teachers who were in the process of aligning their planned and lived curriculums with the common core state standards.

Timbers School District

The first site, the Timbers School District (pseudonym), is located in a rural remote area of a western state, positioned 80 miles from the nearest urban cluster and more than 350 miles from the nearest urban area. While the town serves as a county seat, its resident population is below 2,500 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a). Two major highways run through the town, which are used as overland trucking routes. The local economy is largely related to farming and ranching, as well as recent growth in oil field activity. The Timbers School District campus is located on the north side of town, outside the flow of regular traffic. This K-12 school district is composed of three schools, all housed in the same building, including a K-6 elementary school wing, a 7-8 junior high wing, and a 9-12 high school wing. In the 2015-2016 academic year, a total of 370 students were enrolled in the district. Demographics indicated the district included an ethnically homogeneous student population, with 90% of students identified as White, 5% as Hispanic, and 5% as other minority ethnic groups. Additionally, 29% of students were classified as economically disadvantaged, and 16% were identified as eligible for

special education services. Historically, the district experienced fluctuations in student enrollment numbers, due to economic shifts in the surrounding oil and gas industry.

According to 2014-2015 state assessment measures, the Timbers School District successfully met AYP in reading at all tested grade levels. Additionally, state assessment history shows that students in the Timbers School District consistently scored above the state average in reading since trends were compiled in 2007. In the 2013-2014 school year, this state began implementation of the Smarter Balanced Assessment model to align the common core state standards with district curriculum. The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, a publically-created agency with paid memberships for states and territories, was focused on the development of effective, online assessment tools for the common core state standards (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, 2015). The Smarter Balanced assessments addressed skills in the common core state standards and were correlated to state-adopted versions of the standards. Additionally, during the 2015-2016 school year, the state's public school agency made a state-wide assessment change, identifying the Smarter Balanced Assessment as the state assessment for Grades 3-8 and the ACT as the state assessment for high school. Smarter Balanced assessment data for the 2014-2015 school year showed that 60% of elementary students were proficient or advanced in English language arts and 71% of Grade 11 students were proficient or advanced. The Timbers School District was still waiting for assessment results for the 2015-2016 school year at the time that this study was conducted. According to ACT assessment data, Grade 11 students in the Timbers School District scored higher than the state average in reading since 2014, but fell below the state average in writing in 2015.

Students scored below the state average in English in 2014, but matched the state average in 2015.

The K-12 English language arts program at the Timbers School District is segmented into elementary, middle, and high school curriculum structures. At the K-5 level, all teachers involved in English language arts instruction use the district's purchased English language arts program, *StoryTown* by Harcourt School Publishers, as the primary curriculum and follow the scope and sequence curriculum guides included in the program. Elementary teachers supplement the program using a variety of online and print resources. Additionally, elementary teachers are involved in an intervention program, based on the Response to Intervention (RTI) model, which involves daily focused reading lessons for flexible groups of students. One middle school English language arts teacher provides instruction for students in Grades 6-8. This teacher recently selected the textbook series *Collections* by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt as the primary curriculum resource for these middle school students. The teacher does not follow a specific scope and sequence from the purchased curriculum, but instead structures her own units and integrated the textbook series into her instructional plans. At the high school level, two teachers teach English to students in Grades 9-12. These teachers are responsible for different classes and develop their own curriculum based on available textbooks and novels as well as online resources.

Frontier School District

The second research site, the Frontier School District (pseudonym), is also located in a rural remote area of this western state. The school district is located 54 miles from

the nearest urban cluster and 340 miles from the nearest urban area. The Frontier School District is located in a town with a population below 2,500 people and is classified as a rural remote area, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012a). As the largest town in the county, the town serves as a county seat and is divided by a major highway. Three main industries support the local economy, with agriculture as the major economic activity. In addition, the oil and gas industry has a growing presence in the area, and a large number of community members are employed by a regional telecommunications service. The Frontier School District is located on the east side of town, surrounded by residential housing. The school is a K-12 facility, with areas of the building designated for different student groups. Grades K-3 are housed in one wing of the school, and Grades 4-6 in another wing of the school. Students in Grades 7-12 have lockers on the first and third floors of the building and attend classes on these floors of the building. A gymnasium and an auditorium space are located on the second floor of the building. In the 2015-2016 academic year, a total of 283 students were enrolled in the district. District demographics indicated the student population was homogeneous, with 88% of students identified as White, 6% as American Indian, and 6% as other minority ethnic groups. In addition, 16% of students were identified as special education students, and 20% of students were classified as economically disadvantaged. In recent years, student enrollment in the district has increased, reflective of economic growth in telecommunications and in the oil and gas industry.

Yearly assessment data released by the state public education agency shows the Frontier School District met AYP measures in the 2014-2015 academic year. Historical

assessment data for the district shows that students have fluctuated above and below the state average for reading proficiency, with the school scoring just below the state average in the 2013-2014 school year. Similar to the Timbers School District, the school district administered the Smarter Balanced Assessment during the 2014-2015 school year. Assessment results showed that 30% of elementary students were proficient or advanced in English language arts, 65% of students in Grades 7-8 were proficient or advanced, and 55% of Grade 11 students were proficient or advanced. Scores for the 2015-2016 were not released at the time this study was conducted. According to ACT assessment data, Grade 11 students in the district scored below the state average for reading, English, and writing since 2013.

The K-12 English language arts program at the Frontier School District is diverse because teachers at different grade levels use varied curriculum resources that they believe are aligned to the common core state standards. At the K-2 level, teachers implement the district's purchased English language arts program titled *Read Well* by Sopris West. Teachers adhere to the scope and sequence that this district-adopted program provides and supplement the program with varied print and online sources. For students in Grades 3-6, teachers use a district-purchased English language arts program titled *Journeys* by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. At this level, teachers do not follow the complete scope and sequence, but select content from the scope and sequence as their foundational curriculum and they supplement this curriculum with additional print and online sources as well as novel units. For students in Grades 7-8, two teachers provide instruction in English language arts, with one teacher providing instruction in literature

and the other teacher providing instruction in writing and grammar. Teachers have multiple textbook resources available for these classes, though textbooks are largely outdated, such as the text used for grammar instruction, *Heath Grammar and Composition* published by McDougal Littel. Similarly, for students in Grades 9-12, the English language arts teacher also uses outdated textbooks. Teachers at Grades 7-12 design their own units and integrate textbook resources as well as additional print and online materials into the curriculum.

Concerning organizational conditions that may have influenced the findings of this study, these school districts are located in agricultural communities with some oil wells, making the oil and gas industry an influential factor in a growing economy. Economic conditions are healthy in both districts, given the agricultural foundation of the local economics, but changing oil prices have generated periods of rapid increases in student enrollment as well as slow declines in student enrollment as oil prices decline. Such changes in student populations also impact teacher-to-student classroom ratios and the distribution of school resources across the district. In the elementary grade levels, student enrollments increase with oil development, leading to larger class sizes. Additionally, generated oil revenue is dispersed to schools the following fiscal year, meaning schools are responsible for managing more students for one full academic year before state funding for the increased enrollment is in place in the school districts. As oil revenue fluctuates, this funding delay impacts both school districts and may impact resources that teachers need for implementation of the common core state standards in English language arts.

Participant Demographics

At each research site, four teachers participated in the study. Each of these teachers was responsible for providing instruction in English language arts to students through assigned courses. A summary table of participant demographics is presented at the end of this section.

Timbers School District

At the first site, participants from the Timbers School District were all veteran public school teachers, with varying experiences inside and outside of the district. Both elementary school teachers were licensed elementary school teachers and had been employed by the Timbers School District for their entire careers. The secondary school participants had earned master's degrees and had taught grade level courses in multiple states.

Angie (pseudonym), a kindergarten teacher, had 8 years of teaching experience in the Timbers School District, all at the kindergarten level. Angie was one of two kindergarten teachers in the district, and her teaching responsibilities involved teaching all content areas required in the kindergarten curriculum. Additionally, Angie was involved in the development and implementation of the district's RTI program and collaborated with other elementary teachers in identifying student learning needs in reading and related placements in RTI groups each week.

Nancy (pseudonym), with 28 years of teaching experience, had taught students in Grades 3, 4, and 5. At the time of this study, Nancy was one of two Grade 4 teachers in

the district and was responsible for teaching all content areas required in the Grade 4 curriculum. Nancy also served as a member of the district RTI team.

At the junior high level, Lois (pseudonym) had 11 years of experience teaching at middle or high school levels within three states. Lois also had earned a master's degree in special education and had teaching experience in regular education classrooms and special education settings. At the time of this study, Lois' teaching assignment included English language arts courses for students in Grades 6, 7, and 8, as well as student skills support courses. Lois was the sole English language arts instructor for these grade levels, with other junior high teachers responsible for other content areas.

Courtney (pseudonym), one of two high school English teachers in the district, had 16 years of experience teaching secondary English language arts at the middle and high school levels in two different states. Courtney also had earned a master's degree in education and remained active in instructing and participating in writing institutes during the summers. At the time of this study, Courtney taught English language arts courses to students in Grades 9-12.

Frontier School District

All participants at the second research site, the Frontier School District, were also veteran public school teachers, with experience inside and outside the district, including rural teaching experiences in other states. The Grade 1 teacher was a licensed elementary teacher with more than 30 years of teaching experience within the school district. The second elementary teacher was a licensed elementary teacher in her fifth year of teaching. The middle school teacher was also a licensed elementary teacher, with 10 years of

teaching experience at various grade levels. The high school English teacher was the only licensed secondary English language arts teacher, had entered teaching as a second career, and was in her eighth year of teaching students in Grades 9-12.

Brenda (pseudonym), a kindergarten teacher, had 38 years of teaching experience, with 33 of those years in the Frontier School District. Brenda had taught in the state for her entire career. Brenda's teaching experience included kindergarten, Grade 1, and Title I. At the time of this study, Brenda was the sole Grade 1 teacher and was responsible for providing instruction in all content areas for the grade level. As an elementary teacher, Brenda used the district reading curriculum *Read Well* as the primary English language arts curriculum. Additionally, Brenda used a supplemental phonics curriculum to support learning for students at risk in reading.

Jennifer (pseudonym), the Grade 2 teacher, had experience teaching students in Grade 1and Grade 2 in two states. Jennifer had taught students in Grade 2 for 4 years and was teaching students in Grade 2 at the time of this study. Jennifer was the sole Grade 2 teacher in the district and was responsible for teaching all content areas. Like Brenda, Jennifer used the district reading curriculum *Read Well* as the primary English language arts curriculum.

Susan (pseudonym) had provided instruction to students in English language arts for 7 years. Susan had taught students in Grades 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 in rural remote schools in three states. At the time of this study, teachers in the middle grades, which included Grades 4, 5, and 6, specialized their content instruction, with three teachers sharing instructional responsibilities. Susan specialized in English language arts instruction,

while another teacher specialized in mathematics, and a third teacher specialized in science. These teachers shared other instructional roles, including homeroom and social studies instruction.

Cheryl (pseudonym) was the sole high school English teacher in the Frontier School District. Cheryl had earned nonteaching degrees, including a master's degree in communications, before enrolling in a teaching certification program at a state university. Cheryl had 8 years of teaching experience in the state, with 6 years in the Frontier School District. In addition to teaching all English language arts courses for students in Grades 9-12, Cheryl was also responsible for teaching grammar and writing to students in Grades 7-8. Another teacher in the district was assigned to teach literature to these students.

In planning this study, my goal was to identify participants who met the inclusion criteria for the study, including employment within a participating school district as an English language arts teacher and knowledge of the common core state standards and its integration in school curriculum. At both school sites, I was able to identify participants who met these inclusion criteria. Selected participants were all veteran teachers with a range of teaching experience from 5 to 33 years, though notable differences emerged in the longevity of teachers' employment within these two school districts. In addition to having at least 3 years of teaching experience in their current school district, five of the study participants had experience teaching in other rural school districts. Three teachers had experience teaching in larger school districts. Total years of teaching ranged from 5 to 38 years. All grade levels were represented except Grade 3. Table 1 provides a summary of participant demographics.

Table 1

Summary of Participant Demographics

Participant	*Grade Level(s)*	*District*	*Years in District*	*Total Years Teaching*
Angie	K	Timbers	8	8
Brenda	1	Frontier	33	38
Jennifer	2	Frontier	4	5
Nancy	4	Timbers	28	28
Susan	4-6	Frontier	10	14
Lois	6-8	Timbers	3	11
Cheryl	7-12	Frontier	6	8
Courtney	9-12	Timbers	5	16

Data Collection

For this multiple case study, I collected data from multiple sources, including individual interviews with English language arts teachers at various grade levels in each school district, instructional observations of English language arts lessons taught by the interviewed teachers in each school district, reflective journals that these teachers maintained, and documents related to the English language arts program for each school district. I also followed strict data collection procedures to ensure the trustworthiness of this qualitative research.

Interview Data

Prior to visiting each school site, I coordinated interview schedules with participants and their principals. All teachers agreed to participate in the interviews during noninstructional hours, during their assigned preparation periods when teachers were preparing for instruction without students present in their classrooms. Interviews were conducted on-site due to the limited time for teachers to participate in interviews

during their assigned preparation periods. Private conference room space was not available, so empty classrooms were used for interviews. Classroom doors were closed during the interviews, and no students or other adults were present in the room during the interviews. A summary table of the interviews is included at the end of this section.

At the Timbers School District, for three of the four participants, I conducted individual interviews the same day as the classroom observations, though the order varied according to scheduling needs. Due to class period overlaps in the district schedule, I arranged the classroom observation and individual interview for one participant across two sequential days. I conducted the first interview with Angie, the kindergarten teacher, on October 22, 2015, at 12:45 p.m. in her classroom. This interview was 9 minutes and 21 seconds. My second interview on October 22, 2015 was with Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher. This interview was conducted in her classroom at 1:15 p.m. and lasted 7 minutes and 9 seconds. My interview with Lois, the junior high English language arts teacher, was conducted the following day, October 23, 2015. The interview took place in Lois' classroom, at 10:30 a.m. and lasted 9 minutes and 47 seconds. My final interview was with Courtney, the high school English teacher, on October 23, 2015. It was held in Courtney's classroom at 1:00 p.m. and took 12 minutes and 24 seconds.

At the Frontier School District, I also coordinated interview schedules with participants and their principal. All teachers participated in these interviews during noninstructional hours. Interviews were conducted during their assigned preparation time when students were not present in their classrooms. Each of the participants was interviewed the same day as when I conducted the observations of instruction in their

classrooms. The interviews and observations were scheduled over a 2-day time frame, with two interviews and two observations completed each day. I conducted the first interview with Cheryl, the high school English teacher, on April 11, 2016 at 12:10 p.m. in her classroom. This interview took 26 minutes and 32 seconds. I conducted the second interview on April 11, 2016 with Susan, the Grade 6 English language arts teacher, at 1:00 p.m. in her classroom. This interview was 8 minutes and 13 seconds in length. The following day, April 12, 2016, I conducted interviews with the other two teachers. First, I interviewed Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher, at 11:10 a.m. in her classroom. This interview lasted 8 minutes and 59 seconds. My final interview on April 12, 2016 was with Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher, at 1:00 p.m. in her classroom, and the interview was 19 minutes and 27 seconds in length.

For each interview, I followed the guidelines outlined in the interview protocol (Appendix C). In order to ensure accurate transcription of the interview data, I audio recorded each interview and wrote brief notes while conducting the interviews. Following my on-site visits, I transcribed each interview immediately and organized the data according to each individual interview question.

Thus, interviews were conducted from October 22, 2015 to April 12, 2016. Times ranged from 7 minutes to 26 minutes, due to teachers' preparation schedules. Conducting personal interviews during the scheduled school day proved to be a limitation for this study because teachers needed to balance their scheduled instruction with unscheduled duties. Teachers were direct in responding to questions, so interviews were brief. Interviews were generally conducted from midmorning to early afternoon when teachers

had assigned preparation periods without students. Table 2 presents a summary of the interview data collection.

Table 2

Summary of Interview Data Collection

Participant	*District*	*Date*	*Time of Interview*	*Length of Interview*
Angie	Timbers	10/22/2015	12:45-12:54 p.m.	9:21
Nancy	Timbers	10/22/2015	1:15-1:22 p.m.	7:09
Lois	Timbers	10/23/2015	10:30-10:39 a.m.	9:47
Courtney	Timbers	10/23/2015	1:00-1:12 p.m.	12:24
Cheryl	Frontier	4/11/2016	12:10-12:36 p.m.	26:32
Susan	Frontier	4/11/2016	1:00-1:08 p.m.	8:13
Brenda	Frontier	4/12/2016	11:10-11:09 p.m.	8:59
Jennifer	Frontier	4/12/2016	1:00-1:19 p.m.	19:27

Observation Data

Prior to visiting each school site, I coordinated observation times with participants and the principals at each site. I observed English language arts instructional lessons that participants presented for students in their classrooms. A summary table of this observation data is included at the end of this section.

For three participants at the Timbers School District, I conducted classroom observations on the same day as the individual interviews. For one participant, I observed classroom instruction on the day prior to conducting the interview. I observed each participant as they taught a 45-minute lesson in English language arts. My first observation of an instructional lesson was held on October 22, 2015. I observed an instructional lesson in English language arts related to phonics, letter blends, and vocabulary building in Angie's kindergarten classroom from 8:40 to 9:25 a.m. On the

same day, I conducted an observation of an instructional lesson in English language arts in Nancy's Grade 4 classroom from 10:35-11:20 a.m. During this observation, Nancy taught a lesson on sentence structure, grammar rules, and journal writing. My final observation on October 22, 2015, was of an instructional lesson in a Grade 10 English course that Courtney, the high school English teacher, taught as part of a journalism writing unit to Grade 10 students. I observed Courtney from 1:52 to 2:37 p.m. On October 23, 2015, I observed an instructional lesson in Lois' Grade 6 classroom from 11:00 to 11:45 a.m. In this lesson, Lois reviewed reading comprehension skills, including determining vocabulary meaning from context clues and drawing inferences from text. Additionally, Lois reviewed structural elements of stories.

At the Frontier School District, I conducted each observation on the same day as the individual interviews of participants. All of my observations were conducted during a 45-minute lesson in English language arts. I began my instructional observations on April 11, 2016. First, I observed an instructional lesson for students in Grade 6 in Susan's classroom from 8:45 to 9:30 a.m. In this lesson, Susan instructed students on reading strategies, pronoun usage, folktale structure, and reading analysis, stemming from the novel *Touching Spirit Bear*. From 10:05 to 10:50 a.m., I observed an instructional lesson for students in Grade 9 in Cheryl's classroom. During this observation, Cheryl taught students critical reading skills as the class studied the novel *Lord of the Flies*, including how to conduct a critical analysis of literary text. Additionally, Cheryl outlined the structure of a literary essay as part of this instruction. On the second day, April 12, 2016, I observed Brenda, the first grade teacher, provide instruction on reading and language

skills from 8:45 to 9:30 a.m. This lesson included instruction on contractions, vocabulary, prepositions, and rhyming. Finally, I observed an instructional lesson in Jennifer's Grade 2 classroom, from 12:15 to 1:00 p.m. During this observation, Jennifer led instruction on the use of affixes and used guided reading strategies, addressing text vocabulary, spelling, and comprehension.

For all observations, I recorded field notes and researcher reflections on the observation data collection form relating to specific criteria that I had adapted from Merriam's (2009) recommendations for how to collect observation data for qualitative research. In the days following the observations, I transcribed these field notes and reflections from the observation data collection form into a consistent digital format, which enabled me to code the observation data.

Thus, observations were conducted from October 22, 2015 to April 12, 2016. Observation length averaged 45 minutes or the length of the lesson. Five observations were conducted in the morning, and three observations were conducted in the afternoon because of the scheduling of English language arts classes. In the case of elementary teachers, reading instruction was included as part of their morning activities, while secondary teachers had English language arts classes scheduled throughout the day. Table 3 presents a summary of the observation data collection.

Table 3

Summary of Observation Data Collection

Participant	*District*	*Date*	*Time of Observation*	*Length of Observation*
Angie	Timbers	10/22/2015	8:40-9:25 a.m.	45 minutes
Nancy	Timbers	10/22/2015	10:35-11:20 a.m.	45 minutes
Courtney	Timbers	10/22/2015	1:52-2:37 p.m.	45 minutes
Lois	Timbers	10/23/2015	11:00-11:45 a.m.	45 minutes
Susan	Frontier	4/11/2016	8:45-9:30 p.m.	45 minutes
Cheryl	Frontier	4/11/2016	10:05-10:50 a.m.	45 minutes
Brenda	Frontier	4/12/2016	8:45-9:30 a.m.	45 minutes
Jennifer	Frontier	4/12/2016	12:15-1:00 p.m.	45 minutes

Reflective Journal Data

Participants completed the reflective journals as two separate submissions. On the Monday immediately following the on-site visits, I e-mailed participants the first Survey Monkey link for the first three reflective journal questions. A week later, I sent a second e-mail to participants featuring the second set of three questions related to the reflective journal. Participants varied their response time on the reflective journals, with some participants completing journals as they received online links and others waiting several weeks to complete journal reflections. At the Frontier School District, one study participant declined to participate in the reflective journal because she believed she did not have adequate time to complete the journal, given her added workload at the end of the school year.

Documents

The documents I collected for this multiple case study included documents related to the K-12 English language arts program for each school district and school. I collected

these documents from the participants, except for the common core state standards for K-12 English language arts and literacy, which I collected from the state agency for the western state included in this study. Each teacher provided me with curriculum documents that they had selected or developed, based on their individual professional development and curriculum work. Documents included (a) national standards, (b) state standards, (c) scope and sequence, (d) alignment documents that included English language arts standards checklists and unit outlines, and (e) lesson plans.

Level 1 Data Analysis: Single Case

Level 1 analysis involved examining the data for each source for each case. After collecting data at each site, I transcribed the interview data and observation field notes. Additionally, I used a two cycle coding process that Miles et al. (2014) described to code the interview data, the observation data, and the reflective journal data, with the first cycle involving line-by-line coding, including value, descriptive, and verbal codes. The second cycle involved constructing categories from the coded data. I also scanned curriculum documents that teacher participants provided in order to create a digital record of these documents. I adhered to the line-by-line coding method that Charmaz (2014) described. I used a content analysis to describe the purpose, structure, content, and use of each document (Merriam, 2009). This analysis is presented below.

Interview Data Analysis

Interview data were analyzed in relation to each of the six individual interview questions. The coded data for each question were examined for similarities and differences in participant responses, using the constant comparative method that Merriam

(2009) recommended. A summary table of categories constructed for each interview question is presented at the end of this section.

The first interview question asked, "*How would you describe the curriculum development process in your school? What is your role in this process?"*

All four participating teachers in the Timbers School District described the curriculum development process as mostly independent, driven by their personal experiences with curriculum development processes and their knowledge of the standards. Courtney, the high school English teacher, commented, "That's just me developing my courses" because no other teachers in the school district taught the same grade levels or content. Angie, the kindergarten teacher, Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher, and Courtney, the high school teacher, also acknowledged situational limitations in the curriculum development process for their school district, especially related to the irregularity of time allocations to support teachers' curriculum development work. Angie, the kindergarten teacher, and Lois, the Grade 6 teacher, acknowledged the presence of local and regional teacher support systems that were in place. The local system that these teachers regularly used included grade level meetings at the elementary level. In contrast, Courtney, the high school English teacher, noted that there was not a clear support system for secondary teachers. The regional system included membership in a regional education consortium, which scheduled various professional development activities for rural school educators within the consortium's assigned geographical area.

At the Frontier School District, three of the four teachers also described their curriculum work as independent, largely due to the fact that each teacher in the district

was the sole teacher at their assigned grade level or content area. Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher, explained, "We do [curriculum] as a group, but we also do it individually for our class because we have one teacher for each grade. We are responsible for aligning our grade to the curriculum, and to the common core." Additionally, Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher, and Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher, both noted that the curriculum process was not clearly established, especially concerning the timeline for curriculum development and renewal. As a result, all four participants noted that previously developed curriculum was outdated because it was at least 10 years old. All teachers described the new curriculum development process that district administrative leaders had initiated during the 2015-2016 school year, including its focus on integrating the common core state standards into the new curriculum. Cheryl, the high school English teacher, described the process, "We just started this year. We are doing that in increments. It's not going to be complete by this school year in any way. We're just working on it grade by grade." Similarly, the other three participants also described the curriculum development they had completed for their grade level curriculum.

Thus, teachers at both sites described curriculum development as an independent process, with some local and regional support. Teachers also acknowledged some limitations in curriculum development at their rural schools. These limitations included limited time for curriculum collaboration with other teachers and infrequent planning opportunities. Teachers also described how being of the only instructor for a content area or grade level increased the isolation of their curriculum work. As such, teachers referred

to the established curriculum in their school district as their foundation, with the addition of new processes for integrating common core state standards into their curriculum.

The second interview question asked, "*How do you believe the common core state standards have impacted the curriculum development process in your school district?"*

Three of the teachers in the Timbers School District viewed the common core state standards as an alignment tool for curriculum development, though the methods used by each teacher to track this alignment varied. Even though teachers held positive views about the impact of the common core state standards on their students' learning progress, Angie, a kindergarten teacher, Lois, the Grade 6 teacher, and Courtney, the high school teacher, also discussed the challenge of helping all students, who often had differing skill levels, achieve the skills outlined in the standards. Courtney added, "I've tried to modify lessons to make sure that we're reaching those higher expectations in the common core. . . . . I try to offer more opportunities for students to have to develop some complex writing and thinking skills." Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher, acknowledge the role of the common core state standards, but also emphasized the role the district's purchased English language arts program, *StoryTown,* played in their curriculum in Grades K-5, "We have a book that we guide. So, it's not like we do just the common core. We probably go more towards our books that we use." Angie, the kindergarten teacher, also described her use of the purchased reading curriculum as her primary curriculum resource.

At the Frontier School District, all four teachers also described their use of the common core state standards for curriculum alignment, as they reviewed and reflected on

their established curriculum. Susan, the Grade 6 teacher, stated, “So it’s making us go back through and make sure we’re hitting everything we should be hitting.” In describing their current curriculum practice, Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher, Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher, and Cheryl, the high school English teacher, noted that their established curriculum had not been changed significantly by the implementation of the common core state standards. Cheryl, the high school teacher, explained, “I think there has always been a standard . . . . I look at them and the common core is similar to state standards that they have. I still have those and I look at those.” Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher, reflected, “I don’t think that common core has impacted my teaching that much or has changed it that much because I feel like I’m a pretty through teacher.” Cheryl, the high school teacher also described her efforts to address various college entry skills included in the common core state standards to better prepare students for higher education.

Thus, teachers at both sites identified the common core standards as an alignment tool to support them in updating their established curriculum. Elementary teachers viewed the use of the established curriculum as a primary component of their curriculum process, noting that the multi-grade level curriculum established cohesiveness across grade levels. Teachers at the secondary level described their integration of the common core as an independent process, using the standards to guide their selection of content materials and target skills. Teachers at both levels also described the challenges of developing curriculum to address learner diversity.

The third interview question asked, “*How do you integrate the common core state standards into your courses?”*

Each of the teachers in the Timbers School District described a different method of checking their instructional alignment with the common core state standards, including the use of a spreadsheet, a unit outline, a scope and sequence document from a published textbook series, and a weekly instructional plan. The Grade 4 teacher, Nancy, described her method of tracking as an expanding grid spreadsheet that enabled her to not only keep track of the standards she taught, but also the applicable lessons and subsequent reinforcement activities to ensure students had multiple experiences with as many standards as possible. The instructional methods used by the teachers were also varied, including scaffolding activities, cooperative learning structures, and guiding students in textbook-based assignments. Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher, and Lois, the Grade 6 teacher, emphasized the need to include language from the standards so that students developed familiarity with the vocabulary related to the common core state standards. Courtney, the high school English teacher, described her efforts to design lessons featuring differentiated instruction and cooperative learning opportunities as a means of engaging all students in the common core state standards.

Teachers at the Frontier School District also reported using self-checking methods to monitor their integration of the common core state standards, although these plans were informal and independently employed by each teacher. Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher, Susan, the Grade 6 teacher, and Cheryl, the high school teacher, described their process of reviewing the common core state standards to check their instruction. Susan summarized her process:

> What I've done is just on my own sat down and look through the common core to make sure the curriculum we use is fairly close lining up to things and then I supplement a lot when I see gaps. And it's a work in progress.

Additionally, Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher at the Frontier School District, and Susan, the Grade 6 teacher, emphasized the value of locating resources already aligned with the common core state standards to enrich the established curriculum.

Thus, teachers at the two school sites engaged in diverse integration processes as a part of their curriculum development. All teachers described methods of self-checking their integration of the common core state standards, although each teacher developed an independent method of monitoring. Teachers also reported that administrators did not require them to report their integration strategies. Additionally, teachers emphasized the need for curriculum to improve student learning related to skills already present in the established district curriculum as well as skills introduced in the common core state standards.

The fourth interview question asked, "*What problems do you face in integrating the common core state standards into your courses?"*

Teachers in the Timbers School District did not agree on common problems that they faced in integrating the standards into their courses. In fact, teachers were divided in their understanding of the common core state standards. Angie, the kindergarten teacher, and Courtney, the high school teacher, believed they understood the standards and did not find the development of related curriculum and instructional activities to be difficult. However, Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher, and Lois, the Grade 6 teacher, acknowledged they

were not confident in their own understanding of the standards, which they believed impacted their confidence in curriculum development. For example, Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher, described the challenges in planning instructional activities, especially in understanding how state level assessments relate to the skills outlined in the standards. Angie, the kindergarten teacher, and Courtney, the high school teacher, also described how their previously established curriculum was impacted by their efforts to integrate the common core state standards. Angie noted that the common core state standards required intensive instruction in writing, so she had to enrich the writing curriculum at the kindergarten level in order to meet these expectations.

Similar to teachers at the Timbers School District, teachers at the Frontier School District were divided in their comfortability with the common core state standards. Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher, and Susan, the Grade 6 teacher, related their concerns about managing instructional time with their established curriculum and the integration of the common core state standards. Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher, reported that she did not feel pressured to integrate the common core state standards into instruction, but acknowledged that many educators she maintained contact with online believed that they faced significant administrative pressure to restructure their curriculum so that the common core state standards were prominent in lesson plans and in instruction. Cheryl, the high school teacher, reflected on how she monitored student learning; “There have probably been times when I’ve said I did not cover that well enough because they are not producing what I thought they should be.” Cheryl also reflected on her efforts to establish

collegial connections with other high school English teachers in other areas to expand resources and instructional ideas.

Thus, teachers at both sites had different perceptions about their understanding of the common core state standards, which also generated different concerns about the implementation of the standards. While some teachers reported they had no difficulties in implementing the standards, others were uncertain that they were teaching common core state standards to the expected depth or complexity needed to help students achieve proficiency on these standards. Elementary teachers described concerns related to linking the common core state standards with established district reading programs. Teachers were also concerned with how to locate supporting resources for their curriculum, especially because they were the sole teachers at their assigned grade level or content area.

The fifth interview question asked, "*As a rural remote teacher, how would you describe your curriculum planning experiences with other K-12 teachers in relation to the common core state standards?"*

All four teachers in the Timbers School District identified limitations related to the frequency and duration of their curriculum planning experiences with other teachers, both within and beyond their local school district. Courtney, the high school English teacher, described her interactions with colleagues as occasional and informal due to the different schedules of teachers, adding, "Sometimes we mention some things in passing." Similarly, Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher commented, "We don't really meet that often . . . . We just don't get together to discuss it. It would help, I think, if we did." Given these

limitations, the four teachers also discussed ways they had independently sought out training resources and collegial support for their curriculum development work. Angie, the kindergarten teacher, explained that she maintained her own connections with other kindergarten teachers at neighboring schools to share and gather new curriculum ideas; "On our own, we e-mail, we contact each other, and we share stuff. But, it's on your own." Lois, the Grade 6 teacher, described summer curriculum work as part of a consortium-sponsored professional development opportunity. Additionally, Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher, and Lois, the Grade 6 teacher, expressed interest in expanding their collegial connections to better inform their curriculum development work.

All four teachers at the Frontier School District described the curriculum renewal plans for their district that began in the 2015-2016 school year, but they also recognized that much of their grade level curriculum work was done independently because each grade level or content area had only one assigned teacher. Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher, described her collaborative planning work with Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher, because they were responsible for teaching foundational reading foundations skills. Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher, noted a major concern was working with teachers at other grade levels work on her grade level curriculum, when she was the teacher with the most knowledge of that grade level. Alternatively, Susan, the Grade 6 teacher, believed that curriculum planning involving the entire staff had supported the alignment of the curriculum between grade levels. Cheryl, the high school teacher, mentioned how teachers in neighboring classrooms had supported her curriculum work, even though they were responsible for different content areas. Cheryl noted that the high school science teacher "has helped me

in kind of an order and on how to write it down, since we're implementing and trying to get it all written ourselves. So he's helped me a lot." Another aspect of curriculum planning that all four teachers described was their belief in maintaining individual control of their assigned curriculum. Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher, emphasized, "We also want to be very independent and do our own thing and not be exactly the same because otherwise it gets monotonous and the kids are going to get bored." Similarly, Brenda and Cheryl also expressed their appreciation for teacher autonomy in developing their curriculum.

Thus, teachers at both sites acknowledged the independent nature of their curriculum work, while also describing how collegial interaction often supported their curriculum development. Teachers valued common curriculum planning times and the curriculum collaboration activities they experienced, yet they noted these interactions were limited and infrequent. In order to support curriculum development, teachers sought out independent support, including developing professional connections to teachers outside the district and independently attending trainings when possible. Participants were also interested in increasing their opportunities to collaborate with other teachers.

The sixth interview question asked, "*What recommendations would you make to improve curriculum development in rural remote school settings?"*

To improve curriculum development, teachers at the Timbers School District recommended expanding collegial interaction opportunities. Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher, Lois, the Grade 6 teacher, and Courtney, the high school teacher, all advocated for this expansion within their school district as well as with teachers outside their local district. Lois, the Grade 6 teacher, explained, "I would like to see more collaboration between the

schools, so I could see what other middle school English teachers are doing. It just would be helpful to meet more often." In addition, Angie, the kindergarten teacher, and Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher, also recommended expanding teacher contact with professional development experts, rather than relying on independent curriculum development work. Angie, a kindergarten teacher, explained, "I feel fortunate to be here and to be teaching in a nice, little community. But, then it's also harder because you're away from resources and other teachers." Angie noted that increased funding for curriculum development would enable district leaders to bring in training opportunities, rather than relying on teachers' willingness to travel significant distances to attend professional development opportunities offered by other school districts. Likewise, Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher, advocated for the inclusion of a curriculum coach at the district level so teachers had regular access to professional training and support.

At the Frontier School District, teachers also expressed an interest in having expert guidance throughout the curriculum development process. Susan, the Grade 6 teacher, and Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher, described the need for on-site visits from experts to assist in curriculum development relevant to rural classrooms. Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher, was concerned with how their developing curriculum compares to the curriculum of other rural schools. Brenda questioned:

> I wonder if all the schools are doing it the same. Like, I wonder if ours looks different from [a neighboring school district]? So, it makes me wonder, when you get right down to it, are we finding they are aligned? Or are we showing we are

> aligned? Or the way it should be shown? I don't know. I don't know what the correct way is.

Both Susan, the Grade 6 teacher, and Cheryl, the high school English teacher, discussed the continuous nature of curriculum development. Cheryl responded, "One thing I would say is, don't let it slide . . . . I think it should be an ongoing thing. Always have it, even be improving on it, tweaking it." Teachers acknowledged that the curriculum process, by starting with one content area, was likely to progress through all content areas in the common years.

Thus, teachers at both sites made multiple suggestions about how to enrich and expand their curriculum development work through increased interaction with each other and additional access to expert guidance. Teachers were interested in additional discussion concerning the common core state standards as well as obtaining increased opportunities for collaboration with colleagues as part of the curriculum development process. Teachers were also concerned with limited expertise in their districts, and therefore, they suggested more training with experts in curriculum development. Additionally, teachers described the need for a curriculum process to be clear and ongoing in order to establish a cohesive curriculum across their district.

Table 4 presents a summary of the categories that I constructed for the interview data in relation to each interview question.

Table 4

Summary of Categories for Interview Data Analysis

Interview Question	*Categories*
IQ 1: Role in curriculum development	Believing process is mostly independent
	Perceiving situational limitations in process
	Receiving limited access to support systems
	Relying on local or regional collegial support
	Adhering to established curriculum practices
	Developing new processes for curriculum development
IQ 2: Impact of common core standards	Updating established curriculum practices
	Using alignment strategies for curriculum development
	Integrating common core standards independently
	Understanding challenges in supporting diverse learners
IQ 3: Integrating common core standards	Using self-selected curriculum integration strategies
	Implementing instructional strategies to improve student learning
	Believing language used in common core standards is essential
IQ 4: Challenges integrating common core standards	Needing to individually locate supporting resources
	Having confidence in understanding common core standards
	Lacking confidence in understanding common core standards
	Expressing concerns about managing implementation
	Striving to connect common core standards to established curriculum
	Valuing established curriculum practices
IQ 5: Planning with other K-12 teachers	Receiving limited opportunities to collaborate with other teachers
	Valuing scheduled collaboration time with other teachers
	Choosing to work on curriculum development independently
	Desiring increased collegial interaction to develop curriculum

(*table continues)*

IQ 6: Recommendations for curriculum	Desiring increased collegial collaboration
	Desiring access to curriculum development experts
	Desiring clear curricular development process
	Wanting additional funding for professional development

Observation Data Analysis

Data analysis for the observation field notes was conducted for each of the criteria that Merriam (2009) recommended for observations and that were adapted for this study. Coded field notes for each criterion of each observation were examined for similarities and differences, using the constant comparative method that Merriam recommended. A summary table of categories constructed for each criterion is presented at the end of this section.

Classroom setting. The first observation criterion was the classroom setting concerning how teachers used teacher and student space for instructional purposes, including the arrangement of furniture in the classroom. Numerous classroom resources were common to all four classrooms in the Timbers School District. All rooms featured teacher desks with desktop computers, Smartboards, marker boards, cabinets, and work tables. Framed school motto statements were also found in each classroom, along with bulletin boards and various print materials posted on classroom walls. Three of the classrooms included bookshelves full of printed materials. All of the teachers arranged a specific corner of their classrooms as teacher space, but they spent most of the observed lesson moving around the classrooms. However, student space was organized differently in all four classrooms. In the kindergarten room, Angie arranged student tables in rows, with student storage shelves built under the tabletops. Additionally, several areas of the

room were used as learning centers and play areas. In the Grade 4 classroom, Lois arranged individual student desks with attached swivel chairs into groups of two to three desks each and aligned into two rows that extended across the classroom. Each chair also had a fabric pocket hanging on its back for student storage. In the Grade 6 classroom, Lois arranged rows of student desks with attached chairs. Students were able to store materials in the baskets mounted under the chairs. Courtney, the high school English teacher, used an assortment of round tables, each with four to five chairs situated around the tables. This classroom also featured a computer lab area with three duel-monitor computers set for student use and a reading area with bean bags.

At the Frontier School District, common classroom resources were also noted in the four classrooms where I observed instructional lessons. All rooms featured teacher desks as well as computer tables with desktop computers. Additionally, several classrooms included document cameras in printers. In the Grade 6 classroom and the high school classroom, students also had iPads on their desks to use as needed during the lesson. Multiple marker boards were found in all classrooms, along with work tables and bookcases full of printed materials for student use. All classrooms had multiple bulletin boards with various print materials posted on classroom walls. Three of the classrooms had built-in cabinets as well as a classroom sink, with two classrooms marking the sink area as a snack space. In the two elementary classrooms, kidney-shaped tables had been arranged into two student learning centers. Two of the teachers arranged a specific corner of their classrooms as teacher space, while two teachers had arranged one side of the classroom as teacher space. All four teachers spent most of the observed lessons moving

around their classrooms. Student space was organized as rows of desks in two of the classrooms, with single unit desks having attached chairs. In the Grade 2 classroom, student desks were arranged into clusters of four to six desks. In the Grade 6 classroom, a majority of the desks were arranged in a large U-shape, with the remaining desks positioned in rows within the center space. In addition, the Grade 2 classroom and the Grade 6 classroom included established space for student reading.

Thus, the materials and resources that I observed at the research sites appeared to be equitable across all classrooms. Classroom arrangements indicated teachers were interested in using classroom space for collaborative student time as well as individual student work. Additionally, some classrooms were arranged to include learning centers. Teachers and students had access to technology, which was used to support instruction. Classrooms also featured similar print materials, including teacher resources and student texts for reading instruction as well as for independent reading. Because all of the teachers monitored student progress, which included frequent interactions with student groups as well as with individual learners, they had designed classroom space to allow for that monitoring.

Participants. The second observation criterion was about the participants who were engaged in each instructional lesson, particularly relating to the number of teachers and students in the classroom and the gender of participants. All four participants from the Timbers School District were female teachers. Three of these teachers were the only adults present in the room during the observed lessons. Angie, the kindergarten teacher, worked with an instructional aide as well as two community volunteers at the time of the

observation. Angie instructed a total of 18 kindergarten students, including 11 male students and seven female students. Additionally, two of Angie's students were identified as special education students and required additional support from the classroom aide to complete some of the lesson activities. Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher, instructed 15 students during the observed lesson, including six male students and nine female students. In the Grade 6 classroom, Lois instructed 16 students during the observed lesson, including eight male students and eight female students. Courtney, the high school teacher, instructed 12 students, including seven male students and five female students.

At the Frontier School District, all four participants were female teachers. Two of these teachers also had a female instructional aide present during the observed lesson. In both of these elementary classrooms, the instructional aide was responsible for guiding student groups at one learning center, while the classroom teacher interacted with students at another learning center. The other two teachers were the only adults in the classroom during the observations. Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher, instructed a total of 16 students, including nine male students and seven female students. Additionally, one student in the classroom had a physical disability that impacted hand movement and finger dexterity. This student did not require alternative instruction or seating space but used specialized tools to complete some classroom tasks. Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher, instructed 21 students, including 13 male students and eight female students. In the Grade 6 classroom, Susan instructed 22 students, including eight male students and 14 female students. Additionally, one student in the classroom had a physical disability that required the use of crutches but did not require alternative seating space. At the high school level,

Cheryl instructed 16 Grade 9 students, including 12 male students and four female students.

Thus, the class sizes at the research sites varied from 12 to 22 students, which is representative of the small class size often found in rural school settings. The gender balance of students was also representative of a typical public school. Some classrooms also included additional adult support, including classroom aides and classroom volunteers.

Curriculum. The third observation criterion was the curriculum in relation to the identified standard and unit objective(s) selected for the lesson, the target skills and concepts teachers identified for the lesson, and the corresponding assessment for the lesson. All four teachers in the Timbers School District targeted standards-based skills during instruction, but none of the four teachers explicitly named the standard or unit objective during the observed lessons. Specific standards related to the instructional lesson were also not visibly posted in any of the four classrooms. Angie's kindergarten lesson addressed the language standards relation to phonics, specifically the use of the letter "a" and three-letter word constructions that included the letter "a." Nancy's Grade 4 lesson concerned the use of verbs, compound subjects, and compound predicates within sentence structures. In the Grade 6 lesson, Lois addressed standards related to grammatical rules, sentence structures, decoding vocabulary, making reading inferences, and using textual evidence to support inferences. At the high school level, Courtney's lesson included instruction related to Greek and Latin root words, journalistic writing on informational topics, evaluation of informational articles, and writing informational text.

At the Frontier School District, all four teachers also addressed standards-based skills within their presented lessons. However, none of the teachers had visually posted or explicitly named the standard(s) as the focus of the lesson. Three of the teachers had not posted or named the unit objective. Cheryl, the high school teacher, had posted a learning objective on the marker board, listing the current class novel and assigned pages for the day. In the Grade 1 classroom, Brenda's lesson addressed reading skills, including comprehension and vocabulary strategies, and language skills, including contractions, prepositions, and word rhymes. Jennifer's Grade 2 lesson also included reading comprehension and vocabulary strategies, as well as language skills, including affixes and spelling. Additionally, Jennifer's lesson included a reading comprehension assessment. In the Grade 6 classroom, Susan presented a lesson on reading skills, including reading comprehension and the structure of folktales, as well as language skills, including the use of pronouns and their antecedents. Cheryl's Grade 9 lesson included reading skills related to critical and analytical reading of a class novel, as well as writing skills related to quotation analysis and literary essay structure.

Thus, all observed lessons were aligned with the common core state standards and included multiple grade-level standards. All teachers at both sites presented lessons that addressed targeted skills aligned to the common core state standards. However, teachers did not name or post specific common core state standards during the observed lessons.

Instructional strategies. The fourth observation criterion was the instructional strategies that teachers used to deliver the standards and/or lesson objectives. At the kindergarten level in the Timbers School District, Angie engaged students in nine

separate instructional activities that included updating the daily calendar, practicing letters, matching images to beginning letters, word building, singing alphabet songs, and using letter vests to construct three-letter words. In terms of instructional strategies, Angie used nonlinguistic representation by visually connecting letters and vocabulary to images. Angie also used the instructional strategy of questioning to ask students about letters and letter blends. In conjunction with this strategy, Angie used the strategy of providing cues for learning by varying the way she addressed questions to students, including asking for student volunteers, selecting students through random name drawing, and directly asking students to contribute to the class discussion. Throughout the lesson, Angie also employed the strategies of reinforcing effort and providing recognition, identifying students by name as they contributed responses and acknowledged their success. At numerous points in the lesson, Angie also used the instructional strategy of modeling to illustrate new skills for students. Angie's lesson included whole group direct instruction, as well as small group interaction and individual feedback for students as they completed guided practice.

Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher at the Timbers School District, included six instructional activities as part of the observed lesson, which included sentence structure, the use of compound sentences, and the use of subject and verb phrases. In terms of instructional strategies, Nancy used questioning to lead students through a discussion about sentence structure. Nancy also employed the instructional strategy of reinforcing effort and providing recognition as students volunteered responses to questions and provided sentence examples. Nancy also engaged students in guided practice, using a

grammar textbook as a resource for practice exercises. Nancy used the instructional strategy of cooperative learning by asking students to write and review practice sentences fitting each of the structures discussed earlier in the lesson. Using the strategies of guided and independent practice, Nancy asked students to individually complete journal entries using the sentence structures they had learned over the course of the lesson. Nancy provided individual assistance to students when they raised their hands to ask questions. Over the course of the lesson, Nancy provided whole group direct instruction as well as small group and individual guided practice.

Lois, the Grade 6 teacher at the Timbers School District, provided instruction for nine different instructional activities in the observed lesson, including instruction on grammatical sentence corrections, new vocabulary terms, prereading strategies, making inferences, and making predictions. In terms of instructional strategies, Lois reviewed objectives and provided feedback to students on their progress concerning a long-term reading goal. Lois also used the strategy of guided practice to review grammar correction rules and procedures. Lois continued to use guided practice with the literature textbooks, instructing students to use prereading strategies with a new story and to preview the story's vocabulary. As a means of investigating vocabulary, Lois used the instructional strategy of cooperative learning to engage student pairs in discussions about the new vocabulary. As a learning extension, Lois used the instructional strategy of nonlinguistic representation in several activities, challenging students to connect vocabulary to a series of photographs as well as to audio pronunciations of the terms. In addition, Lois employed the instructional strategy of identifying similarities and differences by asking

students to compare the new vocabulary terms to one another. Additionally, Lois used questioning to help students draw inferences and make predictions about the story. Lois reinforced these inference skills by using nonlinguistic representation, playing an audio example of a discussion between two readers who used inferences to preview the story. Lois also used the strategy of independent practice, assigning the story as homework. Over the entire course of the lesson, Lois utilized whole group direct instruction as well as student pair interactions and guided and independent practice.

Courtney, the high school teacher at the Timbers School District, included four instructional activities in the observed lesson, including practicing Greek and Latin word roots, reviewing criteria for an ongoing journalism project, providing project work time, and constructing a genre-specific rubric. In terms of instructional strategies, Courtney first used cooperative learning by asking student groups to review Greek and Latin root word flashcards. As students worked, Courtney moved among the groups and used the instructional strategies of providing cues and asking questions to check students' understanding of the terms. At multiple points during flashcard practice, Courtney engaged students in deeper thinking about the terms by using the instructional strategy of identifying similarities and differences. In transitioning students to an ongoing journalism project, Courtney used the strategy of setting objectives and providing feedback by clarifying the project's objectives and checking with individual students about their progress on the project. Courtney also used modeling to show students possible formats for their genre-specific rubric. Courtney's lesson included whole group direct instruction, as well as small group interaction and individual guided practice.

At the Frontier School District, Brenda engaged Grade 1 students in five separate instructional activities that included reading strategies and language instruction. Brenda also utilized three learning centers during the observed lesson. In terms of learning strategies, Brenda used the instructional strategy of guided practice as she led students through directions and examples on language worksheets used for guided practice. Early in the lesson, Brenda separated the students into three groups for learning center rotations. In the reading station, Brenda used the strategy of small group instruction, as well as questioning and guided practice as students read aloud sections from leveled reading books. This combination of instructional strategies enabled Brenda to provide immediate and individualized feedback to students as they engaged in center work. Additionally, Brenda used the instructional strategy of summarizing to support students' reading comprehension by asking students to recall events from stories they read in the leveled readers. Similarly, Brenda's classroom aide used the strategy of small group instruction at the language learning station. At this station, the classroom aide used the instructional strategies of questioning and guided practice to review letter sounds, sentence writing, and vocabulary. Students in the third group were engaged in independent practice as they finished seat work assignments. Brenda's lesson included whole group direct instruction, small group instruction, guided practice and independent practice.

Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher at the Frontier School District, engaged students in five instructional activities, including strategies for reading and language comprehension. Similar to Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher, Jennifer also employed the use of three learning

centers during the observed lesson. In terms of instructional strategies, Jennifer used modeling to illustrate the use of affixes with root words. Jennifer assigned student groups to the three learning centers, first identifying students for independent practice who had completed their assignments as part of the seatwork station. In the reading station, Jennifer used the strategy of small group instruction, as well as questioning and guided practice to engage students in prereading and reading activities. As students interacted at the center, Jennifer used the strategies of questioning and providing cues to help students identify examples and text evidence. Jennifer also distributed reading assessments to students who had completed the units. At the second center, which was the language center, the classroom aide also used the strategy of small group instruction, combined with questioning and guided practice, to help students identify the parts of sentences. Additionally, the classroom aide provided immediate feedback as students structured suffixes and prefixes for words and practiced vocabulary. Jennifer's lesson included brief whole group direct instruction, small group instruction, guided practice and independent practice.

In the Grade 6 classroom at the Frontier School District, Susan included seven instructional activities in the observed lesson, including whole group reading and discussion, independent reading, and language skills related to the use of pronouns. In terms of learning strategies, Susan first used the strategy of independent practice as students silently read books of their own choice. Susan then used the strategy of setting objectives and providing feedback as she conferenced with individual students about their progress on language activities. Following independent reading, Susan used guided

practice with students as they individually completed several worksheet pages on pronouns and the structure of folk tales. Susan engaged students in a whole group reading of the assigned novel, using the strategies of providing cues and asking questions as the story progressed to build reading comprehension skills. As reading continued, Susan also used the strategy of modeling to assist students with difficult vocabulary. Students again engaged in independent practice as Susan asked them to complete their reading the current chapter of the novel. Susan also used cues and questions to guide a whole group discussion of the novel. Susan's lesson included whole group instruction and discussion, guided practice, and independent practice.

Cheryl, the high school English teacher at the Frontier School District, included six instructional activities in the observed lesson, which included various reading analyses and essay writing skills related to an assigned novel. In terms of instructional strategies, Cheryl first used independent practice, instructing students to re-read a section of a previously assigned chapter in the novel. Following this instructional activity, Cheryl engaged the whole class in a discussion about the events in the novel, drawing students' attention to specific passages within the text. Cheryl used the instructional strategies of providing cues and asking questions to expand students' comprehension of the text. Next, Cheryl used the strategy of advanced organizers by asking students to record information about key vocabulary terms and notable quotations from the novel. Cheryl continued with this strategy, in addition to modeling, as she guided students through a text analysis organizer used for the critical analysis of quotations. Cheryl also used the strategy of small group interaction by asking student pairs to select practice quotations to discuss and

feature in their text analysis organizers. Cheryl's lesson included whole group instruction and discussion. In addition, Cheryl also used paired interactions and guided and independent practice.

Thus, all teachers at both sites used multiple instructional strategies as part of their lesson design. These strategies included a combination of direct instruction and small group interaction, as well as guided and independent practice. Each teacher also used questioning strategies to engage students in speaking and listening activities related to the content material as well as in writing tasks. Teachers also acknowledged the needs of each learner by providing individualized feedback.

Subtle factors. The fifth observation criterion was subtle factors, which related to unplanned interactions and instructional adjustments that teachers made during the delivery of the lesson. At the Timbers School District, each teacher addressed different unplanned interactions during lesson instruction. As a kindergarten teacher, Angie, adjusted her activities to allow students to take drink and bathroom breaks as their attention wavered. Angie also took time to welcome and direct classroom visitors. When students took particular interest in one of the examples used during instruction, Angie facilitated a short question and answer exchange with students, addressing their curiosities and then suggesting they read a book as a whole class about the topic later during the week to give them more information. Several students were unable to find their practice sheets, and Angie quickly made adjustments, so these students were able to participate in letter writing practice. Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher, used several technologies at the same time during the observed lesson, including a Smartboard and a

document camera to present model sentences for student practice. At one point, Nancy adjusted the settings on both devices to make the projected lesson material more visible to students. Lois also engaged students with technology, asking them to share their work and responses on the document camera as well as on the Smartboard. In the Grade 6 classroom, Lois managed several logistical concerns prior to the beginning of the lesson, including expired and upcoming deadlines for student work. Additionally, Lois integrated numerous grading calculations into the instructional lesson to encourage students to practice mathematics skills as well as to help them understand grading practices. In Courtney's instructional lesson at the high school level, students continued to work on an independent journalism topic. Courtney provided individual guidance for students that was specific to the work they were doing. Because several students needed to leave for a school-related trip, Courtney also provided individual instruction about the instructional activities that these students needed to complete during their absence.

Teachers at the Frontier School District also managed unplanned interactions and difficulties during the observed lessons. In the Grade 1 classroom, Brenda monitored students working independently at the seat work learning center as she directed students at the reading learning center. As students working on seat work encountered problems, they approached Brenda or the classroom aide for additional assistance. Brenda also redirected several students who had gotten off-task while working on seat work. At one point, Brenda also assisted a student with a bloody nose. In the Grade 2 classroom, Jennifer also monitored students completing seat work as she directed instruction at the reading station. A number of students completed seat work before rotating into other

learning centers, so they independently retrieved mathematics and reading games from a designated bookcase in the classroom library. In the Grade 6 classroom, Susan monitored students' use of iPads during the lesson. Several students used their tablets to look up vocabulary. The iPads were a corporate-funded initiative, so all students in Grades 6-12 received iPads for classroom use. One student who frequently referred to her iPad was a new immigrant from Brazil and used the technology to assist her in translating classroom materials because her English was limited. Without supporting services for English language learners at the school, this student's primary support tool was her iPad. In the high school English classroom, Cheryl also monitored students' use of iPads. Students frequently used the iPads to take pictures of projects, notes, and instructions written on the marker board, so that students could refer to them later. At times during instruction, Cheryl repeated or rephrased questions to generate student responses. In addition, as student pairs worked, Cheryl encouraged verbal interaction, because students were often hesitant to talk.

Thus, all teachers at both sites adjusted their instruction to manage unexpected events within their classrooms, including adjusting for individual learning needs and monitoring student engagement. Teachers determined additional skills and practice that individual students needed and purposefully integrated small tasks that supported students' work into these areas. Additionally, teachers were flexible in their instruction and work time, which allowed them to adjust instruction based on progress monitoring. Teachers also monitored students' use of technology and provided reminders about homework assignments and upcoming deadlines.

Table 5 is a summary of the categories that I constructed for the analysis of observation data.

Table 5

Summary of Categories for Observation Data Analysis

Interview Question	*Categories*
O 1: Classroom setting	Noting common classroom resources
	Noting technology used to support instruction
	Noting variety of print resources in classroom
	Arranging student seating for instructional purposes
O 2: Participants	Noting class size ranged from 12 to 18 students
	Noting a balance of male and female students
	Noting only one teacher in classrooms
	Noting special needs students in all classrooms
	Noting some use of instructional aides at elementary level
	Observing some community volunteers at elementary level
O 3: Curriculum standards/objectives	Noting standards/objectives not presented to students
	Noting targeted concepts and skills for lessons
	Noting assessment included in the lesson
	Noting posted class work objective
O 4: Instructional strategies	Identifying similarities and differences
	Using summarizing and note-taking
	Reinforcing effort for task completion
	Providing recognition for responses and task completion
	Using guided practice
	Requiring homework
	Using nonlinguistic representation
	Using cooperative learning
	Setting objectives and providing feedback

(*table continues)*

	Generating and testing hypotheses
	Using cues, questions, and advanced organizers
	Providing direct instruction to whole group
	Providing small group instruction
	Engaging in whole group discussion
	Presenting new content
	Modeling specific skills
O 5: Subtle Factors	Incorporating breaks into lessons
	Managing technology to support instruction
	Addressing shortages in learning materials
	Redirecting student attention to instructional activities
	Providing assignment reminders

Reflective Journal Data Analysis

Reflective journal data were first coded and then categorized, using similar procedures for the analysis of interview and observation data. Coded data for each journal question was examined for similarities and differences in participant responses, using the constant comparative method that Merriam (2009) recommended. Journal data included seven rather than eight participants because one participant declined to participate in the reflective journal, citing lack of time. A summary table of categories constructed for each journal question is presented at the end of this section.

The first reflective journal question asked, "*In recent years, this state has adopted state standards based on the common core standards. Please describe how teachers in your school district were informed about the adoption of these new state standards*."

Three of the four teachers in the Timbers School District credited a regional consortium, which included teachers from rural school districts in the regional area, with

facilitating their introduction to the common core state standards. According to Courtney, the high school teacher, the consortium also provided support in locating standards resources. Additionally, Lois, the Grade 6 teacher, and Courtney, the high school English teacher, also described speakers who visited their school district to provide overview information about the standards. Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher, reported that state-level experts visited the school to provide an introduction to the common core state standards early in the reform process. Nancy also described the principal's involvement in helping district teachers gain access to standards documents.

At the Frontier School District, all of the three teachers reported that administrative leaders facilitated their introduction to the common core state standards. Susan, the Grade 6 teacher, and Cheryl, the high school English teacher, stated that several training sessions, led by school district administrators, introduced teachers to the common core state standards.

Thus, all teachers at both sites reported that district administrators introduced them to the common core state standards during district training sessions. In addition, some teachers described regional and state-level outreach as central to their introduction to the common core state standards.

The second reflective journal question asked, "*How do you believe the adoption of the common core state standards has impacted your classroom instruction?"*

Three of the four teachers in the Timbers School District believed that the adoption of the common core state standards increased their emphasis on student learning. Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher, noted, "It has provided me the goals and

benchmarks to ensure students are progressing on a path for success in school and the future." Nancy and Lois, the Grade 6 teacher, also reported that implementation of these standards helped them to clarify their curricular and instructional goals. Lois described how the standards revealed specific targets for her instruction, adding that "the common core standards have changed a lot of the vocabulary I use when teaching kids." According to Courtney, the high school English teacher, her integration of the common core state standards increased the complexity of the tasks included in her lesson design. Angie, the kindergarten teacher, described the connections she saw between the established reading curricula used in the district with the common core state standards.

At the Frontier School District, Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher, and Cheryl, the high school English teacher, described how their awareness of standards-based skills expanded as they became familiar with the common core state standards. Similarly, Susan, the Grade 6 teacher, mentioned staff discussions concerning the common core state standards. However, Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher, and Cheryl, the high school English teacher, believed that their instruction had not changed significantly because of the adoption of the common core state standards. Jennifer commented, "It has made us more aware of what we are hitting on and what we need to work on, but overall it hasn't changed that much." Cheryl agreed, describing how she was more aware of instructional goals because of the common core state standards.

Thus, teachers at both sites reported that they appreciated the increased clarity in the standards and believed this change helped them to focus their instruction on improved student learning. Teachers also noted that their instruction had not significantly changed

because of the common core state standards, but that the standards had clarified and reinforced skills within their established curriculum.

The third reflective journal question asked, "*Describe the interactions you have experienced with other English language arts teachers (K-12) concerning the common core state standards*."

Teachers in the Timbers School District reported varied interactions with other English language arts teachers concerning the common core state standards. Angie, the kindergarten teacher, and Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher, reported that their interactions were primarily with teachers who provided instruction at or near the same grade level. Three of the four teachers also emphasized limitations in their interactions, given that they were the sole teacher at their assigned grade level in the district. Lois noted, "Not a lot of interaction has taken place. I have spent minimal time with other teachers in our consortium and a few days with other English teachers." These three teachers also noted that their integration of the common core state standards into their instruction was largely independent and driven by their interest in developing curriculum and instruction for their specific courses. At the high school level, Courtney described her efforts to participate in national and state writing projects to update her knowledge and practice, but she noted that her participation in such activities was due to her individual interests and was not tied directly to school district requirements.

At the Frontier School District, all three teachers also articulated how the nature of rural teaching limits collegial interaction. Both Susan, the Grade 6 teacher, and Cheryl, the high school teacher, noted they were the only teacher in their assigned grade levels

responsible for teaching English language arts. As such, interactions with other English language arts teachers occurred out of the school district. In an effort to learn more about the common core state standards, Cheryl, the high school English teacher, attended training sessions outside the district. She noted, "I have been to training where there have been a lot of questions posed to the trainers by teachers regarding the common core." Cheryl explained that she found these questions to be reaffirming because she discovered that teachers in other schools had concerns similar to her own. Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher, wrote that interactions with other teachers have "more focus on what we are teaching and how it is relating to our students. I am sure what we discuss deals with [the common core] but it isn't the focus of discussions." Jennifer explained that district interactions among teachers related more specifically to the established curriculum, rather than to the common core state standards.

Thus, teachers at both sites were concerned with the limitations in their collegial interactions, and even though they independently sought professional interactions, their district's size and isolation restricted these options. In some cases, teachers were able to collaborate with teachers outside their district, even though these interactions were planned as single interactions rather than as continuous professional development opportunities. Teachers also sought out standards implementation guidance independently to support their curriculum development, including online education sites, attendance at state and national programs, and summer courses.

The fourth reflective journal question asked, *"Please describe the professional development opportunities you experienced in your district in relation to implementing the common core state standards*."

In the Timbers School District, Lois, the Grade 6 teacher, and Courtney, the high school teacher, identified the regional consortium as a beneficial support system for information concerning the integration of the common core state standards into their courses as well as for ongoing professional development. Lois, the Grade 6 teacher, recalled that "the director of our curriculum consortium really broke down the standards for us." However, Angie, the kindergarten teacher, and Courtney, the high school teacher, also noted that their professional development opportunities were limited. Nancy, the Grade 6 teacher, described one professional development opportunity held at the Timbers School District when school administrators invited other school districts on-site to participate in state-facilitated training on the common core state standards. Courtney described her professional involvement in common core training at state and national events as separate from her teaching role. Angie, the kindergarten teacher, also noted that professional development opportunities were limited, especially in recent years.

All three responding teachers at the Frontier School District described the use of planned pupil-related instruction (PIR) days for in-district curriculum planning and development. Cheryl, the high school teacher, recalled that district administrators facilitated the training sessions. In addition to reviewing the common core state standards during PIR time, Cheryl explained, "We looked at several film clips of teachers talking

about and implementing standards into their teaching." Susan, the Grade 6 teacher, also wrote about using PIR time to align the curriculum with the common core.

Thus, teachers acknowledged opportunities for local and regional professional development, yet they also described how these opportunities focused on introducing teachers to the common core state standards. Teachers also noted that training sessions beyond this initial phase were not readily available, and there were significant time gaps between training sessions. Teachers also described how some professional development time was embedded within planned PIR days featured in the academic calendar.

The fifth reflective journal question asked, "*Please describe the interactions you have experienced with K-12 teachers in other content areas in relation to implementing the common core state standards*."

Teachers at the Timbers School District identified beneficial support as well as limitations in their interactions with other K-12 teachers. Three of the four teachers described informal conversations as their primary interaction with K-12 teachers for other content areas. Angie, the kindergarten teacher, recalled: "general discussion when we updated our programs." Likewise, Courtney, the high school teacher, described her interactions with high school teachers of other content areas as "some informal conversations with coworkers about the standards. "Lois, the Grade 6 teacher, described interactions with other middle-level educators at regional consortium trainings as supportive because she met with other teachers "for a few days and aligned our curriculum with the standards." Angie, the kindergarten teacher, and Courtney, the high

school teacher, however, viewed their overall contact with other content area teachers as limited.

Teachers at the Frontier School District described diverse experiences with K-12 teachers in other content areas. Susan, the Grade 6 teacher, noted that elementary teachers in the district worked together. In contrast, Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher, viewed staff interaction as more casual, noting that teachers "talk a little in staff meetings about what we are doing, but it doesn't necessarily focus on common core." Cheryl focused on her interactions with English language arts teachers outside of the district, instead describing classes and training sessions she chose to attend as part of her own professional development. Cheryl explained, "I take classes every fall . . . and common core is always discussed at some point in the training." Cheryl's comments illustrate the role of regional trainings in rural teacher training.

Thus, teachers reported different experiences with teachers of other content areas, which also varied when interactions occurred in the district in contrast to outside the district. In some cases, teachers participated in training sessions with teachers of neighboring grade levels, and they had discussions with teachers about curriculum. In other cases, conversations across content areas were informal conversations, rather than planned professional development opportunities.

The sixth reflective journal question asked, "*What recommendations would you make concerning professional development opportunities I rural remote school settings, especially related to curriculum and standards-based education reform."*

All four teachers in the Timbers School District recommended expanding professional development opportunities within their school district, especially related to seeking curriculum experts to guide their work on integrating the common core state standards into their courses. Courtney, the high school English teacher, noted, "Teachers need more time to work through the resources without it being an added stress to their already full schedule." Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher, expressed her interest in instructional coaches, adding "it would be so nice to have a reading and math coach come into our school and go over the standards with us, so we understood each one completely." Similarly, Lois, the Grade 6 teacher, suggested online professional development opportunities could be used to expand professional development for rural teachers. Angie, the kindergarten teacher, recommended additional funding to support more professional development opportunities.

At the Frontier School District, all three teachers also recommended expanded professional development, especially related to educators' interactions. Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher, and Cheryl, the high school English teacher, were interested in learning more about how educators in other schools had integrated the common core state standards into their courses. Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher, also suggested that educators in rural school districts increase their collaboration to bring in outside experts. Susan, the Grade 6 teacher, recommended planning professional development time more purposefully so that teachers in related grade levels or content areas could more effectively align their curriculum work to the common core state standards.

Thus, teachers at both sites made recommendations related to expanding professional development opportunities, both in and outside the district. Teachers were interested in pursuing diverse methods of interaction, including in-district collaboration time, access to expert guidance on-site, and online training and collaboration. Teachers were also aware of travel limitations, given the rural nature of their school locations, and they suggested plans to overcome travel barriers, such as collaborating with neighboring school districts or attending regional training sessions.

Table 6 is a summary of the categories that I constructed from an analysis of the reflective journal data.

Table 6

Summary of Categories for Reflective Journal Data Analysis

Reflective Journal Questions	*Categories*
RJ 1: Adoption of common core standards	Noting regional consortium involvement
	Noting assistance from state-level experts
	Noting assistance from administrative leaders
	Noting district level staff meetings
RJ 2: Impact on classroom instruction	Helping to clarify instructional goals
	Expanding the established curriculum
	Emphasizing student learning
	Noting no change in established instruction
RJ 3: Interactions with K-12 ELA teachers	Being only teacher at grade level
	Experiencing limited interactions with other teachers
	Seeking standards implementation guidance independently
	Participating in some grade level work
	Noting interactions with other teachers were infrequent

(*table continues)*

RJ 4: Professional development	Appreciating regional consortium support
	Appreciating state department support
	Receiving limited in-district training
	Noting significant time gaps in training
	Seeking training independently
RJ 5: Interactions with other K-12 teachers	Experiencing limited interactions with other teachers
	Appreciating regional consortium support
	Participating in informal conversations with colleagues
	Seeking common core training independently
RJ 6: Recommendations for development	Needing expert guidance
	Needing time for teacher collaboration
	Needing curriculum planning time
	Needing instructional coaches
	Needing common core examples
	Needing additional funding
	Noting challenges of rural travel

Document Content Analysis

Documents were reviewed by a content analysis, which involved investigating each document to determine the purpose of the document, structural attributes of the documents, content included within the documents and the methods in which participants used the documents to guide their instruction and curriculum development (Merriam, 2009). Documents that were analyzed included (a) national standards, (b) state standards, (c) scope and sequence, (d) alignment documents that include English language arts standards checklists and unit guides, and (e) lesson plans.

National standards. The first document that I collected from the national common core state standards website was the *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/ Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects* (2010). This national document served as the primary standards document for state standards development in the western state involved in this study. The NGA and the CCSSO (2010) developed this document for the purpose of establishing nationally consistent standards for English language arts as well as determining literacy standards that are applicable to other content areas. In addition, the *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/ Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects* (2010) includes college and career readiness (CCR) anchor standards and outlines grade level standards for K-12 students. Specific standards include reading standards for literature, reading standards for informational text, writing standards, speaking and listening standards, and language standards. At the Timbers School District, I noted that Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher, and Courtney, the high school teacher, both had copies of this document included in their personal resource binders for curriculum work. At the Frontier School District, Cheryl, the high school English teacher, mentioned using these common core standards documents as a reference for instructional planning.

Thus, only three of the eight teachers provided evidence of using the national content standards as reference documents during the curriculum development process. The national content standards featured standards related to college and career readiness, reading, writing, speaking and listening, language, and literacy.

State standards. The second document that I collected from the State Office of Public Instruction website was the *State Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/ Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects.* Three of the four teachers at the Timbers School District referred to these standards documents as their primary source for integrating the common core state standards into their curriculum. The purpose of this document was to articulate the state approved standards relevant to English language arts instruction, as well as to outline literacy standards for other content areas. Similar to the national standards document, this document included college and career readiness anchor standards as well as literacy standards that were organized according to grade level and six categories of language arts skills, including reading standards for literature, reading standards for information text, writing standards, speaking and listening standards, and language standards. At the Timbers School District, teachers referred to online standards resources available through the state department website. Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher, and Lois, the Grade 6 teacher, also utilized checklist documents to monitor their instruction of the common core state standards. Three teachers at the Frontier School District referred to their use of the common core state standards documents. Both Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher, and Cheryl, the high school English teacher, described their frequent review of the standards documents to verify they were including the expected skills in their instructional planning. Susan, the Grade 6 teacher, also reported that she independently reviewed the standards and her planned curriculum to align her instruction with the common core state standards.

Thus, teachers at both sites used the state common core standards document as a foundational curriculum document, though their record-keeping methods varied in format and formality. The state common core state standards featured standards related to career and college readiness, reading, writing, speaking and listening, language, and literacy.

Scope and sequence. The third type of document I collected was scope and sequence documents at the course level. These documents included the content and skills that were taught in the course for the year and the order in which these content and skills were taught. Because teachers who participated in this study were assigned multiple courses to teach, however, I only collected a scope and sequence document for the course in which I observed an instructional lesson.

At the Timbers School District, Angie, the kindergarten teacher, and Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher, used the scope and sequence documents from the district-adopted K-5 English language arts program titled *StoryTown.* This textbook series was published by Harcourt School Publishers, and the Timbers School District had adopted the 2007 edition of the series, which was published before the common core state standards were adopted in this state. This textbook series included classroom activity guides, student reading textbooks, student reader books, phonics workbooks, vocabulary workbooks, and writing prompts. Both teachers reported that they followed the district-adopted textbook scope and sequence as closely as possible, which identified the topics and instructional activities for each day of instruction as well as the sequence in which lessons should be delivered. At the kindergarten level, the scope was presented as reading themes that included the following sequence: All About Me, Families, Friends at School, On the

Farm, Whatever the Weather, Let's Play, In the Neighborhood, Jobs People Do, and On the Go. At the Grade 4 level, reading themes included Facing Challenges, Getting the Job Done, Natural Challenges, Imagination at Work, A New Home, and Exploring Our World.

At the junior high level in the Timbers School District, I reviewed teacher and student texts from the adopted textbook series. As the lone junior high English language arts teacher, Lois reported that she was responsible for recommending a textbook series that the district should adopt for students in Grades 6-8. After reviewing curricular materials from several publishing companies during the 2014-2015 school year, Lois recommended that the district adopt *Collections* published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, a textbook series that was aligned with the common core state standards. This 2015 edition series was not a continuation of the language arts textbook series used in Grades K-5 and was published after the adoption of the common core state standards. At the Grade 6 level, the scope was presented as thematic units that included the following sequence: Facing Fear, Animal Intelligence, Dealing with Disaster, Making Your Voice Heard, Decisions that Matter, and What Tales Tell. Rather than following the scope and sequence found in the 2015 edition of the textbooks, Lois reported that she identified the common core state standards she was most concerned with teaching and then selected units and lessons from the textbook to support instruction related to the standards. Lois also shared a teacher-created scope and sequence document titled *Quarterly Content Design*. This document, which was given to her by the previous middle school English language arts teacher, listed the units, literary selections, and major skills taught in these

units for each quarter of the English language arts courses required for students in Grades 6-8. The document was developed prior to the state's adoption of the common core state standards, and Lois noted that she used it as a guide while she developed an updated scope and sequence that would include the new *Collections* textbook series. Lois did not share an updated printed scope and sequence document.

At the high school level in the Timbers School District, I did not collect any scope and sequence documents. Rather than using a purchased textbook scope and sequence, Courtney, the high school English language arts teacher at the Timbers School District, described her efforts at building units and lessons aligned to the common core state standards and identifying a variety of print and digital resources to support the instructional activities for these units and lessons.

Elementary teachers at the Frontier School District similarly followed a scope and sequence included in a district-purchased K-2 reading series, which was titled *Read Well*, published by Sopris West. Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher, and Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher, included the scope and sequence document from the 2007 edition of the reading series as an attachment to their weekly lesson plans. This series was published and adopted by the Frontier School District before the common core state standards were adopted in this state. Both teachers reported that they adhered to the scope and sequence, including using all scripted parts of the textbook series and instructional activities detailed in the teacher resources. At the Grade 1 level, the scope was presented as 38 thematic units with diverse fiction and nonfiction works that included the following units: Snazzy Snake, Mammals, Rhyming Fun, Turkeys on a Tightrope, Fact or Fiction, and A Kangaroo Trick. At the

Grade 2 level, the reading series included 25 thematic units, also with diverse fiction and nonfiction works, such as Maya and Ben, Where in the World, Family Tales, African Adventures, and Mapping Our World.

At the middle school level, Susan, the Grade 6 teacher at the Frontier School District, used the district-purchased language arts textbook series *Journeys*, published by Houghton Mifflin. Similar to Lois at the Timbers School District, Susan reported using some units and lessons as the scope and sequence for the 2012 edition of the textbook series suggested and supplementing the curriculum with additional print and digital resources when she considered the skills in the textbook series to be insufficient. This series was published after the adoption of the common core state standards but had been adopted by the Frontier School District prior to their integration of the common core state standards. At the Grade 6 level, the scope was presented as six thematic units from the textbook series that included the following sequence: Finding Your Voice, Common Ground, Going the Distance, Treasures of the Ancient World, Taking Charge of Change, and Respect and Protect.

At the high school level, Cheryl, the English teacher at the Frontier School District, did not provide a written scope and sequence for any of the English language arts courses that she was assigned to teach. Instead, Cheryl reported that she used a combination of textbook and online materials to support her instruction related to the common core state standards.

Thus, scope and sequence documents at both sites varied. Elementary school teachers at both sites used a district-purchased reading series as the scope and sequence

for their English language arts courses. Middle school teachers also used a purchased textbook series but did not follow the scope and sequence provided by the textbook company. Instead, these teachers selected units and lessons from the textbook series, as well as additional print and digital materials, according to the content and skills identified within the common core state standards. High school teachers did not provide a written scope and sequence for any of the English language arts courses they were assigned to teach. Instead, they reported that they created an original scope and sequence for each course, using various print and digital materials; however, I did not collect any written evidence of a scope and sequence for their courses.

Alignment documents. The fourth document type that I collected was alignment documents. These documents differed at each site and between elementary and secondary school teachers at each site. They included checklists and unit outlines that teachers used to align their instruction to the common core state standards.

Teachers used checklists as alignment documents at the Timbers School District. Elementary and middle school English language arts teachers at the Timbers School District who had participated in a regional consortium developed the *Language Standards Checklists* as a document to help them align their instruction with the state common core standards. Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher, gave me one version of this document. The checklist featured tables of common core state standards, listed in sequential order in the first column of the document. The checklist also featured five additional columns for teachers to record the dates that they taught each standard. Lois, the Grade 6 teacher, shared another version of the checklist, which also featured columns

specifically assigned for the date teachers taught each standard, the date teachers retaught, that date teachers reviewed each standard, the date teachers assessed students, and the date teachers reassessed students. Both Nancy and Lois reported that they added to their checklists daily, according to the skills and activities they had instructed each day. However, at the high school level, I did not collect checklists. Instead, I collected a document titled *Unit Plan Activity* that Courtney, the high school English language arts teacher at the Timbers School District, designed for the instructional unit I observed. The purpose of this document was to identify the skills and instructional activities students complete as part of the unit, as well as to establish the sequence and timeline for the unit. However, the common core state standards were not referenced in this document.

K-12 teachers from the Frontier School District were in the process of developing unit outlines to identify the content and skills for each course and grade level in mathematics and English language arts that were aligned to the common core state standards. These guides adhered to a standard Word document format, which school administrators had developed. The document was structured as an expandable table with rows of the document identifying the common core state standards and with columns identifying the corresponding instructional activities and from the district's established curriculum. Elementary and middle-level teachers at the Frontier School District reported that mathematics was their focus for the unit outlines during the 2015-2016 school year, with the intention of developing unit outlines for English language arts during the 2016-2017 school year. I was able to review several unit outlines for the mathematics units that elementary teachers had completed, but they reported that they were still developing the

English language arts unit outlines. High school teachers in the district were responsible for selecting one course each year as the target of their curriculum guides. Cheryl, the high school English teacher, developed unit outlines for the grammar courses for students in Grades 7-8 during the 2015-2016 school year, as she was responsible for teaching grades 7-12. Similar to Courtney in the Timbers School District, Cheryl had developed thematic unit outlines, titled *[Topic] Unit Guide* and *[Topic] Research Project,* which outlined the skills and instructional activities for thematic units. Cheryl's unit outlines included requirements for the projects, student resource pages and graphic organizers, assessment rubrics, and timelines for the projects. However, these unit outlines also did not reference the common core state standards.

Thus, teachers' use of alignment documents at both sites was varied and limited. Elementary and middle school English language arts teachers at the Timbers School District used checklists to align their instruction with the common core state standards, although the format of these checklists was not universal. English language arts teachers at the Frontier School District were in the process of developing unit outlines to align common core state standards with their established curriculum.

Lesson plans. The fifth document that I collected was lesson plans. The purpose of these lesson plans was for teachers to identify the content and skills and instructional activities they planned for each course. While the skills identified on lesson plans corresponded with skills in the common core state standards, teachers did not reference the common core state standards in their lesson plans. I collected lesson plans from five teachers, including all the teachers from the Frontier School District and Courtney, the

high school English teacher from the Timbers School District. All lesson plans were formatted as grid documents and described the lessons scheduled for one week.

At the Timbers School District, K-12 teachers were not required to submit lesson plans to school administrators, and elementary and middle school teachers did not share written lesson plans. At the high school level, Courtney used a grid format for lesson plans, with each box describing the instructional activities planned for each day. However, Courtney did not identify specific common core state standards for the lessons.

At the Frontier School District, K-12 teachers used a common district weekly lesson planning document, titled *[Grade] Lesson Plan*, to record their instructional plans. Teachers reported that they were required to electronically submit their lesson plans to district administrators by the Friday prior to each instructional week. The lesson planning document was structured as an electronic Word document featuring an expandable table for planning, with each column denoting a day of the week and each row identifying the courses each teacher was responsible for teaching. The time frames for the courses were also listed on the document. The specific lesson information included for each day and course varied by teacher, though all teachers identified lesson topics and instructional activities. The lesson plan format did not require teachers to reference the common core state standards in their lesson plans.

At the Frontier School District, Brenda's Grade 1 lesson plans included references to textbook page numbers and worksheets as well as a numbered list of the instructional activities required for each lesson. At the bottom of each cell, Brenda listed the assignment that she had planned for independent homework practice. Brenda's plans also

included a reference to an attached planning sheet, which was a part of the scope and sequence for the *Read Well* reading program and referenced a 10-day instructional block, listing the specific instructional scripts and exercises needed to deliver the program's lessons. Brenda did not identify the common core state standards in her lesson plans.

Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher at the Frontier School District, included unnumbered instructional activities for each course, identifying the targeted skill areas for guided practice, corresponding assessments, and independent homework practice. Concerning reading, Jennifer listed the skill areas of phonics, independent morning work, and journaling. Similar to Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher, Jennifer also referenced attached reading pages from the *Read Well* program, featuring a 10-day lesson block scope and sequence for reading instruction. Jennifer did not identify the common core state standards in her lesson plans.

Susan, the Grade 6 teacher at Frontier School District, included instructional plans in reading for students in Grades 4-6 because she served as the English language arts instructor for all three grade levels. For each day, Susan listed an instructional objective, naming the specific content-based topic as the focus of each lesson. Susan also segmented areas in each lesson block for guided practice, scheduled assessments, and independent homework practice. Susan did not identify the common core state standards in her lesson plans.

At the high school level in the Frontier School District, Cheryl organized her lesson plans differently from the other teachers. Cheryl inserted a page break after each row of the table, so she could separate her weekly lesson plans for each course into

separate pages. Cheryl explained that this format adjustment enabled her to record more specific notes for each lesson and allowed her to separate her plans per assigned course. Her daily lesson plans had four parts, including an initial warm-up activity, a lesson focus structured as a "how to" statement, a class activity section that included a list of sequential processes over the course of the lesson, and a section identifying the day's homework assignment for independent practice. Cheryl also listed summary items at the bottom of each page, structured as a narrative guided by the acronym KUDOS. Included in this narrative were descriptions of what students should know (K) at the conclusion of each week, what students should understand (U) about the week's topic, and what students should do (DO) to build knowledge and understanding. Cheryl did not identify the common core state standards in her lesson plans.

Thus, none of the lesson plans that I collected referenced the common core state standards, as teachers at the two sites were not required to include references to the standards in their lesson plans.

Table 7 is a summary of the categories I constructed for the content analysis of the documents.

Table 7

Summary of Categories for Content Analysis of Documents

Type of Document	*Categories*
D 1: National common core standards	Career and college readiness anchor standards
	Reading standards for literature
	Reading standards for informational text
	Reading standards foundational skills
	Writing standards
	Speaking and listening standards
	Language standards
	Literacy in history/ social studies, science, and technical subjects
D 2: State common core standards	Career and college readiness anchor standards
	Reading standards for literature
	Reading standards for informational text
	Reading standards foundational skills
	Writing standards
	Speaking and listening standards
	Language standards
	Literacy in history/ social studies, science, and technical subjects
D3: Scope and sequence documents	Following district-adopted textbook series for scope and sequence
	Noting alignment of textbook series to common core state standards
	Adapting district-adopted textbook series scope and sequence as needed
	Supplementing scope and sequence with various print and digital resources for middle school ELA courses
	Designing original scope and sequence for high school ELA courses
D 4: Alignment documents	Using checklists at one site to align common core state standards
	Using unit outlines at another site to align common core state standards
	Organizing alignment according to specific content and skills in standards
D 5: Lesson plans	Determining objectives for each lesson
	Determining instructional activities for each lesson
	Identifying target skills for each lesson
	Aligning objectives & instructional activities to common core state standards

Level 2 Data Analysis: Cross-Case

In this second level of data analysis, I determined themes that emerged from the categorized data, again using the constant comparative method that Merriam (2009) recommended for qualitative research. Merriam also described the use of cross-case synthesis as a method of confirming generalizations in a case study. As part of this cross-case synthesis, I reviewed categorized data from one site in relation to the research questions and compared common categories from this site to categorized data from the second site. This process of constant comparison determined the emergent themes and discrepant data that formed the key findings or results for this study.

Themes

Using the constant comparative method that Merriam (2009) recommended for analyzing qualitative data, I determined initial or emergent themes based on comparisons of categories that were specific to individual interview and reflective journal questions, observation criteria, and document types. These emergent themes reflected diverse constructs such as the alignment of curriculum to the common core state standards, curriculum planning processes, interactions with other teachers, instructional practices, and professional development. Following identification of these emergent themes, I analyzed their relationship to the central and related research questions. These final six themes characterize the curricular experiences of K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote districts.

Aligning curricular materials to common core state standards. K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts adjust curriculum materials to align them with the common core state standards.

Aligning instructional practices to common core state standards. K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts adjusted instructional practices to align them with the common core state standards.

Engaging in limited vertical collaboration. K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts engaged in limited vertical collaboration to align curriculum with the common core state standards.

Engaging in limited interdisciplinary collaboration. K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts engaged in limited interdisciplinary collaboration to align curriculum with the common core state standards.

Engaging in professional development. K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts engaged in professional development activities and seek professional resources to support their alignment of curricula to the common core state standards.

Using different grade level approaches to align planned and lived curricula. K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public schools used different grade level approaches to align their planned and lived curricula.

Discrepant Data

For case study research, discrepant data are data that challenges the theoretical proposition of the study. The theoretical proposition for this study was that K-12 English

language arts teachers in rural remote schools aligned their planned curriculum, represented by written units and lessons, and the lived curriculum, represented by their classroom instruction, with the common core state standards.

During data collection and analysis, some discrepant data challenged this theoretical proposition. Although some evidence of alignment of the planned curriculum to the common core state standards at all levels was found, some discrepancies between the alignment documents that elementary and secondary school teachers shared was also found. Elementary and middle school teachers at both sites provided evidence that they followed scope and sequence documents published by their selected textbook reading series; however, middle school teachers reported that they adjusted and supplemented this scope and sequence. High school teachers did not provide any evidence of written scope and sequence documents. The only planned curriculum documents that referenced the common core state standards were alignment checklists and some unit planning guides.

In relation to the lived curriculum, alignment was even less apparent. Even though observed instructional lessons included some of the content and skills related to the common core state standards, teachers at both sites did not state the common core state standards explicitly to students as part of their instruction. This explicit statement of the common core state standards in the lived curriculum is important because it clarifies learning goals for students as well as teachers. However, observation of this alignment was limited because only one instructional lesson was observed for each teacher, so this discrepancy would need further exploration.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is critical because it ensures that research design and investigation are through and complete. According to Merriam (2009), trustworthiness is evident in rigorous qualitative research. Four research constructs contribute to the rigor of this research, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Merriam (2009) contended that qualitative research is credible when the findings of a study accurately represent the reality of the researched phenomenon. For this qualitative study, I used the strategy of data triangulation to ensure the credibility of this research, as Yin (2014) recommended. In addition, I used the strategies of member checks and adequate engagement in data collection. I used data triangulation by comparing and contrasting the setting, the participants, and the findings that emerged from an analysis of the data collected for this study, which included the interview protocol, instructional observations, and reflective journals. Concerning member checks, I asked participants to review the tentative findings of this study to ensure that the data were representative of their experiences and that the findings were plausible. Concerning adequate engagement in data collection, I visited each site for a two-day period to ensure that I had collected sufficient interview and observation data and documents for this case study.

Transferability

The external validity of research relates to the applicability of the research to additional situations. Following recommendations from Merriam (2009), I used the strategy of rich, thick description to ensure that the setting, participants, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and findings were represented in detail. As Yin (2014) suggested, I also presented a cross-case synthesis to strengthen the transferability of the findings. I also used the strategy of typicality, as Merriam recommended, by selecting two public school districts that were typical of rural remote public school districts located in this western state. Finally, I used the strategy of maximum variation by selecting participants from all instructional levels, including elementary, middle, and high school.

Dependability

Merriam (2009) defined dependability is as the reliability or consistency of qualitative research. Dependability, Merriam contended, can be supported through the use of such strategies as triangulation, an audit trail, and peer review. I used the strategy of triangulation by comparing and contrasting data from multiple sources at two sites and from multiple participants to determine key findings. I also used the strategy of an audit trail by maintaining a reflective journal to establish a record of my research, as well as to facilitate adequate reflection on my role as a researcher. In addition, I used the strategy of peer review by asking a panel of colleagues with advanced degrees to review my research instruments for alignment with the research questions.

Confirmability

Merriam (2009) noted that the objectivity of qualitative research determines its confirmability. According to Merriam, qualitative research is inherently biased because the researcher serves as a research instrument during data collection. In this case study, I served as the sole researcher and was responsible for the collection, management, and analysis of all research data. In order to minimize this potential bias, I used the strategy of maintaining a reflective journal while conducting the study. This journal enabled me to reflect on my research, considering my personal responses to the data and the decisions that I made during data collection and analysis.

Results

The results of this study are presented in relation to the related research questions and central research question for this study. During data analysis, I constructed categories for each data source, including participant interviews, instructional observations, reflective journals, and curriculum documents. Based on patterns that I found in each data source, I identified emergent themes and reduced these initial themes to six major themes that were directly related to the central and related research questions. These themes addressed specific aspects of the planned and lived curriculums, including curriculum alignment, curriculum planning, instructional practices, teacher collaboration, and professional development. Table 8 presents a summary of the results for the central and related research questions, followed by a discussion of the findings. The findings for each related research question are presented first, because these findings are based on the themes for this study. Findings related to the central research question are presented at

the end of this section because they are a synthesis of the findings from the related research questions.

Table 8

Summary of Results

Research Question	*Supporting Data*
RRQ1: Aligning curricular materials with CCSS	Developing new processes to align instruction to CCSS
	Participating in district and regional training on CCSS
	Using textbook series aligned with common core state standards
	Using textbook series published prior to the CCSS
	Following scope and sequence from adopted reading series
	Adjusting scope and sequence from adopted reading series
	Using standards checklists
	Using common format for unit outlines
	Using weekly lesson plans
	Supplementing units and lessons with print and digital materials
	Creating unit outlines independently
RRQ2: Adjusting instructional practices to align with CCSS	Reviewing CCSS to monitor instruction
	Using alignment documents to monitor instruction
	Implementing specific instructional strategies for alignment
	Self-selecting instructional strategies
	Supplementing units and lessons with print and digital materials
	Creating unit outlines independently
RRQ3: Collaborating vertically to align curriculum with CCSS	Using limited time to collaborate with other ELA teachers
	Lacking colleagues at same grade level/ content area
	Developing curriculum independently
	Seeking to collaborate with teachers in outside districts
	Following scope and sequence of district-adopted texts
	Developing curriculum for sequential grade levels
	Desiring increased collaboration with other teachers

RRQ4: Collaborating with other content teachers	Participating in informal conversations
	Participating in district-level staff meetings
	Developing curriculum independently
	Seeking professional development opportunities individually
	Desiring increased collaboration with other teachers
RRQ5: Engaging in CCSS professional development	Participating in district professional development
	Participating in regional professional development
	Seeking professional development opportunities individually
	Desiring increased professional development opportunities
CRRQ: Aligning planned and lived curriculum with CCSS	Following scope and sequence of district-adopted texts
	Using textbook series aligned with common core state standards
	Developing alignment documents individually
	Using alignment documents to monitor instruction
	Developing common unit outlines aligned to CCSS
	Supplementing units and lessons with print and digital materials
	Creating unit outlines independently
	Using limited time to collaborate with other ELA teachers
	Seeking professional development opportunities individually
	Desiring increased collaboration with other teachers

Related Research Question 1

This related research question asked, "*How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts adjust curricular materials to align with the common core state standards?"* The key finding for this related research question was that K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts adjusted curricular materials to align with the common core state standards by (a) developing new curriculum development processes to support their alignment work,

which included relating the established district English language arts curriculum to the content and skills identified in the common core state standards, (b) acknowledging the situational limitations in their curriculum work, due to conditions present in rural remote environments, and (c) developing curriculum materials independently, with limited district and regional support.

This finding was supported by data from all sources. Concerning the interviews, all eight teachers reported adjusting curricular materials to align them with the common core state standards by developing new processes for aligning their instruction to the common core state standards. At the Frontier School District, teachers described a district-wide process for developing unit outlines that the district initiated at the beginning of the school year. Susan, the Grade 6 teacher, described the steps teachers in the district had taken to review the established curriculum, which was driven by district-adopted textbooks. Teachers then compared their current instructional practice with the new content and skills outlined in the common core state standards, making adjustments and additions to the curriculum as needed to ensure they addressed the common core state standards in the updated curriculum. At the Timbers School District, Angie, the kindergarten teacher, and Courtney, the high school teacher, discussed their use of print and online materials to supplement the curriculum when needed. Seven of the teachers also recognized situational limitations in their alignment efforts due to the nature of rural remote teaching, such as infrequent time for curriculum collaboration. Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher at the Frontier School District, described how the curriculum had been revised multiple times in her 33 years of teaching in the district, while Jennifer, the Grade 2

teacher, believed that curriculum development was a new and unfamiliar process because teachers were participating in this process for the first time in her 4 years of teaching in the district. Cheryl, the high school teacher at the Frontier School District, described her knowledge of curriculum development as "happenstance" because she noted that most of her curricular knowledge developed through informal conversations with other English teachers outside the district, rather than through planned curriculum development work within the school district. Similarly, Lois, the Grade 6 teacher at the Timbers School District, believed location limited her interactions with other teachers because curriculum planning opportunities in the region required her to travel to other towns several hours from the school district. In addition, seven teachers reported that they adjusted curricular materials independently because they were the sole teachers at their assigned grade levels. Angie, the kindergarten teacher at the Timbers School District, recalled that "We were asked at one point to come up with our own grade level curriculum." Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher at the Timbers School District, and Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher at the Frontier School District, described how they checked their instruction of the common core state standards to ensure they provided instruction for all required content and skills. Cheryl, the high school English teacher at the Frontier School District, described her reliance on a variety of textbooks and online resources to determine scope and sequence because she was not aware of the curriculum development work of other teachers in the district.

In relation to classroom observations, all eight teachers adjusted curricular materials in order to align them with the common core state standards by including

targeted content and skills in their lessons. Five teachers introduced content and skills in separate instructional blocks, and three teachers integrated content and skills into complex learner tasks. However, none of the teachers posted or named the common core state standards related to the observed lessons.

Concerning reflective journals, teachers described how district and school administrators and regional experts supported their work of adjusting curricular materials to align them with the common core state standards. Five of the teachers wrote that school administrators led the initial introduction to the common core state standards. Additionally, four teachers commented on regional experts who delivered presentations on the integration of the common core state standards. All of the teachers described these training sessions on the common core state standards as introductory in nature, and none of the teachers indicated their involvement in any additional training sessions related to the common core state standards.

In relation to documents, all eight teachers shared documents that illustrated how they adjusted curricular materials to align them with the common core state standards. At the elementary level, Angie, the kindergarten teacher at the Timbers School District, Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher at the Frontier School District, and Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher at the Frontier School District, shared scope and sequence documents that reflected the scope and sequence of the district-adopted reading series, however, the editions used in both districts were purchased and adopted before development of the national common core standards and the adoption of the common core state standards. While many of the skills listed in the scope and sequence documents corresponded with

the common core state standards, none of the teachers shared documentation that explained this alignment process. Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher at the Timbers School District also used an alignment checklist to monitor when she taught skills from the common core state standards. At the middle school level, Lois, the Grade 6 teacher at the Timbers School District, used a similar alignment checklist, monitoring when she taught, retaught, and assessed skills from the common core state standards. Susan, the Grade 6 teacher at the Frontier School District, and Lois, the Grade 6 teacher at the Timbers School District, shared their course textbook series, which were aligned with the national common core state standards and purchased after the adoption of the common core state standards. Cheryl, the high school teacher at the Frontier School District, and Courtney, the high school teacher at the Timbers School District, shared unit outlines that they had created independently. These unit guides included objectives, instructional tasks, prompting questions, and timelines for students.

Related Research Question 2

This related research question asked, "*How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts adjust instructional practices to align with the common core state standards?"* The key finding for this related research question was that K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts adjusted instructional practices to align with common core state standards by (a) implementing instructional strategies that support student's learning of new content and skills, such as using cues and questions to prompt student thinking and whole student instruction, followed by guided practice of targeted skills and (b) selecting specific

strategies as a result of participating in self-identified training sessions, courses, and technology opportunities in order to independently improve their instructional practice related to the standards.

This finding was supported by data from all sources. Concerning the interviews, all eight teachers described adjusting instructional practices to align with the common core state standards by using specific strategies. Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher at Frontier School District, and Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher at the Timbers school district, each described using checklists to align their lessons with the content and skills listed in the common core state standards. Courtney, the high school teacher, described specific instructional strategies, such as cooperative learning, that she used to enhance students' interaction with content and skills related to the common core state standards:

> In designing my lessons, I try to make sure that we're doing argument writing. that we are looking at complex texts. We do a lot of cooperative learning or group work [and] a lot of discussion and doing things together. I find that really gets us to a higher level.

Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher at the Frontier School District, described how she managed time constraints in order to introduce new content and skills related to the standards as well as maintain the quality of existing lessons. Angie, the kindergarten teacher at the Timbers School District, and Susan, the Grade 6 teacher at the Frontier School District, referenced online resources they regularly incorporated into their instruction to provide students with rich learning experiences related to the common core state standards.

During classroom observations, all eight teachers adjusted their instructional practice to align with the common core state standards by using a variety of instructional strategies to integrate new content and skills in their lessons. As a strategy for introducing new information to students, seven teachers used whole group instruction. In addition, seven teachers used cues and questions to guide students' thinking about new content and skills related to the standards. To increase the depth of student understanding of new content and skills related to the standards, seven teachers used guided practice and small group instruction to encourage students to practice new content and skills.

In relation to the reflective journals, four of the teachers described adjusting instructional practices to align with the common core state standards by using the standards to clarify their instructional goals and practices. Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher at the Timbers School District, described her attention to goal-setting and the importance of teaching students relevant content to improve their educational success. Angie, the kindergarten teacher at Timbers School District, wrote, "It has enhanced some areas and reinforced other areas. [It is] always good to keep up on the best practices." Lois, the Grade 6 teacher at the same district, wrote about her use of common core vocabulary to connect students to new content and skills featured in the standards.

In relation to documents, three teachers shared instructional planning materials that they used to adjust their instructional practice to align with common core state standards, particularly relating to self-monitoring their instruction. Lois, the Grade 6 teacher at the Timbers School District, and Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher at the same district, shared standards checklist documents they used to record their instruction of the

common core state standards, noting the dates and lessons for each standard. Cheryl, the high school teacher at the Frontier School District, developed lesson guides based on the Know-Understand-Do (KUDOS) strategy as well as project guides for units. In addition, five teachers shared instructional planning materials, including unit outlines and lesson plans, but the lesson plans were not aligned to the common core state standards.

Related Research Question 3

This related research question asked, "*How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts collaborate vertically to connect their curriculum across grade levels while aligning their curriculum with the common core state standards?"* The key finding for this related research question was that K-12 English language teachers in rural remote public school districts collaborated vertically to align their course curricula across grade levels by using limited opportunities to plan and develop curriculum with other teachers, although much of their curriculum development work was independent.

This finding was supported by all data sources except the observations of instructional lessons. Concerning the interviews, six teachers described how they collaborated vertically to align their course curricula across grade levels by meeting with other English language arts teachers in their district. Susan, the Grade 6 teacher at the Frontier School District, and Angie, the kindergarten teacher at the Timbers School District, mentioned meetings with teachers from other grade levels to discuss curriculum. At the elementary level, Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher at the Frontier School District, explained the value in conversations with the teacher in the grade below her: "I really

have to work a lot with our first-grade teacher so I can see where my kids are going to be at . . . . I guess in a way we have to collaborate to keep our classrooms moving smoothly." On the other hand, seven teachers described how they worked independently to develop the curriculum for their specific grade level English language arts course because there were limited opportunities to meet with other teachers. Susan, the Grade 6 teacher at the Frontier School District, explained, "You know pretty much everyone is on their own because there is only one person that is teaching that one grade that knows what is going on." Courtney, the high school teacher at the Timbers School District, also viewed collegial interaction as minimal. She noted, "We don't work together to make sure that we're reaching those standards. Not that I don't think anybody is trying to. It's just that we're not working to help each other to do it. It's just all individual." Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher at the Frontier School District, recalled some curriculum meetings that included discussions with full-time staff about curriculum as well as release time for teachers to work individually in their classrooms. Lois, the Grade 6 teacher at the Timbers School District, recalled some training that she attended during her first year of teaching in the district, but noted that similar training had not been available in the following 3 years.

In relation to the reflective journals, six of the teachers wrote that their experience with vertical collaboration in their district was limited because collaborative planning was not scheduled into the academic year. Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher at the Frontier School District, wrote, "I wouldn't say there has been much interaction concerning the common core." Similarly, Courtney, the high school teacher at the Timbers School

District, noted that English language arts teachers in the district, "seldom meet to discuss teaching English or the common core state standards." Courtney also described how she and the two other secondary English language arts teachers in the district sought collegial training and interaction outside the district. Cheryl, the high school teacher at the Frontier School District, and Angie, the kindergarten teacher at the Timbers School District, commented that their interactions were mostly with teachers from other school districts responsible for teaching at the same grade level, rather than with teachers in their districts.

In relation to documents, elementary teachers in both districts demonstrated the vertical alignment of their materials by adhering to the scope and sequence of the district-adopted reading series. Because middle school and high school teachers were responsible for providing instruction at multiple grade levels and for multiple English language arts courses, they described their work on vertically aligning these courses. However, they did not provide written documentation of this vertical alignment work.

Related Research Question 4

This related research question asked, "*How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts collaborate with teachers of other content areas to support the implementation of common core literacy standards?"* The key finding for this related research question was that K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts collaborated with teachers of other content areas to support implementation of the common core state literacy standards by (a) informally interacting with teachers of other content areas concerning curriculum development, (b)

developing curriculum independently, and (c) requesting more formalized and continuous curricular planning opportunities with colleagues.

This finding was supported by data from two data sources: interviews and reflective journals. Teachers did not share any documents that illustrated their collaboration with teachers of other content areas. Concerning the interviews, six teachers reported that they collaborated with teachers of other content areas through informal conversations to support the implementation of the common core state literacy standards. According to Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher at the Frontier School District, teachers interacted with all staff members during the school year at four scheduled sessions after school, with each session lasting three hours. However, Brenda acknowledged that teachers often used this time for various planning needs, including individual classroom preparation time. Similarly, Susan, the Grade 6 teacher, described some meetings in which teachers discussed the common core state standards as well as the alignment of major curricular transitions within the district, such as the transition from middle school to high school. Courtney, the high school teacher at the Timbers School District, described her interaction with other teachers as casual. She explained:

> I develop everything for my courses. I don't take it from other teachers . . . . I developed it all just from other professional development and trying to find materials that help reach that skill, whatever we're working on.

Teachers also advocated for more scheduled teacher collaboration time. Cheryl, the high school teacher at the Frontier School District, described her conversations with other teachers, emphasizing the importance of teachers attending training sessions held at local,

regional, and national levels to increase the frequency of collegial interactions. Nancy, the Grade 6 teacher at the Timbers School District, believed that student learning would improve if teachers had additional time to work together on curriculum planning. Similarly, Lois, the Grade 6 teacher, described her appreciation for the regional curriculum development meetings she was able to attend and noted that such training sessions should be offered more frequently.

In relation to the reflective journals, five of the teachers wrote that they used meetings and training sessions to collaborate with teachers of other content areas to support the implementation of the common core state literacy standards. Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher at the Frontier School District, noted that discussions involving teachers of all content areas were part of all staff meetings, even though such meetings included numerous discussion topics. Angie, the kindergarten teacher at the Timbers School District, recalled staff meetings related to specific content areas but noted that these meetings had not happened for several years. Teachers often chose to attend training sessions as part of their own professional development. Lois, the Grade 6 teacher at the Timbers School District, Cheryl, the high school teacher at the Frontier District, and Courtney, the high school teacher at the Timbers School District, described their efforts to participate in training sessions, summer programs, and continuing education courses to maintain their subject expertise and to interact with colleagues. Cheryl, the high school teacher at the Frontier School District, noted that this independent training led her to interact mostly with other English teachers.

Related Research Question 5

This related research question asked, "*How do English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts engage in professional development activities concerning the integration of the common core state standards into their planned curriculum and instructional practices?"* The key finding for this related research question was that K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts engaged in professional development activities concerning the integration of the common core state standards into their planned curriculum and instructional practices by (a) participating in limited local and regional trainings, guided by school administrators and state-level experts, and (b) requesting professional development opportunities, especially concerning additional collaboration time with colleagues and greater access to curriculum experts.

This finding was supported by data collected from three data sources: interviews, reflective journals, and documents. Concerning the interviews, six teachers described how they engaged in professional development activities concerning the alignment of the common core state standards to their instruction by participating in district and regional training sessions. Three teachers described district sessions, which were led by district administrators, while three teachers described regional professional development sessions, which were led by regional and state experts. Courtney, the high school English teacher at the Timbers School District, recalled, "Our curriculum consortium has tried to offer days where like all the English teachers get together because they're so remote. So, we've had some days like that, that are good, but it just isn't enough." Brenda, the Grade

1 teacher at the Frontier School District, described the positive impact of having clear administrative leadership to direct curriculum development work so that all teachers in the district follow the same process. Cheryl, the high school English teacher at the Frontier School District, emphasized the importance of establishing ongoing practices of collegial interaction and curriculum development work. Additionally, five teachers recommended additional professional development opportunities. Angie, the kindergarten teacher at the Timbers School District, and Susan, the Grade 6 teacher at the Frontier School District, recommended that experts should provide training at the site. Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher at the Timbers School District, suggested that curriculum coaching would help teachers in curriculum design and implementation. Lois, the Grade 6 teacher at the Timbers School District, and Courtney, the high school teacher at the same school district, believed that collaborative time to discuss curriculum with other teachers in their district as well as with teachers in the surrounding region would be beneficial.

In their reflective journals, teachers recognized diverse professional development resources and made varied recommendations concerning the expansion of professional development opportunities. Six teachers described training sessions that school district administrators led, and four teachers referred to regional training sessions that regional and state level experts led. Cheryl, the high school teacher at the Frontier School District, and Courtney, the high school teacher at the Timbers School District, wrote that district-led training sessions were part of the professional development related to PIR days held at various times during the school year. Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher at the Frontier School District, and Courtney, the high school teacher at the Timbers School District,

wrote district leadership had offered professional development trainings as one-time meetings in their school districts. Angie, the kindergarten teacher at the Timbers School District, also considered training to be limited, because these sessions were held several years ago and not been available recently.

Four teachers shared documents related to professional development opportunities regarding the common core state standards. Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher at the Timbers School District, and Lois, the Grade 6 teacher at the same district, shared standards checklists that they had collaboratively developed at regional consortium trainings. Similarly, Courtney, the high school English teacher at the same district, shared common core alignment documents she had gathered while attending regional consortium trainings. Courtney and Cheryl, the high school English teacher at the Frontier School District, shared unit and project outlines they had developed while participating in summer courses as part of their own professional development plans.

Central Research Question

The central research question asked, "*How do K-12 English language arts teachers in two rural remote public school districts align the planned curriculum, represented by the common core state standards and district curricular materials, with the lived curriculum that they implement in their courses?"* The first key finding for this central research question was that K-12 English language arts teachers in two rural remote public school districts aligned the planned curriculum with the lived curriculum by (a) working independently to align their assigned grade-level curriculum with the content and skills related to the common core state standards, (b) using limited collegial

interaction both in and outside of the district to support their work, and (c) requesting expansion of this collaboration to support their curriculum development. A second key finding was that K-12 English language arts teachers in two rural remote public school districts aligned the planned curriculum with the lived curriculum in three different ways: (a) elementary teachers aligned the content and skills related to the common core state standards by using the district- adopted textbook reading series and its related scope and sequence to support their units and lessons, (b) middle-level teachers aligned the content and skills related to the common core state standards by adapting and supplementing the district-adopted textbooks series in conjunction with additional print and digital materials, and (c) high school teachers aligned the content and skills related to the common core state standards by identifying skills from the common core state standards and by selecting a variety of print and digital instructional materials to support their units and lessons.

These findings were supported by data from all sources. Concerning the interviews, all eight teachers described their efforts to align their planned curriculum and their lived curriculum with the common core state standards by using specific instructional strategies. Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher at the Timbers School District, described a daily curriculum review process that she followed to ensure she was teaching the content and skills related to the standards. Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher at the Frontier School District, described a similar process of matching her instruction to the common core state standards. Lois, the Grade 6 teacher at the Timbers School District, described

the personal approach to curriculum alignment that teachers in rural school districts experience:

> I do appreciate that the administration lets you know the standards . . . Here are my standards, and I get to figure out how I am teaching them. I can find my way of teaching them. I am not told exactly how to teach them. I get to bring my own personality and choose lessons that I know work for my teaching style.

At the elementary level, Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher at the Frontier School District, and Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher at the same district, described their implementation of the district-adopted reading series titled *Read Well*, which was the core curricular material. Similarly, Angie, the kindergarten teacher, and Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher in the Timbers School District, identified the district-adopted reading series titled *Storytown* as the core curricular material. Both of these reading series also determined the scope and sequence for their English language arts courses, as elementary teachers reported their adherence to the published programs' scope and sequence documents. Angie added:

> I guess I believe my role is to follow the curriculum that our district has adopted . . . It's important to follow whatever curriculum we've adopted faithfully because whatever we have at our grade level, it builds on to go to the next grade level. So, follow what's in your curriculum, make sure it's covered, and then, if you have extra time, you can add your extras in.

At the middle school level, Lois, the Grade 6 teacher at the Timbers School District, and Susan, the Grade 6 teacher at the Frontier School District, also described a district-adopted textbook series as the core curricular materials. Both teachers described using the

textbook as the scope for their thematic units and lessons, and then adjusted the sequence of the units and supplemented the units with additional print and digital materials. Susan explained, "I don't love [the textbook series], but I make it work. And I also supplement with a lot of novel units." At the high school level, Courtney and Cheryl approached curriculum development differently, aligning various text and online resources to the content and skills related to the standards that they had included in their units and lessons. Courtney described her alignment goal as follows, "I'm trying to make my students into life-long learners . . . I'm trying to develop skills that will help them achieve whatever goals they want. And I do look at some standards and try to make sure that they get some opportunities to meet those standards." Cheryl also described her curriculum development process for aligning to the standards, "So we do have sets of old textbooks . . . so I pull from it what I think this particular class would respond to and somebody else might not, but I still do the same types of writing exercises."

All eight teachers also acknowledged their limited collaborative curriculum work with other teachers. At the elementary level, Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher at the Frontier School District, described her appreciation for curriculum planning time with Brenda, the Grade 1 teacher in the same district. Similarly, Angie, the kindergarten teacher in the Timbers School District, described her appreciation of the RTI process, which required regular meetings with other elementary teachers. At the middle school level, Lois, the Grade 6 teacher in the Timbers School District, described the value in attending regional curriculum trainings. Susan, the Grade 6 teacher in the Frontier School District, met regularly with the two other Grades 4-6 teachers in her district. At the high school level,

Cheryl, the high school teacher at the Frontier School District, described her efforts to collaborate with high school teachers outside her district, "You know I make a lot of calls. I've called other teachers in nearby schools and asked, collaborated with them."

All eight teachers expressed an interest in expanding collegial interactions inside their school district as well as beyond their district. At the elementary level, Angie, the kindergarten teacher at the Frontier District, and Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher at the same district, advocated for increased collaboration time and access to curriculum experts on-site at their school. At the middle school level, Lois, the Grade 6 teacher at the Timbers School District, noted that regional curriculum trainings were beneficial, but there had only been one scheduled training session in her years of teaching in the district. At the high school level, Courtney, the high school English teacher at the Timbers School District, emphasized the value in peer communication and collaboration:

> We need some serious time to do some teachers teaching teachers work, where we see what other people are doing. Teachers, I think, really learn best from each other and not from guest speakers that come in from other states and things. [We need] just some real time to look at the standards and look at how we can meet them.

Cheryl, the high school teacher at the Frontier School District, also expressed interest in expanding her contact with other teachers, adding, "I am an older, newer teacher, so any training opportunity that comes my way, I take it, and so that is always my secondary goal, always going to talk to other teachers." Cheryl also described the value in

discussing curriculum materials with teachers in other districts to identify potential curriculum resources.

During classroom observations, all eight teachers aligned the lived curriculum in their classrooms with the planned curriculum in their unit and lesson plans by presenting lessons that featured English language arts content and skills related to the common core state standards. At the elementary level, Brenda the Grade 1 teacher at the Frontier School District, and Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher at the same district, adhered to scripts from the district-adopted reading series. Similarly, Angie, the kindergarten teacher at the Timbers School District, followed the instructional activity sequence of the district-adopted reading series during her lesson. At the Grade 4 classroom in the Timbers School District, Nancy used the district-adopted reading series as well as supplemental print materials to deliver a lesson related to sentence structures. At the middle school level, Lois, the Grade 6 teacher at the Timbers School District, and Susan, the Grade 6 teacher at the Frontier School District, taught lessons that included multiple standards-based instructional activities. In their lessons, several activities were textbook-based and others were teacher-developed. At the high school level, Courtney, the teacher at the Timbers School District, and Cheryl, the teacher at the Frontier School District, engaged students in teacher-designed lessons that featured multiple common core state standards. Courtney instructed students to create rubrics for evaluating journalism articles, and Cheryl instructed students to conduct a critical analysis of novel passages.

In relation to the reflective journals, five teachers described their alignment of planned and lived curriculums to the common core state standards as independent work.

Additionally, two teachers wrote that their autonomous curriculum development was due to the fact that they were the sole teacher in their district at their assigned grade level. Five teachers also reported that they had limited opportunities to interact with other teachers concerning curriculum development. Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher at the Frontier School District, wrote, "I wouldn't say there has been much interaction concerning the common core." Five teachers described one-time meetings or training sessions as their primary opportunity to collaborate with teachers of the same grade levels from other districts. Teachers were interested in expanding this contact and offered several solutions. At the Frontier School district, Jennifer, the Grade 2 teacher, and Cheryl, the high school English teacher, suggested that curriculum examples from teachers in other districts would be helpful. Lois, the Grade 6 teacher at the Timbers School District, suggested online collaboration as an alternative to physical travel. Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher at the Timbers School District, advocated for on-site expert coaching to support curriculum implementation.

Documents shared by the teachers demonstrated their individual efforts to align the planned curriculum with the common core state standards. At the Frontier School District, English language arts teachers were in the process of developing common unit outlines for their courses, listing the common core state standards along with the district's current curriculum resources. These unit outlines represented the district's effort to uniformly integrate the common core state standards into the planned curriculum. At the Timbers School District, Nancy, the Grade 4 teacher, and Lois, the Grade 6 teacher, shared checklist documents they used to align their instruction to the common core state

standards. At the high school level in both school districts, Cheryl, the teacher at the Frontier School District, and Courtney, the teacher at the Timbers School District, shared unit outlines and project guides that they had developed independently for their English language arts courses. Cheryl included references for targeted skills in these project guides, and Courtney included numbered steps describing the skills students needed to demonstrate to complete assigned projects. However, these high school documents did not specifically refer to the common core state standards.

Summary

This chapter was about the results of this study. In this chapter, the research setting and participant demographics were described. Data collection procedures were also presented, including how interview data, observation data, reflective journal data, and documents were collected. For the single case analysis, specific procedures were followed. The interview data were analyzed according to similar and different responses of participants to each individual interview question. The observation data were analyzed according to similarities and differences in the coded field notes for specific observation criterion. The reflective journal data were analyzed according to similar and different responses of participants to each journal question. The document data were analyzed according to document purpose, structure, content, and use. For the cross-case analysis, emergent themes and discrepant data across all data sources were presented. A discussion about the evidence of trustworthiness for this qualitative research related to the four constructs of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability was also

included. The results for this study were analyzed in relation to the related research questions and the central research question.

In Chapter 5, the discussion, conclusions, and recommendations for the study are presented. An interpretation of the findings is also presented. Limitations for the study, recommendations for future research, and implications for social change are also discussed.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe how K-12 English language arts teachers in two rural remote public school districts aligned the planned curriculum, represented by the common core state standards and district curricular materials, with the lived curriculum that they implemented in their courses. This purpose was well-suited to a multiple case study research design because teachers implement curriculum in complex environments, and therefore, data related to the phenomenon of curricular alignment was collected from diverse sources to provide a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. Yin (2014) also maintained that such phenomenon should be explored in an authentic environment, which for this study was the English language arts classroom setting. In addition, two cases of curricular alignment were investigated in order to generate richer data for a cross-case synthesis. This study was conducted because limited research exists about how K-12 English language arts classroom teachers align the planned curricula of the common core standards to the lived curricula that they use in their classrooms. This study was conducted to contribute to the body of research on the curricular alignment process because the knowledge and experiences of rural remote teachers are valuable to the ongoing national conversation regarding the development of nationalized standards and curricula.

The key findings of this study relate to the curricular materials, instructional practices, collaborative work, and professional development experiences of rural remote teachers. In relation to curricular materials, teachers developed new curricular process, managed situational limitations in their work, and worked independently to develop

course curricula. Concerning instructional practices, teachers used a variety of instructional strategies to integrate the common core state standards into their instruction, including using alignment documents to monitor instruction, creating unit outlines independently, and supplementing units and lessons with print and digital materials. Regarding teacher collaboration, teachers collaborated vertically with other English language arts teachers through limited planning opportunities and continued to develop curricular units on their own. Teachers also collaborated with teachers of other content areas through informal conversations and district meetings and requested increased collaborative time to improve curricular planning. Teachers also participated in local and regional professional development, though these opportunities were limited. In addition, teachers were interested in expanding professional development opportunities.

Interpretation of Findings

The interpretation of findings for this study is based on the conceptual framework and the literature review. The interpretation of findings for the related research questions is presented first and is anchored to the themes for this study. This interpretation is followed by the interpretation of findings for the central research question, which is a synthesis of the related research questions. The findings for the central research question are also interpreted in relation to the conceptual framework for this study, which was based on Aoki's (1993) theory of curriculum, which included two critical components of curriculum, which are the planned curriculum and the lived curriculum.

Aligning Curricular Materials

This first related research question asked, "*How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts adjust curricular materials to align with the common core state standards?"* The key finding for this related research question was that K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts adjusted curricular materials to align with the common core state standards by (a) developing new curriculum development processes to support their alignment work, which included relating the established district English language arts curriculum to the content and skills identified in the common core state standards, (b) acknowledging the situational limitations in their curriculum work, due to conditions present in rural remote environments, and (c) developing curriculum materials independently, with limited district and regional support.

Research supports this finding. In a study about how educators have implemented the common core state standards, Porter et al. (2015) that found educators are concerned and frustrated about selecting new materials for major curriculum changes, particularly when they believe they have incorporated existing textbook materials into their plans. Porter et al. concluded that the implementation of the common core standards has impacted the workload of teachers by increasing their curricular planning time. Porter et al. recommended that district and school administrators increase their support of teachers' implementation of the common core state standards. In earlier research, Powell et al. (2009) explored changes in curriculum in rural schools following the passage of the NCLB Act and found that elementary teachers have often adopted basal textbooks in an

effort to align their instruction across grade levels. Powell et al. concluded that this change in instructional materials limits the flexibility teachers and administrators have in structuring courses. Waller and Barrentine (2015) investigated the views of rural teachers about place-based education and found that teachers reported adjusting the scope and sequence of basal reading programs to include additional teacher-selected materials is a difficult process. Waller and Barrentine recommended that teachers continue to adjust curricular materials to include content and skills viewed important to rural education, even though the alignment of these materials with purchased reading programs is challenging. In this study, elementary school teachers used district-adopted reading programs that were adopted prior to the approval of the common core state standards, while middle school teachers used basal textbooks that they supplemented with some additional curricular materials and high school teachers utilized assorted print and digital materials to align their instruction to the standards. This finding contrasts with the findings of Porter et al. because teachers in this study continued to use district-adopted reading programs for alignment.

Physical and professional isolation are also identified as situational limitations for rural teachers. In a significant study, Burton et al. (2013) performed a narrative analysis of rural education studies from 1970 to 2010 and found isolation was the most prominent storyline in the literature, especially concerning limited professional connections and resources. Burton et al. recommended that future researchers investigate how professional isolation impacts both rural and urban teachers. In a synthesis of international rural education issues and responses, Stelmach (2011) also identified physical isolation as a

barrier for rural teachers. This research is consistent with the earlier research of Budge (2006) who also determined that professional isolation was a prominent challenge for rural teachers.

Aligning Instructional Practices

This second related research question asked, "*How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts adjust instructional practices to align with the common core state standards?"* The key finding for this related research question was that K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts adjusted instructional practices to align with common core state standards by (a) implementing instructional strategies that support student's learning of new content and skills, such as using cues and questions to prompt student thinking and whole student instruction, followed by guided practice of targeted skills and (b) selecting specific strategies as a result of participating in self-identified training sessions, courses, and technology opportunities in order to independently improve their instructional practice related to the standards.

Research supports this finding. According to Marzano et al. (2013), successful implementation of the common core standards requires that teachers appropriately align their curriculum materials and instructional practices with the common core state standards, so teachers and students can effectively build on content and skills that have been identified as critical for college and career readiness. In other supporting research, Ball and Forzani (2011) discussed how the implementation of the common core state standards has driven educational improvement and concluded that such reform is

dependent upon the instructional practices of classroom teachers. According to Ball and Forzani, the instructional practices teachers use must anchor student learning to the goals outlined in the common core state standards. In other foundational research concerning instructional strategies, Marzano et al. (2001) identified the following nine effective instructional strategies that support student learning: identifying similarities and differences, summarizing and note taking, reinforcing effort and providing recognition, homework and practice, nonlinguistic representations, cooperative learning, setting objectives and providing feedback, generating and testing hypotheses, and cues, questions, and advance organizers. For this study, data analysis revealed that teachers used seven of these strategies in observed lessons, not including identifying similarities and differences and generating and testing hypotheses. This finding indicates that the use of research-based instructional strategies is particularly relevant to the implementation of the common core state standards because these instructional strategies and standards are cross-curricular in nature.

Research about teachers' selection of instructional strategies also supports this finding. Kissling (2014) examined how teachers revise curriculum in light of their lived classroom experiences and found that teachers are impacted by their past experiences as they develop curriculum. Kissling concluded that teachers are diverse in their backgrounds, which also generates diversity in their teaching. Kissling recommended that this diversity be embraced as a strength in curricular planning because teachers develop their own living curriculum when they are teaching. In a discussion of the common core state standards, Hess and McShane (2013) noted that curricular materials that are labeled

as aligned to the common core state standards may not truly be aligned. In light of this fact, Hess and McShane emphasized the need for teachers to focus on more accurately aligning their instructional practices to the common core state standards to ensure that student learning improves. Similarly, teachers who participated in this study drew upon their unique experiences and training as they selected or designed curriculum and instruction for their courses.

Aligning Curricula across Grade Levels

This third related research question asked, "*How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts collaborate vertically to connect their curriculum across grade levels while aligning their curriculum with the common core state standards?*" The key finding for this related research question was that K-12 English language teachers in rural remote public school districts collaborated vertically to align their course curricula across grade levels by using limited opportunities to plan and develop curriculum with other teachers, although much of their curriculum development work was independent.

Research supports this finding. In research concerning teacher curriculum design teams, Huizinga et al. (2014) found that teachers collaborating in teams to develop curriculum benefit from the experience, especially when they are guided by the use of curriculum templates. However, Huizinga et al. also noted that teachers' individual lesson plans often vary and teachers are not always willing to use standardized templates for daily lesson planning because the lesson structure is not always similar. However, Huizinga et al. concluded that templates are an effective support tool for teachers

engaged in curriculum development because they assist teachers in determining common lesson elements, such as objectives and research-based instructional strategies. Huizinga et al. recommended that additional support be given to teachers involved in curriculum design, particularly concerning the creation of curriculum frameworks and lesson templates. In other supportive research, Allen and Topolka-Jorissen (2013) examined the use of teacher learning walks in a rural school as a supervisory tool and found that teachers from prekindergarten to Grade 8 felt isolated in their work prior to the integration of these walks because their schedules and teaching loads did not allow time for collegial interaction. Allen and Topolka-Jorissen concluded that teacher learning walks help to diffuse teachers' feelings of isolation and recommended that more research be done concerning teacher-selected professional growth. In a study of vertical teaming in rural schools, Gilmer (2010) found teachers' vertical collaboration not only strengthens connections between grade levels but also the supports development of grade level curricula. Gilmer concluded that teachers often view their vertical teaming experiences positively and recommended that rural schools establish vertical teaming practices. In the context of this study, teachers also described isolation as an obstacle to collaborative work, because most teachers were the sole teachers in their district at their assigned grade level or content area. Additionally, teachers involved in this study used templates for their curriculum work as well as independently seeking out professional development because district and regional professional development trainings were limited.

Collaborating with Other Teachers

This fourth related research question asked, "*How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts collaborate with teachers of other content areas to support the implementation of common core literacy standards*?" The key finding for this related research question was that K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts collaborated with teachers of other content areas to support implementation of the common core state literacy standards by (a) informally interacting with teachers of other content areas concerning curriculum development, (b) developing curriculum independently, and (c) requesting more formalized and continuous curricular planning opportunities with colleagues.

Research concerning the cross-curricular interactions of rural teachers is limited. Allen and Topolka-Jorissen (2014) explored the use of teacher learning walks as a supervisory tool and found that teachers appreciate time spent observing other teachers across grade levels and content areas. Allen and Topolka-Jorissen concluded that observations help teachers become more familiar with the curriculum of different grade levels and recommended conducting additional research about collegial interactions to investigate the impact of such connections on rural teachers. In a participatory case study of the conversations rural teachers have concerning school improvement, Bana (2010) found that teachers needed months of collegial conversation to generate change in their classroom practices. Bana recommended such conversation practices be expanded in rural schools because they bring attention to school improvement and reform efforts.

Research indicates teachers want opportunities to collaborate with colleagues. Vaughn and Saul (2013) investigated the vision rural teachers have for their students and schools and found that rural teachers view collaboration as an important aspect of rural teaching. Vaughn and Saul reported that rural schools operate with limited faculty, yet the collaboration between rural teachers establishes a supportive environment for teachers and students. In earlier research, Chance and Segura (2009) explored the development of a collaborative approach in a rural high school and found that when collaborative efforts are regularly scheduled with planned agendas, a climate of trust and collegial interaction develops. Chance and Segura recommended the use of on-going collaboration plans within rural environments, under the leadership of school administrators. In the context of this study, teachers reported that they had little time to collaborate, but they also shared an interest in expanding collegial interactions.

Engaging in Professional Development

This fifth related research question asked, "*How do English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts engage in professional development activities concerning the integration of the common core state standards into their planned curriculum and instructional practices?*" The key finding for this related research question was that K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts engaged in professional development activities concerning the integration of the common core state standards into their planned curriculum and instructional practices by (a) participating in limited local and regional trainings, guided by school administrators and state-level experts, and (b) requesting professional development

opportunities, especially concerning additional collaboration time with colleagues and greater access to curriculum experts.

Research supports this finding. Renihan and Noonan (2012) examined the roles of rural principals and found that these leaders are viewed as responsible for guiding professional development for rural districts; however, Renihan and Noonan also noted that facilitating professional development in rural areas is difficult due to geographic limitations. In exploring the operation of small rural and remote schools in Australia, Clarke and Wildy (2011) found that professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators increase when educators collaborate in "clustering arrangements" (p. 32). Clarke and Wildy concluded that interactions across schools are valuable, yet individual administrators typically direct these efforts rather than established district practices. Clarke and Wildy recommended collaboration become an established practice in rural areas. In other supportive research, Stewart and Matthews (2014) explored the relationship of rural principals to professional development and found that rural principals dedicate little time to facilitating teacher collaboration. Stewart and Matthews concluded that rural administrators, especially those with teaching loads, are in need of additional assistance for management responsibilities so they are able to expand their leadership of district professional development.

Research also supports increased professional development opportunities for teachers as they implement the common core state standards. Marrongelle et al. (2013) investigated the professional development needs of teachers implementing the common core standards for mathematics and concluded that the training needs of teachers in the

era of national standards are extensive and require high-quality, systematic professional development. Additionally, Marrongelle et al. emphasized the need for teachers and school administrators to facilitate in-district training for teachers who have not participated in out-of-district professional development experiences. In similar research, Barrett et al. (2015) examined professional development strategies in rural schools and also found that teachers benefit when professional development activities are purposeful and systemic. In other research, Gibson and Brooks (2012) explored teachers' perception of professional development while integrating new social studies curriculum and found that teachers are critical of the lack of follow-up professional development provided after initial curriculum training. Gibson and Brooks recommended that professional development related to the implementation of new curriculum be "ongoing, sustained, intensive and supported by modeling and coaching" (p. 21). In additional research, Williams and Nierengarten (2011) explored recommendations from rural administrators and found that professional development needs are the third priority administrators identify, behind testing preparation and student achievement. Williams and Nierengarten also found that even though administrators clearly identify professional development needs, they believe they are unable to improve training due to limited rural budgets and the lack of state assistance for training costs. Williams and Nierengarten recommended school administrators and state legislators work to improve services and funding allocations to better support rural schools. In the context of this study, teachers held positive views of the regional and local trainings they attended; however, teachers also

reported their opportunities for collaboration were limited and district professional development focused on initial training rather than ongoing professional development.

Aligning Planned and Lived Curriculum

The central research question asked, "*How do K-12 English language arts teachers in two rural remote public school districts align the planned curriculum, represented by the common core state standards and district curricular materials, with the lived curriculum that they implement in their courses?"* The first key finding was that K-12 English language arts teachers in two rural remote public school districts aligned the planned curriculum with the lived curriculum by (a) working independently to align their assigned grade-level curriculum with the content and skills related to the common core state standards, (b) using limited collegial interaction both in and outside of the district to support their work, and (c) requesting expansion of this collaboration to support their curriculum development. A second key finding was that K-12 English language arts teachers in two rural remote public school districts aligned the planned curriculum with the lived curriculum in three different ways: (a) elementary teachers aligned the content and skills related to the common core state standards by using the district-adopted textbook reading series and its related scope and sequence to support their units and lessons, (b) middle-level teachers aligned the content and skills related to the common core state standards by adapting and supplementing the district-adopted textbooks series in conjunction with additional print and digital materials, and (c) high school teachers aligned the content and skills related to the common core state standards

by identifying skills from the common core state standards and by selecting a variety of print and digital instructional materials to support their units and lessons.

Research concerning the independent curricular practices of rural teachers supports these findings. Babione (2010) explored how rural teachers view state standards and found that rural teachers feel isolated in their curriculum work due to their diverse instructional roles. Babione also found that teachers appreciate collaborative time and believe ongoing professional development time is necessary to successfully integrate state standards into curriculum. Babione concluded that "[c]ollegiality does not happen naturally in these smaller, busy, school settings, to the degree one might expect." Babione recommended that professional development be flexible in order to support the work of rural teachers. In other supportive research, Roberts (2013) investigated how rural history teachers used curriculum and found that teachers adapt curriculum in two ways. Some teachers feel their job is to follow published curriculum guides, while other teachers prefer to adapt published curriculum to fit with the attributes of their school and community. Roberts concluded that rural teachers often make these curricular decisions individually, according to their understanding of the curriculum and the school and community. Roberts recommended that both published curriculum and teacher-designed curriculum be valued as part of the educational process.

Research also indicates that rural teachers are interested in expanding their collegial interactions. Adams and Woods (2015) explored the use of mentoring in rural Alaska schools and found teachers value mentoring relationships that provide instructional support as well as social connections. Adams and Woods recommended that

mentoring programs be established to support rural teachers. In other similar research, Rosenberg et al. (2015) reviewed the reforms of SIG schools and found that PLCs were established to support the collegial interactions of rural teachers; however, teachers were critical of how these communities were organized because teachers were still unable to collaborate with other teachers of their grade level or content areas.

Researchers offer some insight into the curriculum choices of teachers, but they do not specifically compare the choices that rural teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school levels make. In an examination of teacher involvement in curriculum design, Huizinga et al. (2014) found that teachers were critical of using published curriculum materials as-is, and they preferred the flexibility to adapt curriculum materials to their instructional needs. However, Huizinga et al. also noted that these teachers did not describe curricular adaptations in their curriculum planning. Huizinga et al. concluded that this finding may indicate that classroom teachers are not confident in their adaptation practices. Huizinga et al. recommended that teachers have more extensive support at all stages of curriculum development to expand their confidence regarding curriculum work. In other supportive research, Gibson and Brooks (2012) explored teachers' views on professional development provided for new curriculum and found that teachers struggle to locate appropriate resource and supplemental materials for new curriculum. Gibson and Brooks concluded that professional development experiences do not support teachers in their search for curricular materials, and they recommended greater variety in professional development opportunities. In exploring the implementation of new curriculum standards in Canadian social studies, Gibson (2012) found teachers are

concerned with the scope and difficulty of new standards-based content, particularly when teachers have a history of using textbooks as primary curriculum materials. In similar research, Taylor (2013) investigated how mathematics teachers use textbooks and found that while teachers consistently use the texts, their use of supplemental materials varies, with more experienced teachers incorporating greater variety into their instruction that teachers with less teaching experience. Taylor concluded that there is value in helping teachers to use materials flexibly in structuring effective curriculum. Leifer and Udall (2014) explored the fit of curriculum materials to the common core state standards and cautioned that many textbooks do not adequately address the skills found in these standards. Leifer and Udall noted that many teachers develop their own curriculum materials to address this gap, and they recommended that better curricular materials need to be developed to support the efforts of classroom teachers.

Even though this study did not include teachers with different experience levels, findings indicated that teachers at different grade levels incorporated supplemental materials differently in their English language arts courses. For students in Grades K-2, teachers adhered to the scope and sequence found in district-adopted reading programs, while for students in Grades 4-6, teachers adjusted the scope and sequence found in district-adopted reading programs by adding supplemental resources. For students in Grades 9-12, teachers used varied print and digital materials to determine the scope and sequence for their instruction relating to the common core state standards.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Aoki's (1993) theory of curriculum. Aoki identified two aspects of curriculum: planned curriculum and lived curriculum. The planned curriculum is the predetermined, written curriculum that district educators establish prior to student-teacher interactions within the classroom. For this study, the planned curriculum included the common core state standards and district curricular materials that related to these standards. The lived curriculum is the actual, interactive curriculum that teachers and students experience in the classroom. For this study, data related to the lived curriculum was collected through observations of instructional lessons in English language arts. Aoki (1986) theorized that teachers balance the duel curriculums constantly in their work, which requires continual adjustment and realignment. Aoki (1987) did not advocate the value of one curriculum over another, but argued a well-developed planned curriculum, when applied through instructional practice, generates powerful lived curriculum experiences for teachers and students. This relationship between the planned curriculum and lived curriculum provided the conceptual lens through which I examined how teachers in rural remote school districts integrated the common core state standards into classroom instruction.

In relation to the planned curriculum, data analysis indicated evidence of predetermined course curricula that teachers had established prior to instruction. These predetermined curricula included the national common core standards, common core state standards, course scope and sequence documents, and teacher-developed alignment documents for units and lessons within courses. Teachers were able to show written

documentation of planned curriculum, though the planned curricula documents that each teacher used varied. Evidence was also found of the integration of the common core state standards into planned curriculum in some alignment and scope and sequence documents; however, the standards were not stated explicitly in teacher lesson plans.

In relation to the lived curriculum, data analysis indicated that in the actual interactive curricula at the course level, teachers did not always provide evidence of the integration of the common core state standards into classroom instruction. This finding is consistent with Aoki's (1999) theory that teachers balance the planned ideas they have for curriculum with the unplanned adjustments they make a they actively work with students in their classrooms. In this study, teachers adjusted curriculum during instruction to include skills from the common core state standards, but they did not always identify the standards to students during the course of instruction. Aoki (1986) described the tensions teachers feel as they balance the planned curriculum with their lived curriculum experiences. Aoki believed this tension was necessary to create high quality educational experiences in classrooms. For this study, tension was found between the planned and lived curriculums in relation to district-selected curriculum materials; however, this tension was not as evident concerning the integration of the common core state standards because teachers used district-adopted reading programs and related textbooks, though most of these materials were adopted prior to the approval of the common core states standards. Only the middle level textbook series used in the Timbers School District was clearly aligned with the national common core standards. During instructional observations, teachers chose lesson topics from identified scope and sequence documents

and instructed students in content and skills identified within the common core state standards; however, only one teacher instructed students on terminology specifically featured in the common core state standards. In Aoki's (1987) ideal of lived curriculum, the tension and interplay between planned curriculum elements and lived curriculum experiences is evident, because teachers and students grapple with not only the content and skills, but also the terminology, of the common core state standards.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study are related to the research design of case study. The first limitation concerns the number of cases. In this study, two cases were presented. Yin (2014) maintained that the value of multiple case study design is that they support research replication, which strengthens research findings. In this study, the use of two cases facilitated literal replication, because the cases were similar in context and phenomena. However, Yin contended that two cases are not adequate to support theoretical replication, which requires at least four to six cases in order to investigate contrasts between the cases. The two cases presented in this study confirmed commonalities in how rural remote English language arts teachers align their planned and lived curriculums with the common core state standards.

The second limitation concerns the small sample size because only four teachers were included in each case for this study. Even though this sample size allowed for data collection at the lower elementary level, upper elementary level, middle school level, and high school level, data at each level represented the experiences of only two teachers. The number of teachers employed within rural remote school districts is limited, and often

only 1-2 teachers are assigned to each grade level. As such, the inclusion of four teachers from each school district was a reasonable selection for the two cases presented in this study. However, a larger sample size, if possible, may have supported a richer picture of the phenomenon of alignment.

The third limitation is related to the data collection process. For this study, I was the sole researcher with limited time and resources, and therefore, I was able to visit each site for only two days, which enabled me to conduct one individual interview and one classroom observation for each participant. Interviewing participants during their scheduled preparation times also limited the study, as teachers answered directly and succinctly so they would have time to manage other scheduled and unscheduled teaching responsibilities. Additional time on site would have increased opportunities for additional data collection.

Recommendations

Recommendations for future research are based on the findings of this study. The first recommendation is that research into the professional development needs and collaborative planning interests of rural teachers be expanded. Teachers involved in this study demonstrated their interest in developing curriculum, but they also recognized the limitations related to time and collegial connections. Additional research may clarify how state, regional, and local educational leaders can better support the curriculum planning needs of rural remote teachers as they integrate the common core state standards into rural curriculum.

The second recommendation is that additional research be conducted to clarify how and why rural teachers use curricular materials differently when implementing new standards. In this study, all teachers reported using existing curricular materials as they integrated the common core state standards into their instruction, rather than using new and updated materials. Rural school district educators often have limited budgets and may not be able to manage a complete transformation in the use of curricular materials, so teachers have taken on the challenge of aligning existing materials to the common core state standards. Rural administrators may more effectively direct curriculum development if they had a clear understanding of how rural teachers successfully align existing district curricular materials to the common core state standards.

The third recommendation is that further research be conducted related to the nature of lived curriculum within an era of nationalized standards. According to Latta and Kim (2011), the lived curriculum requires teachers to think creatively and reflectively while providing instruction to students in their classrooms. Similarly, the complexity of content and skills included in the common core state standards also requires creative investigation and reflection on the part of students (Ball & Forzani, 2011). The active and purposeful development of lived curriculum within classrooms may be critical to the successful alignment of the common core state standards with classroom instruction. Research into this relationship may help teachers conceptualize standards-based curriculum in new ways.

Implications for Social Change

This study will contribute to positive social change in several ways. At the individual level, this study may provide teachers with insights into how teachers align curriculum with the common core state standards, particularly in school settings with limited personnel and resources. K-12 teachers across the country are engaged in this alignment work, which makes communication about this alignment valuable to the education field. In relation to rural remote teachers, this study may validate the ideas and concerns teachers in rural remote settings have about this alignment as they integrate the common core state standards into instruction, particularly given the geographic and professional isolation of their work.

At the organizational level, this study may expand conversations about curriculum alignment so that school and district staff members can better communicate their concerns and recommendations for improving this alignment. Findings from this study suggest that teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school levels approach curriculum alignment differently. Additional research may compel educational leaders to develop new plans for grade level curriculum development at the local, regional, and state levels. This study may also provide educators and researchers with a deeper understanding of how curriculum development occurs at the classroom level in small schools. In presenting prominent storylines from rural education research, Burton et al. (2013) argued there is a need for "[m]ore exploration into the complexity and layers of issues in rural education and with rural teachers." Due to their professional isolation, responsibility for providing instruction for multiple grade levels and/or content areas, and

limited time for professional development, rural teachers' experiences are unique. Professional collaboration is significantly different from the collaboration found in larger schools, given that rural teachers are often only able to interact with teachers of other grade levels and content areas. Because this professional collaboration is unique, it may provide insights into the potential for more diverse collaboration in the education profession.

At the societal level, this study contributes to continued dialogue concerning the future of education at a time when prominent movements include standards-based learning and nationalized curriculums. It is important that societal conversations on education include diverse teaching and learning experiences because society is impacted by the format and accessibility of education. Additionally, there is value in conversations across all societal groups. In addition, this study may contribute to improving the cultural traditions of rural communities and the goals that rural populations have concerning the success of their youth.

Conclusion

The era of nationalized standards has motivated significant change for all K-12 classroom teachers, yet gaps still remain in the support systems for classroom teachers. In rural remote schools, the findings of this study suggest that the implementation of the common core state standards is highly individualized, as teachers are frequently the sole teachers at their assigned grade level and content area. The nature of rural teaching highlights an important question concerning the common core state standards: Can teachers individually interpret and align the common core state standards with their

instruction in meaningful and effective ways that honor their individual skills as educational professionals, yet also strengthen the foundational academic skills of students? A central goal of nationalized curriculum is to establish common ground for students; however, the diversity of schools and communities across the country inherently contradicts the notion of uniform academic instruction. The true test of the common core state standards is not if their implementation can eliminate variance in public education, but whether or not the standards can inspire teachers and students to strive for deeply creative, meaningful, and reflective learning experiences. Students who can engage in these types of experiences will have access to powerful educational and career opportunities.

At present, research concerning the implementation of the common core state standards has focused on its integration into the planned curriculum of schools. This first step is essential because educators need to present the standards as part of the planned curriculum in order for educational reform to be effective. Given that many states across the country have adopted versions of the common core standards, there is evidence that the integration of the common core into planned curriculum is occurring. The next important step of the integration process is to establish how the common core state standards have been integrated into the lived curriculum since the actual impact of these standards on student learning will be evident in student outcomes as they engage in the lived curriculum functioning within the classroom setting.

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Appendix A: Letter of Cooperation

Karen Toavs
[redacted]
karen.toavs@waldenu.edu

Date

Dear Karen Toavs,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled *How Rural Educators Implement Common Core State Standards* in the Divide County Public School District.

As part of this study, I authorize you to identify and contact potential participants, conduct individual teacher interviews, observations of instructional lessons in English language arts, collect written responses to reflective journal questions, and collect written documents related to the English language arts program.

Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include providing the researcher with a private conference room at the school in order to conduct the individual interviews. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Participating School District, Superintendent

Appendix B: Invitation Letter

Dear Rural Educator:

My name is Karen Toavs, and I am currently pursuing a doctoral degree in education from Walden University, specializing in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. I am also currently employed as an English language arts teacher in a neighboring rural public school district.

I am inviting you to participate in a research study titled *How Rural Educators Implement Common Core State Standards.* The district superintendent and principal of your school have granted approval for me to conduct this study.

You have been invited to participate in this study because you currently teach English language arts in this school district. In addition, you were identified as a teacher who has integrated the common core state standards into your classroom instruction.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please review and sign the attached consent form, which includes a description of the participation procedures that you will be required to follow. I have enclosed a self-addressed stamped envelope for you to return the signed consent form to me. For each grade level group, I will select the first participant who responds with a signed consent form.

If you have any questions about this study, I can be contacted at karen.toavs@waldenu.edu.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Karen Toavs
Doctoral Candidate at Walden University
[redacted]
karen.toavs@waldenu.edu

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Date of Interview	Participant Label	Context Information
Interview Questions		Field Notes and Coding
1. How would you describe the curriculum development process in your school? What is your role in this process?		
2. How do you believe the common core state standards have impacted the curriculum process in your school district?		
3.How do you integrate the common core state standards into your courses?		
4. What problems do you face in integrating the common core state standards into your courses?		
5. As a rural remote teacher, how would you describe your curriculum planning experiences with other K-12 teachers in relation to the common core state standards?		
6. What recommendations would you make to improve curriculum development in rural remote school settings?		

Appendix D: Reflective Journal

Dates of Response	Participant Label	Context Information

Guidelines

In order to better capture your teaching experience, please provide a written response to each of the questions posed below. Please answer one question per day, spending about five minutes to create a reflective journal response.

Questions	Participant Response
1. In recent years, Montana has adopted state standards based on the common core standards. Please describe how teachers in your school district were informed about the adoption of these new state standards.	
2. How do you believe the adoption of the common core state standards has impacted your classroom instruction?	
3. Please describe the interactions you have experienced with other English language arts teachers (K-12) concerning the common core state standards.	
4. Please describe the professional development opportunities you experienced in your district in relation to implementing the common core state standards.	
5. Please describe the interactions you have experienced with K-12 teachers in other content areas in relation to implementing the common core state standards.	
6. What recommendations would you make concerning professional development opportunities in rural remote school settings, especially related to curriculum and standards-based education reform?	

Appendix E: Observation Data Collection Form

Date of Observation	Participant Label	Context Information

Observation Criteria	Field Notes and Researcher Reflections
<u>Classroom Setting</u> -furniture arrangement -teacher space -student space	
<u>Participants</u> -number of teachers/students -gender of teachers/students -student seating arrangement	
<u>Curriculum</u> -standard/ unit objective -target skills and concepts for the lesson -assessment of the standard/ lesson objective	
<u>Instructional Strategies</u> -key words/ lesson themes -lesson activities/ learning tasks -teacher-student interactions	
<u>Subtle Factors</u> -unplanned interactions -instructional adjustments	

Appendix F: Alignment of Instruments to Research Questions

Central Research Question: How do K-12 English language arts teachers in two rural remote public school districts align the planned curriculum, represented by the common core state standards and district curricular materials, with the lived curriculum that they implement in their courses?			
Related Research Questions	**Research Instruments**		
	Interview Protocol	Reflective Journal	Observation Data
How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts adjust curricular materials to align with the common core state standards?	Q1: How would you describe the curriculum development process in your school? What is your role in this process? Q2: How do you believe the common core state standards have impacted the curriculum process in your school district? Q3: How do you integrate the common core state standards into your courses?	Q1: In recent years, Montana has adopted state standards based on the common core standards. Please describe how teachers in your district were informed about the adoption of these new state standards.	<u>Curriculum</u> - standard/ unit objective -target skills and concepts for the lesson -assessment of the standard/ lesson objective
How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts adjust instructional practices to align with the common core state standards?	Q3: How do you integrate the common core state standards into your courses? Q4: What problems do you face in integrating the common core state standards into your courses?	Q2: how do you believe the adoption of the common core state standards has impacted your classroom instruction?	<u>Instructional Strategies</u> -key words/ lesson themes -lesson activities/ learning tasks -teacher-student interactions <u>Subtle Factors</u> -unplanned interactions -instructional adjustments
How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts collaborate vertically to connect their curriculum across grade levels while	Q5: As a rural remote teacher, how would you describe your curriculum planning experiences with other K-12 teachers in relation to the common core state standards?	Q3: Please describe the interactions you have experienced with other English language arts teachers (K-12) concerning the common core state standards.	

aligning their curriculum with the common core state standards?			
How do K-12 English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts collaborate with teachers of other content areas to support the implementation of common core literacy standards?	Q5: As a rural remote teacher, how would you describe your curriculum planning experiences with other K-12 teachers in relation to the common core state standards?	Q5: Please describe the interactions you have experienced with K-12 teachers in other content areas in relation to implementing the common core state standards.	
How do English language arts teachers in rural remote public school districts engage in professional development activities concerning the integration of the common core state standards into their planned curriculum and instructional practices?	Q6: What recommendations would you make to improve curriculum development in rural remote school settings?	Q1: In recent years, Montana has adopted state standards based on the common core standards. Please describe how teachers in your district were informed about the adoption of these new state standards. Q4: Please describe the professional development opportunities you have experienced in your district in relation to implementing the common core state standards. Q6: What recommendations would you make concerning professional development opportunities in rural remote school settings, especially related to curriculum and standards-based education reform?	

Appendix G: Data Accounting Log

Data Sources	Case Study Participants							
	A-1	A-2	A-3	A-4	B-1	B-2	B-3	B-4
Introductory E-mail								
Signed Consent Form								
Orientation Phone Call								
Follow-Up Phone Call								
Interview Protocol								
Instructional Observation								
Reflective Journal: Journal 1								
Reflective Journal: Journal 2								

This data log indicates the date when each data source was submitted/ completed.