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Interest-based instructional strategies secondary teachers use to promote student engagement and how administrators support their work

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

INTEREST-BASED INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES SECONDARY
TEACHERS USE TO PROMOTE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND
HOW SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS SUPPORT THEIR WORK

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

Dawn M. Macy

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
School of Educational Research,
Leadership and Technology
Program of Educational Leadership
and Policy Studies

May, 2011

This Dissertation by: Dawn M. Macy

Entitled: *Interest-Based Instructional Strategies Secondary Teachers Use to Promote Student Engagement and How School Administrators Support Their Work*

Has been approved as meeting the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Education in the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, School of Educational Research, Leadership and Technology, Program of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

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ABSTRACT

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Entering into this study years ago, I was bewildered at how disengaged so many high school students were in their education. They expressed their lack of connection with school by dropping out before graduating. Understanding that the real impact of education needs to happen between a teacher and a student, I became passionate about finding out what instructional strategies were being implemented at the secondary level that were engaging students in their learning. Schools are for the most part operating as a system of accountability instead of a system that engages students in learning (Schletchy, 2005). This research focused on interest-based instructional strategies that teachers in one high school used to engage their students in learning and how administrators supported their work. Using the method of portraiture by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), I identified three emergent themes of instructional strategies using interest-based techniques to promote student's engagement in learning: (a) Interest-based instructional criteria established by The Ohio Department of Education (2008) appeared to increase student engagement; (b) Administrative support, not direction, was necessary for teachers to develop, implement, and incorporate instructional strategies for student engagement; and (c) Time for teacher collaboration was a challenge but imperative in developing more wide-spread student engagement practices. Administrators and teachers in the study

wholeheartedly felt interest-based instructional strategies was the way students should be taught in schools as we prepare them for their futures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This acknowledgement is long because it's more than an acknowledgement; it's a story of defining moments. I hope you will be inspired to read it through to the very end.

Nothing great is done without the guidance, input, and inspiration of people in our lives. The culmination of years of study reflects more than a dissertation; it is the impact that relationships have had as an imprint on our lives forever.

The patience and wisdom of my advisor, Dr. Linda Vogel, through my master's and then doctorate has made the final step on this journey possible. I am grateful she encouraged and supported me to keep going. Along with Dr. Vogel, I thank my committee members who graciously gave their time, energy, and input: Dr. Katrina Rodriquez, Dr. Randy Zila, and when I needed committee member change due to retirement, Dr. Anthony Armenta (Go Lumberjacks!). The stress I had leading up to the defense was relieved knowing my entire committee was as passionate about student engagement in learning as I was. The University of Northern Colorado is fortunate to have this caliber of educators.

I started this doctoral work my third year as an assistant principal; the very next year, I became the principal of the same school. I will complete my 15th year in May; of those wonder years, eight have been dedicated to this degree. I would be remiss if I did not express my love and gratitude to my colleagues at Sunset Middle School who have

given me the power to want to be not only a better administrator but a better person as we share our life's work together.

Years go by and we get so busy we forget to stop and reflect on the things that matter most. It's not the things. It's the people in our lives. Having my own children, Levi and Dani, taught me why it was so important to go into education. I love them more than the sun shines and I thank them for allowing me to share my energy with them, my work, and this research. There were days when I wanted to throw in the towel with this degree. The love of my life, John, wouldn't let me. He always believed I could do it, even when I doubted myself. Thanks, Sweetie. In the wings of support were my forever friends, Terry and Ann. I love you both.

Lastly, defining moments...I am dedicating this work to my dad, Larry T. Parker. If there is a sub dedication, it would to my mom, Mickey, who never goes down; no matter what happens in life, she pulls up her boots and moves forward with an incredible force. Thank you, mom for instilling the quality of tenacity in me and in my brothers and sisters.

My Dad won't be at graduation, at least not in person, but his spirit will be walking next to me as we earn the degree of doctorate in Educational Leadership. I say we because if it weren't for my dad, I would not be on this road and it is a road I am so grateful to be traveling. I was done with college after my first semester at Arizona State University. It was overwhelming and bigger than the entire town I graduated from-- Camp Verde, Arizona. I headed home to Flagstaff where Mom and Dad and baby sister Laree were living, **NEVER** to return to school again! At that time, my dad was going to school to finish up his education degree, as both Grandma and Pappy were educators.

Dad ended up fulfilling his passion in the game of golf by becoming a Golf Superintendent. However, in 1978, he was taking some classes at Northern Arizona University thinking he might follow family patterns and become a teacher. He convinced me somehow to take just one more semester and get a year of college under my belt. That second semester of college while we were registering for classes, I look back a little embarrassed as I remember me sulking in a chair while my dad brought me cards of classes to approve. He got me registered; I got hooked. I graduated from N.A.U. (Go Lumberjacks!) in 1982, moved onto post-graduate work at the University of Arizona in education, and completed my educational work at University of Northern Colorado with a master's in Educational Leadership. When I finish this doctoral program, my dad and I will have completed 16 years of higher education. You see, I never walked this road without my dad pushing me, believing in me, and above all making sure I got at least one year of college under my belt.

In the middle of my submission of Chapters IV and V of this dissertation, Dad went to sleep on January 25, 2011 to join other great educators and lovers of golf like Grandma and Pappy. I was inspired to finish the work Dad and I started in 1978 at N.A.U. You see, it's those defining moments in life that put us on the road to our life's work. Dad, we did it! I love you and I miss you more than a dedication serves. Don't worry, Mom is doing well; she's still the pistol you married! Grab your tassel, Dad, we have walking to do ☺.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Schools across the United States are experiencing a high school dropout epidemic. Each year, almost one third of all public high school students and nearly one half of all Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans fail to graduate from public high schools. There is no single reason why students drop out; however, it seems to be linked to several different factors. Nearly half of the respondents in a study supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation indicated that the major reason for dropping out was that classes were not interesting (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). Students reported being bored and disengaged from high school; 69% said they were not motivated or inspired to work hard and chose to dropout (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

I have first-hand experience as a school administrator supporting and facilitating teachers to be the best they can be for all of the students all of the time. One of the most frustrating challenges is when a teacher comes to me looking for guidance and says, “I don’t know what to do for some of the students in my class. They are simply lazy and not motivated to do anything I am asking them to do!” I ask the teacher to reflect on why their students are not performing or doing what is expected and what they (as the teacher) are doing to promote or inspire them to want to accomplish the tasks and learning being presented. The reality of teachers being frustrated with non-performing or low motivated students is a real barrier to teaching. Those frustrations, if not addressed and overcome,

can result in those same students being part of the silent epidemic of high school dropouts.

Teachers are experiencing a demand for accountability at many levels. The demand that students perform well on statewide tests is a critical concern when working with students who are not interested in what is going on in the classroom. Teachers feel the pressure of high stakes tests; they are very aware that time is crucial to complete rigorous learning in order to make sure students master the expected knowledge and skills in a given time period. Yet, we need to remind ourselves we are not just teaching subjects--we are teaching people. Levine (2003) best framed the work for educators as they focus on all children:

I am not arguing that productivity in school or at work is the sole source of gratification and happiness in life. Nor am I saying that people with low levels of output are condemned to lives of abject misery. There are other ways to be a happy person. Having positive relationship, being altruistic, living a rich spiritual life, enjoying one's family, excelling at partying, and loving to read are but a few of the limitless potential sources of gratification in life. Nevertheless, feeling productive, showing off a product line in which you can take pride, and reaping recognition for your output are major sources of satisfaction and meaning in your life. I have seen way too many adolescents and young adults get into serious trouble as a result of chronic success deprivation. They are the ones who after years of having nothing to show for their efforts have decided to cancel all effort or to commit themselves to self-destructive or perhaps even illegal activities. Individuals with output failure all too often are tragedies in the making. They need our compassion, help, and understanding. (p. 8)

Education must be all-encompassing and embrace so much more than preparing students for state standardized tests that are administered, scored, and interpreted in the same, pre-specified way by all users (Freedman & Houtz, 2004). It will take great courage from teachers and the education system if public education is to change rates of students dropping out. Even when professionals know what to do and how to do it, they are often reluctant to take courageous action (Blankstein, 2004). Knowing what to do and

how to do it in the classroom is what Marzano (2007) exemplifies as the art and science of teaching, specifically referring to students attending to the instructional activities occurring in class. The importance of engagement to academic achievement is almost self-evident and has been commented on by a number of researchers and theorists (Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Marks, 2000; Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1990). The dynamics of what causes or encourages student to engage in classroom behavior are complex; they include how teachers might increase student engagement by incorporating high energy, missing information, the self-system, mild pressure, and mild controversy and competition (Pashler, 1999; Styles, 1997).

One model of instruction that has had an impact on student engagement and learning is the School-wide Enrichment Model (SEM; Renzulli, 1977; Renzulli & Reis, 1985, 1997). SEM is a school-wide enrichment approach for all students that provides enriched learning experiences and higher standards for all students through three goals: developing talents in all children, providing a broad range of advanced level enrichment experiences for all students, and providing follow-up advanced learning for children based on interests. Separate studies on SEM have demonstrated its effectiveness in schools with widely differing socioeconomic levels (Olenchak, 1988; Olenchak & Renzulli, 1989). The collected research suggests that SEM can be used to increase engagement and enjoyment of learning as well as to extend interest and enrichment-based learning opportunities to more students (Reis & Renzulli, 2003). When students have an opportunity to learn in ways that support their learning styles and interests, they may become more invested in their learning process and the content materials with which they are interacting and attempting to master (Field, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

Graduation rates of high school students are significant sources of data as states look at whether our schools are successful or failing. The executive summary of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2000) declared that between 347,000 and 544,000 10th through 12th grade students left school each year without successfully completing a high school program. Greene (2002) of the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research calculated rates over the last decade and found that the national graduation rate for the class of 1998 was 71%. For White students, the rate was 78%, while it was 56% for African American students and 54% for Latino students. He further stated that high school graduation rates are an important measure of the performance of our public school system. Greene emphasized that graduation rate indicators are also predictors for young people's life prospects. He found that the national difference in earnings of a person over 25 without a high school diploma or GED was \$15,334; whereas, a person over 25 with a high school diploma or GED was \$29,294 (Greene, 2002).

The most current facts gathered from the National Center for Education Statistics (2009) stated that the dropout rates represented the percentage of 16-24 year olds who were not enrolled in school and had not earned a high school credential. The dropout rate declined from 14% in 1980 to 9% in 2007. According to *The Condition of Education 2009* (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009), dropout rates and changes in these rates over time differed by race and ethnicity. The report stated that although the gaps between Blacks and Whites and between Hispanics and Whites have decreased, the decreases occurred in different time periods. The Black-White gap narrowed during the 1980s with no measurable change between 1990 and 2007. In contrast, the Hispanic-

White gap narrowed between 1990 and 2007 with no measureable change in the gap during the 1980s (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).

Specifically for young adults in Colorado, graduating from high school is key to a successful future, both personally and as a contributing member of society (Colorado Department of Education, 2004). Before the educational system can address the fact that we are losing students before graduating, the mind set of how we reach students will need to change. Collins (2001), in his study on helping organizations move from *Good to Great*, explored the Stockdale Paradox: “Retain absolute faith that you can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties, AND at the same time confront the most brutal facts of your current reality” (p. 86). According to Collins, if educators are going to believe that every student can and will graduate, education will prevail in the end. However, the brutal fact must be accepted that this is not currently happening.

Most recently, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE; 2009) has reported dropout rates by race/ethnicity, gender, and instructional program. Overall, the dropout rate from 2007-08 went from 3.8% to 3.6%. According to the data analysis, the following groups of students did not make gains in changing the dropout rate: American Indian, economically disadvantaged, migrant, Title I, and the gifted and talented (Colorado Department of Education, 2009).

When reviewing some of the issues related to the dropout problem (Colorado Department of Education, 2007), an effective response to increasing graduation rates is grounded in students’ educational needs. In a recent study, Bridgeland et al. (2006) interviewed 467 ethnically and racially diverse student dropouts and found that nearly half of the sampled students were confident they could have graduated. Many of these

students cited boredom as one of their primary reasons for dropping out. This study examined instructional methods that engage and inspire students through their own interests as they connect to core content learning.

The CDE encourages schools to focus on more effective ways of engaging and graduating students (Colorado Department of Education, 2004). According to the Colorado Children's Campaign (Colorado Department of Education, 2004), students fail to complete high school for a wide variety of reasons--one reason was the lack of connection between academic content and postsecondary work. Another reason the campaign listed was boredom (Colorado Department of Education, p. 4). Educators need to get to know the student's potential; schools have to help students seize their potential and teach them how to identify and exploit their individual passions (Richardson, 2008).

Today's schools are expected to increase testing scores statewide and to make adequate yearly progress (AYP). The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL, 2010) defines the significance and impact of AYP. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2002) requires that each state establish challenging content and performance standards to implement assessments that measure students' performance against those standards (Goetz, 2001). As a result, each state has developed a plan for minimum levels of improvement in measurable terms of student performance that local educational agencies must achieve within the given time frames specified by NCLB legislation.

Colorado developed a measure of progress for student performance in the form of a growth model (Colorado Department of Education, 2010). The Colorado Growth Model measures student progress from one year to the next in the context of a student's "academic peers." The model compares each student's performance with students in the

same grade throughout Colorado who had similar Colorado State Assessment Program (CSAP) scores and calculates a growth percentile. For example, a student growing at well or better than 60% of his or her academic peers would be at the 60th percentile. The percentiles show the amount of growth necessary for each student to reach proficiency (*catch up*) or maintain proficiency (*keep up*) within three years or by 10th grade.

Kohn (1998) in his work of what to look for in a classroom states that schools are operating under the pressure of losing students to choice schools due to performance outcomes. He further states that when this pressure is in place, it creates fear and resentment. It leads people to switch into damage-control mode and act more cautiously. They do not think creatively and reach for excellence. Many teachers focus solely on the content or subject to ensure performance at all costs (Kohn, 1998). Teachers and administrators need to be empowered to transcend the tight constraints of society, including federal and state mandates, placed on them (Fay, 1987). Mandated expectations regarding student growth is part of public school work; therefore, the constraints of how teachers will motivate students to perform at certain levels will be the challenges of engaging students in learning (Schletchy, 2005).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain insights into what teachers at the secondary level were doing to promote student engagement, how students interacted with the instruction happening in the classroom, and how teachers were supported by their administrators. Extending beyond what teachers were doing to promote student engagement, I hoped to gain insight into how they used interest-based instructional strategies and how teachers motivated their students to perform academically, leading to

a successful graduation from high school. I used a qualitative study to draw conclusions from how one high school's instructional practices and administrative support of the work of the teachers related to student engagement in learning.

Bridgeland et al. (2006) identified some of the reasons for high school dropout as disengagement, boredom, and lack of interest in what was being taught. It would benefit our educational system to study successful means teachers use to counteract some of the reasons students have given for dropping out (Bridgeland et al., 2006). In a meta-analysis cross-study of leadership practices (Marzano, McNulty, & Waters, 2005), principals were found to have a profound effect on students' achievement in their schools because of the expectations and climate their leadership set. Therefore, it became imperative in this study of student engagement and achievement that teachers *and* administrators were involved in the effort of creating a culture of success for all students.

Few, if any, investigative studies focused primarily on what teachers were doing in schools with interest-based instruction strategies and how administrators supported teachers in promoting student engagement in order to make a difference in student achievement. Using the minimal amount of current research regarding this topic, I worked with one high school that was making specific changes in their school programming by implementing S.T.E.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) as well as a V.P.A. (Visual and Performing Arts) within their school as a way to engage more students in their learning of core subject content (English, social studies, math, science).

Research Questions

This study investigated how teachers taught and how administrators supported their work of engaging students in learning. The following research questions guided this investigation:

- Q1   What interest-based instructional strategies are teachers using to promote student engagement and learning?
- Q2   How are the administrators in the school helping to support teachers as they implement interest-based instructional strategies to promote student engagement and learning?

Given that this research was a qualitative case study, I needed to be open to components or questions that arose regarding best practices of engaging students in learning by focusing on how teachers used student interests to promote engagement and the learning of specific content.

Rationale

The rationale for this study was to identify specific instructional practices, which were implemented at the secondary level (high school, grades 9-12), that promoted student engagement. In their survey, Bridgeland et al. (2006) showed that students dropped out because of disengagement in school. The students also demonstrated boredom as they sat through classes year after year without completing high school (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Schools must empower students to be active citizens, not just good workers, consumers, or captive audiences (Jones, 2006). Lunenberg (2000) described the importance of why schools must break away from the pressures of mandates:

Educators recognize that students dropping out of school are one of the most difficult challenges facing our public school system. The highest rate of growth

population in the future will be among the very groups who have been served least by our public school system. (p. 1)

Hargroves (1987) stated that focusing attention on fixing one part of the problem called attention to the need for solutions in many other parts of the system. His meaning as it related to student dropouts was that the problem was bigger than an isolated area. If schools narrow the focus to fix one element of education, then they are in a position to identify other problems to be addressed. Identifying specific instructional strategies within a high school setting and how the administrators support that instruction can contribute to increasing student engagement in learning.

Bridgeland et al. (2006), through their research of student dropouts, created a sense of the urgency needed in schools by stating, “The dropout epidemic in the United States merits immediate attention from policymakers, educators, the non-profit and business communities, and the public” (p. 20). The study was grounded in research of stories and reflections of former dropouts, a series of focus groups, and a survey conducted of young people aged 16-25 who identified themselves as high school dropouts in 25 different locations throughout the United States. These interviews took place in large cities, suburbs, and small towns with high dropout rates. The researchers wanted to give their stories and insights a voice, and to offer views on next steps, in the hope that the report would be a wake-up call to educators, policy makers, other leaders, and the public to address the high school dropout epidemic (Bridgeland et al., 2006). The current study narrowed the focus to what specifically was going on in high school classrooms to engage students in learning.

Significance of the Study

This qualitative study is relevant to current challenges in our educational system. Specifically, Colorado schools are being held publicly accountable to make annual yearly growth and individual students make no less than a year's gain of learning based on the Colorado Growth Model. Elmore (2003) pointed out that not only do you need incentives and accountability mechanisms, but educators also need theories of action and strategies that are effective. He further stated that the blame is not entirely on individual teachers; the system has not tried to establish the conditions under which these theories of effective strategies can be successfully implemented (Elmore, 2003). However, through an in-depth study, I hope to uncover specific key instructional strategies that engage students in their learning and change the ways instruction traditionally has been delivered.

The focus of this study was to uncover how secondary teachers inspire and engage their students by using students' personal interests, understanding that school administrators play a significant role in the overall success of teacher's instructional implementations.

The "one-size-fits-all" classroom accounts for why, for many students, motivation for school learning drops off within a few years of formal schooling (Senge, 2000). In the event I identify instructional strategies used by teachers to engage their students in innovative ways by using interests to connect to core learning, a contribution to teaching and learning can be shared.

Schools for the most part operate as a system of accountability instead of a system that engages students in learning (Schletchy, 2005). If teachers feel that state regulations

around test score gains are mutually exclusive with engaging student interest, there is a missed opportunity. Teachers often have reason to fear the consequences of material not being covered through the course of the year. This can create a struggle between providing students with opportunities to use their interests to benefit their education and providing students with the information needed to succeed on the “the test.” Mitigating the pressures teachers feel around accountability could shift the teaching and learning processes. This shift would require focusing on engaging and inspiring students through their interests and passions while they learn the given content and mastery skills (Chapman, 2003). The true struggle that prevails for teachers can be examined through critical theory. It could be possible to highlight ways in which actors (teachers and principals) come to terms with and struggle against cultural reforms that dominate them (Morrow & Brown, 1994). Using the lens of critical theory (Crotty, 2003), I examined some current educational system needs that would need to be addressed to ensure that students who would traditionally drop out of school persevere through graduation by reason of their engagement.

Public education is being scrutinized, with many stakeholders questioning its effectiveness (Jones, 2006). Many policy solutions have been recommended; some have even been implemented: (a) content standards and assessments for students, sometimes with serious consequences for non-achievement; (b) increased testing for teachers entering the profession with sanctions on the colleges that prepare them; and (c) school report cards and “league tables” published in newspapers that show the relative success of different schools within a district or state (Danielson, 2002). Through this study’s investigation of instructional strategies that engage students, I hope to disseminate

information that will reduce student disengagement in classroom learning--one of the main reasons for not completing high school as listed by former dropouts (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

Definition of the Terms

Embarking on research and a study area that has not been explored in detail requires breaking down the concepts and referring to organizations that have contributed to the topic. The Ohio Department of Education (2008) has established their learning philosophy around interest-based learning as an effective instructional strategy; therefore, I defaulted to their definitions.

Brain-based learning. Brain-based learning is a comprehensive approach to instruction using current research from neuroscience (Wilson, 2007). Neuroscience has disclosed important information about the brain and how it learns. It has uncovered "unprecedented revolution of knowledge about the human brain, including how it processes, interprets and stores information" (Sousa, 1998, p. 52). Using the latest neural research, educational techniques that are brain friendly provide a biologically driven framework for creating effective instruction (Wilson, 2007). The new brain-based learning "require[s] that we now shift our focus to the learning process" (Sousa, 1998, p. 35). This information can be used to facilitate learning (Jackson, 1999).

Human development discourse. The totality of oral and written communications that view the purpose of education primarily in terms of supporting, encouraging, and facilitating a student's growth as a whole human being including his or her cognitive, emotional, social, ethical, creative, and spiritual unfolding (Armstrong, 1994).

Interest-based learning. Learning that engages students' curiosity and motivation and promotes collaboration (Ohio Department of Education, 2008).

Instructional strategy. Process or manner by which an instruction module, instruction phase, or an entire course is delivered; may include a conference, demonstration, discussion, lecture. It is also called technique of delivery (Business Dictionary, 2009).

Motivation. There are two types of motivation: Intrinsic motivation comes from the learner's own interests and satisfaction; extrinsic motivation depends upon such external factors as grades, praise, or tangible rewards (Marzano, 2003).

Multiple intelligences. Theory developed by Howard Gardner that proposes the existence of seven relatively autonomous intelligences: linguistic, logical, musical, spatial, bodily kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (Armstrong, 1994).

Self determination theory (SDT). A macro-theory of human motivation concerned with the development and functioning of personality within social contexts. The theory focuses on the degree to which human behaviors are volitional or self-determined, i.e., the degree to which people endorse their actions at the highest level of reflection and engage in the actions with a full sense of choice (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Summary

This qualitative case study sought to identify specific interest-based instructional strategies that secondary teachers used with their students to promote learning in a diversely populated high school located along the Front Range of Colorado. I also explored how administrators supported teachers as they engaged students in learning. The importance of this study directly aligned with the need to address student's boredom

and disengagement in school that have been determined as key factors to them dropping out of school before graduating.

The second chapter presents literature that supports how engagement in learning could possibly decrease the dropout rate. It defines how using students' interests assist the individual in learning core content area subjects (English, social studies, math, and science). Through the study of various learning theories, research, and instructional practices, a connection might be made between the importance of teachers using student's interests and their levels of engagement in the learning process. In Chapter III, methods are described that outline a qualitative case-study design by using portraiture writing to illustrate the findings of the research (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

As the researcher, I have a personal passion for seeking out ways that show students excited in the learning process. Years ago while attending a workshop on cultural competency led by Dr. Charles Luna (2007), I made a connection to what he was exemplifying through his work. He stated, "True learning happens between a classroom teacher and a student." All other work around that connection contributes to learning, but the actual core of learning is the teacher's sole responsibility. That "ah ha" moment brought together the work and mission every educational institute should have as its core value. If all teachers put the relationship and personal learning of their students and how that process looks as a focal point of the teaching and learning process, I think students would be engaged and achieve at higher rates of success than what we currently experience. Throughout this study, I sought if what I had learned about student engagement, student interests, teacher's instructional practices, and how their

administrators supported their work truly impacted what in reality was happening in the classroom and if it made a difference.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Historical Background of the Problem

Historically, a number of students have dropped out of school before graduating from high school. Recently, however, the rate of dropouts has increased and has become alarming (Greene, 2002). According to surveys and sources of data, there are a number of reasons why dropout rates continue to remain unacceptably high (Kaufman, 2001). When those reasons are analyzed, several areas of study and practice could contribute to turning around the trend of students dropping out of school as they relate to some of the most significant reasons students give for dropping out of school before graduation.

In the following sections of this chapter, trends and statistics of dropout rates are detailed. Some of the most significant reasons students give for the dropout epidemic are also explored. The theories, instructional practices, and knowledge of the brain and motivation can help teachers and principals better understand how to turn a student around who is heading toward becoming a dropout statistic. Finally, under specific types of principal leadership, teachers can begin to engage their students in learning by tapping into individual interests, design instruction to maximize student achievement, and ultimately shift graduation dropout rates.

National Dropout Data

The urgency for evaluating how schools are engaging students in learning is evident in the data. Laird, Cataldi, KewalRamani, and Chapman (2008) built upon a series of National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports on high school dropout and completion rates that began in 1988. Their report presents estimates of rates for 2006 and provides data about trends in dropout and completion rates over the last three decades (1972-2006) including characteristics of dropouts and completers in these years:

- Persons of the age 18 through 65 who did not complete a high school education earned \$21,000 in 2006, compared to high school graduates of the same age earning \$31,400.
- The percentage of high school dropouts whom are incarcerated in our prisons; 30 percent of federal inmates, 40 percent of state inmates, and 50 percent of persons on death row are all high school dropouts.
- Between October 2005 and October 2006, Hispanic students in private and public high schools were 7% of the dropouts, while 3.8% were Black, and 2.9% were White.
- In 2006, the dropout rate of students living in low-income families was 9%, in comparison to their peers at 2%. (p. 10)

The effect of not earning at least a high school diploma could be a factor for students being in the higher unemployment statistic compared to those who earned a high school credential (U.S. Department of Labor, 2005). Further, dropouts aged 25 or older reported being in worse health than adults who had not dropped out, regardless of income (Pleis & Lethbridge-Cejku, 2006). Truly, these realities concerning dropouts are not silent; they are screaming loudly for action on the part of the education system.

The Education Trust (2006) also indicated that our education system is struggling to ensure that all students leave high school with a diploma. Their research shows that 3 of every 10 students who start high school will not graduate on time. The numbers are

far worse for students of color. According to Education Trust data (2006), one of every two African American and Latino students will not graduate on time, if at all.

Child Trends Databank (2005) stressed that young people who drop out of high school are unlikely to have the minimum skills and credentials necessary to function in today's increasingly complex society and technological workplace. Their data found that males between the ages of 16 to 24 were more apt to drop out than females (10% as compared to 8%), Hispanic students had the largest percentage of dropouts (22%), and foreign-born students experienced a higher rate of dropping out (24%) over children of foreign-born parents (16%).

Colorado Dropout Data

Within the state of Colorado, a number of reasons have contributed to students dropping out before graduating from high school. Based on 2004 data from the Colorado Department of Education (CDE), the Colorado Children's Campaign calculated that the Colorado high school graduation rate was 70%. This means that each year 16,333 students do not graduate on time. Failure to graduate represents a significant loss in human potential for Colorado and the nation. One analysis estimated that the lost earning potential due to students not graduating from high school costs Colorado \$3.4 billion each year.

The Governor's Colorado P-20 Council Brief (Colorado Department of Education, 2005) summarized issues to consider as we address the dropout problem. Low graduation rates are not just an urban problem concentrated in the Denver-metro area. While the causes and responses to low graduation rates vary across the state, this is a statewide issue. Minority students are disproportionately represented among students

who fail to graduate on time in terms of total numbers of Colorado students; White students represent the largest group of students not graduating from high school. In 2000, approximately 42,000 White students represented 63.5% of Colorado's 9th grade enrollment. More than 8,000 of these students did not graduate from high school on time. The number of students not graduating from high school creates a statewide crisis for individuals, families, local communities, and the economy.

According to the Governor's Colorado P-20 Council Brief (Colorado Department of Education, 2005), the constituents of Colorado should address several issues.

However, of the five detailed strategies Colorado should consider, only two take into account the importance of interest-based instructional practice:

1. An effective response to increase Colorado's high school graduation rate should be grounded in the student's educational needs. While ethnic minority, poor, and male students are more likely to drop out of high school, simply recognizing their gender or ethnicity will not address the diverse educational circumstances of those students or the reasons why those students fail to complete high school on time.
2. Students fail to complete high school for a wide variety of reasons. Schools and districts that anticipate these needs and life circumstances will be more effective in engaging and graduating students. Circumstances that contribute to dropping out include:
  - Work schedules that conflict with school calendars;
  - Being overage (21 years +) but under credited;
  - Lack of connection between academic content and postsecondary work or schooling;
  - Boredom; and
  - Absence of settings that serve students who have been out of school for awhile, among other reasons. (Colorado Department of Education, 2005, p. 4)

To understand the impact of students dropping out, it is essential to categorize the types of students who comprise the dropout rate statistic. By Colorado law, a dropout is defined as a “person who leaves school for any reason, except death, before completion of a high school diploma or its equivalent, and who does not transfer to another public or private school, or enroll in an approved home study program” (Colorado Department of Education, 2007). The 2006-2007 annual dropout rate for all students was 17.6%. The categorized breakdowns for each group of students with their annual dropout rate are as follows:

- Students with disabilities (3.5%)--These students have been formally identified as having a physical or health condition that may have significant impact on the student’s ability to learn and therefore warrant placing the student on an Individual Educational Program (IEP).
- Limited English proficient (9.3%)--This designation encompasses all students identified as either non-English proficient or limited English proficient. Districts must provide language services to all limited English proficient students. These students comprehend, speak, read, or write some English but whose predominant comprehension or speech is in a language other than English.
- Economically disadvantaged (5.2%)--Students qualify for either the free or reduced lunch program. The Federal National School Lunch Act establishes eligibility for the reduced price lunch program for families with income up to 185% of the federal poverty level (in 2005, this amount was \$35,798 for a family of four). Families with income up to 130% of the federal poverty level qualify for the free lunch program (in 2005, this amount was \$25,155 for a family of four).
- Migrant (8.5%)--Students enrolled in a specifically designed program for children who are, or whose parent or spouse is a migratory agricultural worker, and who, in the preceding 36 months, in order to obtain temporary or seasonal employment work, has moved from one school district to another.
- Title 1 (7.9%)--Students that are identified by the school as failing, or most at risk of failing, to meet the state’s challenging student academic achievement standards on the basis of multiple, educationally related, objective criteria established by the school.

- Homeless (9.5%)--According to the McKinney Act (1987), a homeless individual lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.
- Gifted and Talented (.8%)-- Using district-wide procedures aligned with CDE guidelines, these students have been formally identified as being endowed with a high degree of exceptionality or potential in mental ability, academics, creativity, or talents (visual, performing, musical arts, or leadership). (Colorado Department of Education, 2007)

In review, Colorado's data show that the highest percentages of dropouts are homeless students; limited English proficient students closely follow (Colorado Department of Education, 2007).

When analyzing some of the issues related to the dropout problem as noted by the Colorado Department of Education, an effective response to increasing graduation rates is grounded in meeting students' educational needs. As an educational system, there is a need to address the diverse circumstances and reasons why certain students fail to complete high school (Bennett & Mac Iver, 2009).

Richardson (2008) challenged educators to know the student's potential, urging schools to help students seize their potential and identify their interests. Alliance for Excellent Education (2008) concluded that academic *and* social engagement are integral components of successfully navigating the education pipeline. Their research showed that a lack of student engagement is predictive of dropping out, even after controlling for academic achievement and student background (Rumberger, 2004).

Schools are challenged to take the time to explore student's passions and interests because of accountability placed on test scores. Given the emphasis placed on levels of academic achievement in schools, the way in which students acquire knowledge through the learning process has become a primary concern (Mathewson, 1994). Most teachers spend time planning specifically how core content needs to be learned, not necessarily

how student interests could be used to teach the content (Schlechty, 2005). To meet this challenge, administrators strain to meet political agendas and teachers respond by teaching to the test. Students in turn react by cheating, taking “learning steroids” (legal and illegal psycho-stimulants), or by not caring to cope with the demands placed on them in school (Armstrong, 2006). The research surrounding dropouts supports a transformation of the educational system from the pressures of teaching under high stakes accountability testing to teaching in order to engage students through their own interests while learning the given content and skills.

In looking at a new model for school accountability, Jones (2006) suggested the education system is in need of change. He stated that we deal with an increasing number of young people who are not motivated to succeed in schools as we have organized them; we must find ways to make school more engaging and relevant to their lives. From this position, I have set out to search for what teachers and principals are doing to get high school students engaged and motivated in their learning.

Student Motivation to Learn

Motivated students find schoolwork interesting and important, become absorbed in their studies, and work hard to achieve their goals (White-McNulty, Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2005). A student’s motivation and/or interests drive and/or direct their attention. According to Marzano (2003), if a student is not interested in what he/she is learning, his/her corresponding academic and behavioral performance in school will probably suffer. Marzano further explores tasks that motivate students: presenting a task that students see as a manageable challenge, giving a task that is relevant to the student, a

task that arouses curiosity, and a task that engages the student's imagination and/ or fantasy (p. 54).

Motivating students can be done through either intrinsic or extrinsic means. Intrinsically motivated activities are ones individuals find interesting and would do in the absence of operationally separable consequences. The concept of intrinsic motivation fits White's (1959) proposition that people often engage in activities simply to experience efficacy or competence. DeCharms (1968) asserts that people have a primary motivational propensity to feel like causal agents with respect to their own actions. In short, people engage in the activity or, in the case of school, the task of learning because they have a personal interest or connection to what the teacher wants them to learn.

Extrinsically motivated behaviors or tasks are attached to a controlling variable such as a reward or grade (Deci, 1971). Studies have examined whether students tend to engage in a task for which they are being rewarded even when they are not being asked to do the task (Marzano, 2003). The effect of extrinsic reward on free-choice behavior was negative. In contrast, positive effects were reported when the measure of intrinsic motivation was a student's interest (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001).

The overarching hypothesis guiding Deci and Ryan's (1991) work is that intrinsic motivation will be facilitated by conditions that promote the psychological need for satisfaction, whereas undermining intrinsic motivation will result when conditions tend to thwart need satisfaction. Various self-determination theory studies confirm that intrinsic motivation is associated with better learning, performance, and well-being (Benware & Deci, 1984; Deci, Schwartz, Sheinman, & Ryan, 1981; Grolnick & Ryan, 1987; Valas & Sovik, 1993). In contrast, extrinsic rewards and evaluations (in the case of school, we

could equate grades as the evaluation) were found to decrease creativity (Amabile, 1982) and complex problem solving (McGraw & McCullers, 1979). As well as deep conceptual processing of information, all of the characteristics being described as key to intrinsic motivation--creativity, ability to problem solve, deeper understanding and processing of information--are deemed essential in the 21st century (Dwyer, 2007b). Brewster and Fager (2000) cited a number of research studies showing that, compared with students who are motivated by rewards, students whose motivation comes from within are more likely to experience school success.

Self Determination Theory

To better understand self determination theory, it is important to separate externally motivated activities from intrinsically motivated ones. Deci (1975) proposed that intrinsically motivated behaviors are based on a person's need to feel competent and self-determined. In short, people engage in the activity or, in the case of school, the task of learning because they have a personal interest or connection to what the teacher wants them to learn.

Most contemporary theories of motivation assume that people initiate and persist in behaviors that they believe will lead to desired outcomes or goals (Lewin, 1936; Tolman, 1932). This premise has led motivation researchers to explore the psychological value people ascribe to goals (Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Vroom, 1964). While motivation is one element that drives students to act and to understand (Caine & Caine, 1991), there is another element that is specific to student's interests. Caine and Caine state that in order for a student to have the desire to complete a task, it must be linked to an opportunity for

self-enhancement, i.e., students feel engaged in what they are doing because of a perception of benefit to themselves (p. 142).

Lambert and McCombs (1998) noted that when looking at sets of motivational theories, it is part of human nature to be curious, to be active, to initiate thought and behavior, and to make meaning from experience and interests. These sources of motivation reside in all of us across all ethnic and cultural groups (Lambert & McCombs, 1998). Self determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980, 1985, 1991) has differentiated the concept of goal-directed behavior through a different approach--the degree to which people are able to satisfy their basic psychological needs as they pursue and attain valued outcomes. Students who value an outcome will need a connection to their learning. One avenue of connection is a student's own interests or passions. Deci and Ryan (2000) maintain that a full understanding, not only of goal-directed behavior but also of psychological development and well-being, cannot be achieved without addressing the needs that give goals their psychological potency and that influence the regulatory processes that direct people's goal pursuits. Specifically, three psychological needs--competence, relatedness, and autonomy-- are considered essential for understanding the *what* (i.e., content) and *why* (i.e., process) of goal pursuits or, in the case of this research, achievement and completion of a successful education. The starting point for self determination theory is to postulate that humans are active, growth-oriented organisms who are naturally inclined toward integration of their psychic elements into a unified sense of self and integration of themselves into larger social structures. It is part of the adaptive design of the human organism to engage in interesting activities, to exercise

capacities, to pursue connectedness in social groups, and to integrate intrapsychic and interpersonal experiences into a relative unity (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Student Engagement

Teachers are key players in fostering student engagement (Akey, 2006; Garcia-Reid, Reid, & Peterson, 2005). They work directly with the students and typically are the most influential in a student's educational experience. Therefore, the role of the teacher and his/her relationship with students will impact student engagement (Schlechty, 2001).

Blum (2005), through his studies on student engagement, summarizes that "the extent to which schools create stable, caring, engaging and welcoming environments is the extent to which all our children will thrive" (p. 5). In a related study, school engagement is often defined from the student perspective and reflects students' sense of belonging and feelings of being valued (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004).

Student disengagement occurs at all levels of schooling; however, the more frequent and pronounced occurrences happen in the upper grades (Black, 2003). There are many factors, two of them being reduction of motivation and engagement in learning. The disengagement starts in the early grades and by middle school, student interest in schoolwork steeply declines. By high school, students at risk to graduate are seriously disengaged; they have completely lost touch with learning and drop out for good. However, students are most likely to be engaged when teachers pay close individual attention to their interests and the ways they learn (Black, 2003). The importance of finding ways to engage students in their learning is crucial if students are to stay in school. There is no one single reason why students drop out of high school. However, a survey conducted by Bridgeland et al. (2006) found that nearly half (47%) of students

indicated a major reason for dropping out was that their classes were not interesting; they reported being bored and disengaged from high school.

According to Danielson (1996), schools can do plenty to keep students engaged in learning. Students who are deeply engaged in learning are not simply spending “time on task” (p. 14). Engaged students are intellectually involved in curriculum and topics; their minds are involved in the learning. The best teachers keep students involved by encouraging them to contribute their ideas and insights.

Klem and Connell (2004) linked higher levels of engagement in school with improved student performance. Furthermore, they found students who are engaged in school are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores and have lower dropout rates. In contrast, students with low levels of engagement are at risk of adverse consequences, one of them being dropping out of school (Klem & Connell, 2004).

Schlechty (2001) described different levels and types of engagement. The most productive type of engagement is authentic engagement, i.e., students who are authentically engaged conform to expectations because they embrace the intended ends of instruction as meeting needs that they have and can express. During this type of engagement, the student makes a connection between their personal needs and values and their personal interests. Schlechty’s work emphasizes that teachers and schools control two distinct aspects of learning: (a) the task teachers use to help students learn and (b) the process or way the task will be used in the learning.

Schlechty’s (2001) compared the work of successful businesses and how they engage employees to how schools could be successful using the same methods of engagement. Student engagement is when (a) students complete the work assigned with

a high degree of diligence and enthusiasm; (b) the student persists with the task assigned, even when they experience difficulties and find the work tedious and demanding; (c) students take satisfaction in the results of their work and experience a sense of accomplishment and pride; and (e) students learn what they are being taught leads to school success (Schlechty, 2001). Teachers do not cause learning; rather, they need to design activities that students will find engaging and from which students will learn.

Brain-Based Learning

Another pertinent area of literature is what education has learned about how the brain learns or how the brain makes meaning. In order to exert maximum effort, students need to understand that the work being completed and the information being studied are meaningful (Erlauer, 2003). Beyond obtaining more effort from students through meaningful learning, the brain needs this relevance to learn efficiently. A stand-alone neuron (a brain cell that holds a tidbit of information) does the brain little good. It is when that neuron connects to another and that one to another, and so on, that connection and learning takes place (Sousa, 1995). To activate the first neuron, educators must make sure each student links in some way to the information, content, or skill being taught. Through a student's own personal interests, that first neuron can be activated because there is a link between content and importance.

During the 1990s, media attention and professional development on brain research began to focus on the field of education. Beyond just the scientific and physical functioning of the brain, researchers found applications to instructional practices (Jensen, 2000). Caine and Caine (1994) suggested that if teachers are going to implement brain-based learning, a change of mental models and how they have believe students learn will

need to take place. It then becomes possible to integrate learning, instruction, curriculum, and the system as a whole. However, for this to happen, the entire system must be reconfigured. They identified three elements that must be woven into a teacher's work. One element was relaxed alertness that involves creating a challenging, yet nonthreatening, nonjudgmental learning environment. The second element of the mental model was orchestrated immersion in complex experience. This premise was embedded in the notion the students learn not only from teachers but from brief events, ongoing activities, and all sorts of experiences. The third element was for teachers to have a continuous, active processing of ongoing changes and experiences.

Through his study of teaching and training, Jensen (2000) found that embedding intense emotions--those associated with celebrations, competition, or drama--in an activity may stimulate the release of adrenaline, which may more strongly encode the memory of learning. If teachers create memory of learning through interest-based learning, it would align with Jensen's assertion that "the brain is what we have; the mind is how we use it" (p. 77). In addition to the work of Jensen, Caine and Caine (1997) found that brain-based learning maximizes learning or understanding how the brain works best. She identified the following 12 brain and/or learning principles that emphasize the connections and patterns our brains make:

1. The brain is a complex, dynamic system.
2. The brain is a social brain.
3. The search for meaning is innate.
4. The search for meaning occurs through "patterning."
5. Emotions are critical to patterning.

6. Every brain simultaneously perceives and creates parts and wholes.
7. Learning involves both focused attention and peripheral perception.
8. Learning always involves conscious and unconscious processes.
9. We have at least two ways of organizing memory.
10. Learning is developmental.
11. Complex learning is enhanced by challenge and inhibited by threat.
12. Every brain is uniquely organized. (p. 28)

Caine and Caine (1990) concluded that educators can reconceptualize teaching by moving outside of traditional frames of reference and by guiding their teaching to define and select appropriate programs and methodologies that apply the theory of brain-based learning. Although there is no one method or technique that can adequately encompass the variations of the human brain, teachers can base their methods and approaches on the 12 principles of brain-based learning (Caine, 1990). Emotions and how personal interests stimulate positive emotion are directly related to over 50% of Caine's principles of brain-based learning.

Human Development Discourse

Armstrong (2006) looked at the current education system as academic achievement discourse where the focus of the school system is around producing academic results by using teaching methods and programs that facilitate high test scores. He challenges us to change this course and embrace teaching from the perspective of human development discourse. This type of discourse regards 100% academic proficiency as only a small part of the development of an individual's potential. Human development discourse states that each student has a unique potential to develop

capacities beyond their present state, and more importantly, beyond the expectations of the teachers (Armstrong, 2006)). If we are to honor individual uniqueness in our students, we must acknowledge and promote their individual interests and passions. As educators (principals and teachers), we need to marvel at what is possible beyond the blank looks of boredom and the slumped bodies of disengagement. Pablo Casals (1981), the musician, best captures what should be done to empower students:

What do we teach our children in school? We teach them that two and two make four and that Paris is the capital of France. When will we also teach them what they are? We should say to each of them: Do you know what you are? You are a marvel. You are unique. In the entire world there is no other child exactly like you. In the millions of years that have passed there has never been another child like you. And look at your body, what a wonder it is! Your legs, your arms, your cunning fingers, and the way you move! You may become a Shakespeare, a Michelangelo, and a Beethoven. You have the capacity for anything. Yes, you are a marvel. (p. 295)

Theory of Multiple Intelligences

In 1904, Alfred Binet and a group of colleagues developed a means of determining which primary grade student were “at risk” for failure so these students could receive remedial attention. Out of their efforts came the first intelligence tests (Armstrong, 1994). The work and test from Binet and colleagues (1916) led to objectively measured IQ scores. Almost 80 years later, psychologist Howard Gardner (1985) joined others who challenged that intelligence and the tests narrowed the actual measure of what intelligence embodied. He proposed the existence of at least seven basic intelligences. His theory of multiples intelligences (MI theory) sought to broaden the scope of human potential beyond the confines of the IQ score. Gardner suggested that intelligence has more to do with the capacity for solving problems (Armstrong, 1994).

Gardner (1985) provided a means of mapping the broad range of abilities that humans possess by grouping their capabilities into the following seven comprehensive categories or intelligences, also framed as profiles:

- Linguistic intelligence--Capacity to use words effectively, whether orally or in writing.
- Logical/mathematical intelligence--The capacity to use numbers effectively and to reason well.
- Spatial intelligence--The ability to perceive the visual/spatial world accurately and to perform transformations upon those perceptions.
- Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence--Expertise in using one's whole body to express ideas and feelings and facility in using one's hands to produce or transform things.
- Musical intelligence--The capacity to perceive, discriminate and express musical forms.
- Interpersonal intelligence--The ability to perceive and make distinctions in the moods, intentions, motivations, and feelings of other people.
- Intrapersonal intelligence--Self-knowledge and the ability to act adaptively on the basis of that knowledge. (p. 2)

MI theory is a cognitive model that describes how individuals use their intelligences to solve problems and fashion products. Later exploration of intelligences added additional categories; however, the seven aforementioned are the foundational intelligences of the theory. Gardner's (1985) approach is structured to show how the human mind operates on the contents of the world (Armstrong, 1994). The implication for learning is that when natural intelligences or interests are used to teach a skill or content, a real connection is made. MI theory offers teachers an opportunity to develop innovative teaching strategies that are relatively new to education.

Just as we look different from one another and have different kinds of personalities, we also have different kinds of minds. If we treat everybody the same, we cater to one profile of intelligence--the language-logic profile. It is great if you have that profile, but the vast majority of human beings do not (Gardner, 1993).

Teaching Methods that Motivate and Encourage Learning

Organizations are constantly looking for new methods of training--methods that will motivate and encourage learning (Dwyer, 2007a). Reflecting on our personal learning experiences provides us with many insights into good and poor learning methods. Couple these experiences with the recent research on brain-based learning, multiple intelligences, and emotional intelligence can give teachers a powerful repertoire of skills and knowledge to support the unique abilities of all learners (Dwyer, 2007a).

Dwyer (2007a) identifies a new training model that takes into account the emotional, physical, and social learning environments to ensure that cognitive gains are meaningful learning experiences. His premise is that a teacher/trainee needs to have a repertoire of skills that address a diversity of learners and environmental conditions essential for learning. One of the qualities of a good learning environment is that it has to be emotionally safe--free from intimidation and rejection, high in acceptable challenge, and where the learner experiences active participation and relaxed alertness (Dwyer, 2007a). When the appropriate emotional climate is established, learning is more meaningful, enjoyable, and lasting. This means that students are fully engaged and motivated in the learning experience. In order to achieve relaxed alertness, learners are encouraged to talk about their feelings. When there is an outlet for emotions and time to

consider personal feelings as well as interests, learning is more likely to continue uninterrupted (Dwyer, 2007a).

Motivation is essential for any long-term learning. Things that are personally meaningful motivate us (Dwyer, 2007a). Dwyer connects multiple intelligences to the repertoire of skills. People who use their stronger intelligences become more motivated and engaged in the learning experience. Therefore, teachers need to incorporate MI theory into their teaching to increase students' motivation and engagement.

Principal Leadership

There is perhaps no time in history like the present when changes in society have had such a powerful impact on schools (Schlechty, 2001). The kind of leadership required in schools today needs to lead to fundamental reforms. Transformational leadership is what will prepare leaders to deal with uncertainty and learning to “thrive on chaos” (Schlechty, 2001, p. 158). Kouzes and Posner (2002) extend transformational leadership skills to include actions that establish a culture characterized by challenge, energy, excitement, determination, inspiration, and innovation. Kouzes and Posner further state that leadership is needed to take charge of change and use the following essential skills: seizing the initiative, making challenges meaningful, innovating and creating, and looking outward for fresh ideas.

The theory of transformational leadership has its roots in the work of Burns (1978) who is generally considered the founder of modern leadership theory. His robust definition of leadership is as follows:

Leadership as leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivation, the wants and the needs, the aspirations and expectations, of both leaders and followers. The genius of leadership lies in the

manner in which leaders see and act on their own and their followers' values and motivations. (p.19)

Burns (1978) refers to transformational leadership as *transforming*, whereby an individual engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower (Northhouse, 2004). This type of leadership is a favored style, given that it is assumed to produce results beyond expectations (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). According to Burns, transformational leaders form a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders. Bass articulated four factors that characterize the behavior of transformational leaders: individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and idealized influence (also known as the Four I's).

Bass (1990) further details the Four I's of transformational leadership. Individual consideration is giving personal attention to members who seem neglected. Intellectual stimulation enables followers to think of old problems in new ways. Inspirational motivation is characterized by communicating high performance expectations through the projection of a powerful, confident, dynamic presence that invigorates followers. Finally, idealized influence is modeling behavior through exemplary personal achievements, character, and behavior (Bass, 1990).

Admired leaders and their followers speak proudly of mutual ethical aspirations. These leaders know that people aspire to live up to the highest moral standards (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Creating followers is a process of making sure the communion of purpose helps to bind the group together. The work must be a collective effort that joins the family together (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Transformational leadership occurs when

the interactions of the people raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality.

The importance of defining which leadership style will best achieve this expectation becomes crucial as principals are challenged to increase graduation rates and identify how schools will meet the goal of graduating more students. Leaders speak to people's hearts and listen to their heartbeats because, in the final analysis, common caring is the way in which shared visions are enacted (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

In order for principals to embark on these challenges, they will need to have a strong and clear vision--a vision that is profound in changing the direction of education. Reeves (2006) stated that the first obligation of leadership is to articulate a compelling vision and link clear standards of action that will accomplish the vision. His approach applies to small and large tasks. Success is not an ephemeral concept; it is clearly described. Every team member knows every day what the word "success" means and how it has to be achieved (Reeves, 2006, p. 35). This type of leadership will be required if education is going to turn around the dropout rates of students and engage them in learning.

Equally important to visionary leadership is the ability to create a culture that emphasizes the importance of exemplary performance (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Highly respected organizations have evolved a "shared system of informal folkways and traditions that infuse work with meaning, passion, and purpose" (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 1). Howard Schultz, the CEO of Starbucks, puts it this way:

A company can grow big without losing the passion and personality that built it, but only if it's driven not by profits but by values and by people... The key is heart. If you pour your heart into your work, or into any worthy enterprise, you can achieve dreams others may think impossible. (Schultz & Yang, 1997, p. 8)

School leaders will be required to create a culture from the heart of passion around the commitment of graduating every single student.

Finally, if administrative leaders are to survive the challenge that no one before has conquered, it will become crucial for them to be reflective practitioners. To Schon (1983), reflection-in-action involves “on-the-spot surfacing, criticizing, restructuring and testing of intuitive understandings of experienced phenomenon: often, it takes the form of a reflective conversation with the situation.” As principals are implementing and supporting instruction that engages students in learning, it will become crucial to reflect on the spot. The end result is too important not to measure outcome as the practice is happening. Sergiovanni (2001) states that reflective principals are in charge of their professional practice. They do not passively accept solutions and mechanically apply them. They do not assume that the norm is the one best way to practice. They are suspicious of easy answers to complex questions (Sergiovanni, 2001). This type of leadership is required to attack the challenges.

Summary

Dropout statistics of high school students are staggering with very little change in recent trends; more students are dropping out (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). The data show that the populations most affected by this epidemic are limited language learners and students who live in poverty. When students drop out of school before graduating, the impact on them personally and on our society is through loss of income, increased incarceration in our prison system, and failing health. Everyone suffers when students do not graduate from high school.

There are many reasons why students are dropping out of high school; no single reason can be identified. However, when a large percentage (47%) of students surveyed claim they dropped out of school because of boredom, it becomes pivotal that we address this in the classroom if dropout rates are to decrease (Chapman, 2003).

School accountability for high test scores drives many instructional practices. This includes teaching to the test while losing the interests of many students. There is a struggle between what teachers know and how to connect students to the learning. However, many are afraid to bring student interests into content teaching for fear that it will slow down the teaching process. Teachers are under pressure to make sure certain things are taught in a timely fashion in order to achieve the best test scores. Therefore, slowing down the teaching process could jeopardize the time table. As a system, it is important to balance what needs to be taught with how we can best teach essential skills and core subject content information.

To address the challenge of graduating more students, it is imperative that schools reevaluate what motivates students in the 21st century, intrinsically and extrinsically. Attached to motivation and why students do what they do, much can be learned through self determination theory. When teachers understand student motivation and how individual determination applies to learning, they are better able to connect the student to the desired outcome of their lessons so that every student is engaged.

Teachers and schools can incorporate many strategies into everyday instructional practices, which are meaningfully linked to what we know about brain-based learning, human development discourse, multiple intelligences, and teaching methods that promote motivation for students to be engaged in learning. Without strong administrative

leadership in the schools, there can be no change in graduation rates. Principals will need to address three imperative areas: articulate a clear vision; create a culture of enterprise different from the way business has traditionally been done, and have the ability to be a reflective practitioner in the work of school leadership.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to gain insights on what teachers at the secondary level are doing to promote student engagement and how they are supported by their administrators. The research not only looked at what teachers and administrators were doing, but how they motivated their students to perform academically. Using a qualitative design, I conducted an in-depth investigation of one high school's instructional practices and how the administrators supported this work. The following research questions guided this investigation:

- Q1   What interest-based instructional strategies are teachers using to promote student engagement and learning?
- Q2   How are the administrators in the school helping to support teachers as they implement interest-based instructional strategies to promote student engagement and learning?

The Qualitative Approach

Shank (2002) defines qualitative research as “a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning” (p. 5). By systematic, he means planned, ordered and public, following rules agreed upon by members of the qualitative research community. By empirical, he means this type of inquiry is grounded in the world of experience. Inquiry into meaning suggests researchers try to understand how others make sense of their

experience. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) claim that qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach: “This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Qualitative approaches to research attempt to tell a story (Merriam, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1985) described qualitative research as building metaphors and analogies so that relationships make sense. As Merriam wrote, the researcher seeks to describe the world as those in the world experience it. Stake (1995) suggested that in order to fully understand the activities within circumstances, a case study is the best approach to use. My goal was to undertake an in-depth case study of one high school. Stake states that there must be a willingness to put aside many presumptions as you learn how elements function, allowing the meaning of the phenomena to unfold. Crotty (1998) suggests that, in a constructionist view, meaning is not discovered but constructed. From this viewpoint, meaning (or truth) cannot be described simply as “objective.” By the same token, it cannot be described simply as “subjective.” Some researchers describe themselves as constructionists: “We do not create meaning. We construct meaning” (Crotty, 1998, p. 4). The research I conducted constructed meaning using researcher, teachers, and administrators. To better organize the research process, I used Crotty’s basic elements of epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods.

Epistemology

Of all the roles, the role of interpreter and gatherer of interpretations is central (Stake, 1995). Constructionism as defined by Crotty (1998) best served my research in determining what I needed to learn and how I would learn through the construction of

meanings. Constructionism claims that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. The world I researched was a high school, its principal, and teachers within the setting and practice of teaching.

Crotty (1998) stresses that there is no objective truth waiting for the researcher to discover. Truth or meaning comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed (Crotty, 1998, p. 9). Defined simply, constructionism is the view that all knowledge, all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). This research was an in-depth case study at one high school and a few specific classrooms within that social context where those teachers are exemplifying interest-based instructional strategies within their teaching. The high school was selected because of its unique focus on specialized programs.

Theoretical Perspective

In all good research, a philosophical stance is taken and lies behind the methodology used. Through the stance of interpretivism, the researcher attempts to understand and explain human and social reality (Crotty, 1998). Throughout history, the interpretivist approach has appeared in many guises (Crotty, 1998, p. 71). Out of the many streams of understanding through interpretivism, one most fits the methodology of this research--symbolic interactionism.

Crotty (1998) suggests that constructionism and symbolic interactionism are related to one another rather than merely set side by side. Using Crotty's assumptions of symbolic interactionism, there is an assumption that by expounding our theoretical

perspective, our view of the human world and social life within that world becomes grounded. It deals directly with issues such as language, communication, interrelationships, and community. At the heart of symbolic interactionism is being able to put ourselves in the place of others by entering into the perceptions of the participants' attitudes and values as a community. In the case study, the community can be considered the school and the classrooms of the teachers.

Using interpretivism as the basis of the theoretical stance, I entered into a case study of one high school, its instructional practices or phenomena, and how administrators supported strategies using interest-based learning to teach content skills and knowledge.

Methodology

Using the work of Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), I created a methodological stance to record the complex evidence of goodness (p. 9). The stance of goodness does not mean that the portrayal of the human experience or organizational culture is focused only on the good or positive. Questions answered through the portraitists view are: "What is happening here, what is working, and why?" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 142). However, by focusing on what works, underscoring what is healthy and strong, the researcher inevitably sees imperfection, inhibition, and human actions that compromise the success and weaken the achievements.

Portraiture is a method of inquiry that shares some of the features of other qualitative research methods such as ethnography, case study, and narrative. However, it is distinctive in its blending of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life

(Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). After observing, interviewing and gathering data, the style of qualitative writing is through a portraitist's view, believing that there are myriad ways in which goodness can be expressed through perceptions and practices of those involved in the study. Portraitists write to inform and inspire readers (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 10). This is the contribution I wanted to make to educational leadership. There were things educators were doing to inspire students, hook them into learning, propel them to graduate from high school, and go beyond with their learning. Working from a portraitist position is looking for the "good" in the work of teachers as they inspire students to learn, knowing struggles, challenges, and imperfections will naturally be revealed.

This research was driven by stories gathered in the field, looking for a central story, themes, commonalities, and developing a convincing authentic narrative from the teachers, administrators, and my personal experiences. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explain that the process of creating the narrative is like weaving a tapestry. It is a vigilance of empirical description and aesthetic expression. The data were scrutinized carefully, searching for the story line that emerged. If we are to explore change in our classrooms, we need to be inspired by a story that brings meaning to why and how. It was my hope to create that story through portraiture. Interviews gather other people's stories. Simply put, stories are a way of knowing (Seidman, 2006). I gathered the stories of the teachers and the administrators to get to their consciousness of the issues around interest-based learning and students' engagement or disconnectedness. Vygotsky (1987) states that individuals' consciousness gives access to the most complicated social and educational issues.

In order to gather an accurate picture of what secondary teachers and their administrators presume are instructional strategies that promote interest-based learning, I spent extensive amounts of time observing teachers and interviewing their administrators. The most constructive way to work closely with selected administrators and teachers is to set the study up as a qualitative case study. Merriam (1998) explains that what makes a case study in education is the focus on questions, issues, and concerns broadly related to teaching and learning. Based on Merriam's four types of qualitative research, the most effective type of case study to conduct for my type of qualitative research and questions was a psychological case study. This type of case study focuses on the individual as a way to investigate some aspect of human behavior. The human behavior I observed was teaching through interest-based strategies that engaged students. The research questions allowed me to frame the study to become more informed by the psychological concept of interest-based teaching as it engaged students in learning (Merriam, 1998, p. 37).

Stake (1995) specifies intrinsic and instrumental case studies. In an intrinsic case study, a particular case is given and the researcher is interested in studying the case because of intrinsic interest. During an instrumental case study, the researcher will have a research question, a puzzlement, a need for general understanding, and feel that an insight into the question by studying a particular case will produce understanding. In using the instrumental case study approach, I looked for something beyond a school or teachers' instructional methods as it applied to student learning (Stake, 1995, p. 3). The study sought something beyond the particulars, focusing on how the teachers incorporated interest-based instruction to teach content learning and how the administrators supported that instructional strategy. Given that the inquiry into the case

study was instrumental to the understanding of this phenomenon, the process revealed the outcome.

Methods Used in Research

Through the elements of constructionism, I focused on honoring the tradition incorporated in this paradigm. As members made meaning, the design emerged from a loose framework, the context was dependent on inquiry, and I used an inductive data analysis process while gathering the research through this case study (Creswell, 2007). By collecting various data through observations, interviews, artifacts, and researcher reflection, I hoped to construct a better understanding of how teachers used interest-based strategies in their teaching to engage students and how their administrators supported their instruction. Due to the nature of this type of phenomena discovery, a case study, written through the eyes of a portraitist, best served my research and study of the topic.

The interactions between the participants and the researcher told a story of what was transpiring in some classrooms throughout one high school in Colorado by engaging students using their personal interests to ensure content skills and knowledge. The reality of this study was that, in order to understand the intimate details of interest-based learning, it became imperative to examine teachers' work and administrative support as they related to the research question(s).

There were many questions as this researcher interacted with teachers and administrators; the answers were constructed in the minds of the participants involved (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). This helped create a reality of what was truly happening "out there" in the classrooms as I found ways teachers were embedding and administrators were supporting interest-based learning that engaged students.

Deciphering the case study was a task of grouping all of the data from teachers as a unit and the administrators as separate to the individual teachers and the focus group of teachers. Gathering of information or creating “the story” was done through interviews and observations.

In order to gather an accurate picture of what secondary teachers and administrators presumed were interest-based instructional strategies that promoted student engagement and content learning, this researcher spent purposeful time with a selected group of teachers and their administrators. The following are some specific instructional strategies used by administrators as criteria to identify engaging instruction within the classrooms of the study:

- Create a culture of achievement--the instruction is challenging, students feel comfortable asking questions, and students are expected to do their individual best (Akey, 2006).
- Concentrate on active learning a relevant curriculum--instructional strategies such as collaborative learning and experiential learning as well as designing an accessible and relevant curriculum greatly increases student engagement in learning (Akey, 2006; Heller, Calderon, & Medrich, 2003).
- Offer support and encouragement--student engagement is positively correlated to teacher support. Teachers who are supportive and care about their student's success are more likely to have their students engaged in the classroom academically succeeding (Akey, 2006; Heller et al., 2003).

Conducting a case study, I focused on individual school teachers and their instructional practices as well as administrators and their leadership. The focus was on

individuals and their human behaviors as they relate to theories, programs, and events of teaching students based on their interests. The selection of the specific high school to conduct the study and research was determined through informal presentations and interviews with several principals. One principal was able to clearly identify at least three teachers in their building who were implementing interest-based instructional practices. As defined by the Ohio Department of Education (2008), the following criteria are what teachers who use interest-based instructional strategies should do regularly with their students:

- Teachers find out what students are eager to know more about
- Choice is a regular part of students' learning experiences
- Engage students in open-minded, hands-on learning activities
- Encourage exploration
- Encourage reflection

Using the above focused criteria, the case study sought to answer the research questions guiding this qualitative research. It was my greatest hope that after extensive observations, interviews, journaling, and analysis of artifacts, I would be able to make a contribution to education and its commitment to graduating every student.

This research was a representation of constructing meaning through the experiences and stories of researcher, teachers, and administrators. Separating the case study into two different sections was achieved by grouping the identified teachers as a unit and the administrators as a separate unit to the individual teachers. Gathering of information or creating "the story" was done first through school and classroom observations. Once a portrait of the school and classrooms was painted, interviews with

the administrators and then specific selected teachers based on the aforementioned implementation criteria presented were conducted. This researcher gathered the stories of the administrators and the teachers in order to uncover their perspectives of the issues regarding interest-based learning and student disconnectedness.

Data Collection

Through intimate individual interviews with the administrators and teachers (semi-structured), school focus group interviews (semi-structured to unstructured) of participating teachers, teacher artifacts from their practices, researchers reflective journaling, and two classroom observations of teachers in their classroom setting, a clear portrait was created to answer the research questions.

The specific techniques used in this qualitative case study were:

- Setting and action observations of the school and classrooms throughout the study
- Interview with three administrators prior to beginning the study
- One interview with individual teachers identified as using interest-based strategies in their content teaching and in-depth classroom observations
- Focus group (teachers at the school identified as case study subjects) interviews upon completion of the study
- Gathering and analysis of teacher artifacts as they related to practices using interest-based strategies to engage student in learning content material
- Journal reflections from researcher as participant.

The participant school was selected because of their implementation of programs that were specific to a variety of interests to students. Although the classes observed for this

study did not come under any of the “specialized courses,” all of the classes observed were in core content areas. Observations of classes ranged from traditional classes to Advanced Placement classes.

Prior to delving into classroom observations, I conducted interviews of administrators and teacher participants in the study. There were several layers of gathering data. The first layer was interviews with administrators (see Appendix A), focusing on specific things they were doing to support teachers through administrative leadership. Those interviews coincided with interviews with selected teachers in the school (see Appendix B), focusing on their knowledge and practice of using interest-based teaching strategies to engage their students in content learning. Another layer of interview was with the teacher focus group (see Appendix C), gathering common thoughts addressing the research questions. The interviews with individual teachers were done in a semi-structured format prior to the first observation of the classroom and teaching. Interviews with the teacher focus group were unstructured, which allowed for more input and construction of meaning from the group. The teacher focus group interviews were done between the individual teacher’s interviews, classroom observations, and prior to finalizing the case study. Interviewing is the best technique to use when conducting intensive case studies of a few selected individuals (Bateman, 1990). Therefore, the more varieties of interviews this researcher was able to incorporate, the more global story I hoped to capture from the perspective of the participants, both as individual participants and as a common group of teachers practicing similar instructional strategies. Forging a relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee is important in exploring what actually goes on in the classroom (Kvale,

2006; Nunkoosing, 2005; Weis & Fine, 2000). Investing in a relationship with participants assisted in exploring the phenomenon studied and provided a greater depth of interpretation of the study findings.

During the interviews, I allotted extra time outside of the scheduled interview, not fully knowing if I would have an opportunity to forge a relationship. Prior to beginning the actual interviews, the participant and I engaged in casual, cordial conversation. Most of the dialogue revolved around teaching, school, and education in general. However, because we took time at the beginning to get to know each other, I believe the interviewees felt more comfortable sharing additional thoughts and reactions after the questions of the interview were answered. Those conversations lasted up to an hour over our scheduled time. I am convinced that building this type of relationship contributed to a deeper understanding of what I observed in their teaching.

A third layer or form of data used to tell the story was artifacts from the individual teachers working with students, lesson planning documentation, and outcome projects (protecting confidentiality of student names). I used a personal journal of the case study experience as the “researcher’s” artifact. In recent years, new forms of data have emerged, journaling being one, as a means to telling the story and constructing meaning in an innovative way that encourages the researcher to examine the details of their study (Creswell, 2007; Stewart & Williams, 2005).

The forms of data used in these case studies were interviews with no more than three administrators and three teachers, as well as a focus group made up of three participant teachers. I conducted one interview with each administrator and one individual teacher participant as well as one interview as a teacher focus group. Other

forms of data were observations of the school and classrooms, artifacts, and researcher journal entries. These data were used to describe and explain the world or instructional practices as those who are living in the world of education and how they experience it (Merriam, 1998). There were multiple sources of data to allow for triangulations and construction of understanding by the researcher, teachers, and principal participants as we found meaning regarding interest-based learning that engaged student in content subject matter.

Data Analysis

Using multiple sources of data and multiple methods of investigation to confirm the emerging finding, a validity of research was established (Denzin, 1970). Triangulating or finding themes in the emerging data from the study was essential in creating meaning of the findings. Coding with marking and highlighting common occurrences and/or themes allowed for analysis of the data. Using triangulation, employing research strategies of finding common themes and coding, along with tools of data collection, we can find points of convergence among them (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The work of the portraitist is to discover convergent themes while listening to a variety of voices and observing pedagogy and the actors in the classroom (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 209). As the portrait of the picture unfolds, it is a gathering of the many pieces to make one story. This marks the interpretive reflections of the portraitist. I heard the stories, witnessed the actions of teachers and the principal, and then reflected on their meaning and relationship to one another. The analysis of data identified emerging practices and how they compared to what the research identified as interest-based and engaging instruction.

Through the process of reflection, I engaged in personal journal writing as a means of capturing thoughts prior to interviews and observations. I was careful not to presume anything I might observe prior to the classroom visits. It was important to enter the classroom observations with as little expectation as possible. The act of creating meaning together with the teacher and their students helped create a true portraiture of actual experiences. After I had completed an interview or observation, I used reflective journaling to elaborate on what I observed, heard, or thought about while I was in the data gathering phase. Using the pre- and post-journal entries allowed for another perspective of the study through which I could summarize my own stance.

Trustworthiness

Merriam (1998) refers to reliability as the extent to which research findings can be replicated. The central concept of this researcher's specific study was to find data in connection to the phenomena of instructional practices that engaged students through their interests. Researchers in qualitative studies seek to describe and explain the world as those in the world experience it (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). Interpretations of what is happening in classrooms are the researcher's, the prime instrument of inquiry. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest thinking about the "dependability" or "consistency" of the results obtained from the data as a measure of reliability.

While establishing good quality studies through reliability and validity in qualitative research, Seale (1999) states, the "trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability" (p. 266). Throughout the case study, I asked participants to member check interview questions/answers, observations, and artifact descriptions. With member checking, the

validity procedure shifts from the researcher to participants in the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe member checks as the most crucial technique for establishing credibility in a study (p. 314). This study committed to gathering a variety of data, member checked through periodic approvals after each interview and observation transcription, all in an effort to create trustworthiness.

While some qualitative researchers have argued that the term validity is not applicable to qualitative research, at the same time they have realized the need for some kind of qualifying check or measure for research. For example, Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest that validity is affected by the researcher's perception of validity in the study and his/her choice of paradigm assumption. As a result, many researchers have developed their own concepts of validity and have often generated or adopted what they consider to be more appropriate terms such as quality, rigor, and trustworthiness (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Seale, 1999; Stenbacka, 2001). Working with the case study participants in co-constructing meaning while checking the data throughout the study, we were able to establish quality and trustworthiness.

Maxwell (1996) refers to the standard of credibility in qualitative research as an effort to construct a trustworthy narrative as "validity." He speaks of creating the story holistically as "the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 87). This synthesizing of several rigorous methodological themes was done through the course of my study.

Goetz and LeCompte (1994) describe validity as the development of a "credible" and "believable" story. Their work elaborates on "connecting pieces until no holes remain" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1994, p.192). Through portraiture, if an emerging account

makes good logical sense and fits well with other independently analyzed variables, the story begins to take on a life of its own. Goetz and LeCompte emphasize the researcher must make it a goal of finding collaboration among pieces of the puzzle as the portraitist creates the story.

Eisner (1991) discussed credibility of qualitative research as “validation.” He constructed standards to frame the validity of the research such as structural corroboration, consensual validation, and referential adequacy. In structural corroboration, the researcher relates multiple types of data to support or contradict the interpretation, which I did in my study. By seeking the opinions of others (administrators and teachers), I built in consensual validation or “an agreement among competent others that the description, interpretation, and evaluation and thematics of an educational situation were right” (Eisner, 1991, p. 112). Referential adequacy refers to bringing about more complex and sensitive human perception and understanding. Given the subject matter of interest-based learning, this study inherently brought about more understanding and perceptions of this educational phenomenon.

Throughout the case study, I asked participants to member check interview questions/answers, observations, and artifact descriptions. With member checking, the validity procedure shifts from the researcher to participants in the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe member checks as the most crucial technique for establishing credibility in a study (p. 314).

Ethical Considerations

Qualitative case studies have limited generalizability; specifically in this study, we are looking at one high school, three administrators, and three teachers. According to

Yin (1989), case studies are like an experiments; they are generalizable to theoretical propositions but not necessarily to population or universes. Thus, a case study design is not intended to generalize specific observations beyond the single site. Only a single case was studied within a two month period (Stake, 1995), which is how conclusions can be drawn; application is left to the reader.

Stake (1995) emphasizes that interpretation is a major part of the research. On the basis of observations and other data, I drew conclusions or assertions which answered the questions that guided the study. Ultimately, the interpretations of the research are likely to be emphasized more than the interpretations of those people studied (Stake, 1995, p.12).

In qualitative studies, ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge with regard to collection of data and in the dissemination of findings (Merriam, 1998). Overlaying both the collection of data and the dissemination of findings is the researcher-participant relationship.

Researcher Perspective

Before the first interviews with the administrators, I started a reflective journal to ground myself and my awareness that I would have bias going into this case study as a researcher participant. In the very beginning, I experienced great bouts of fear--fear that I didn't have good research questions and, if they were good, would I get any answers to my questions? The doubt led to writing in my journal about everything that could possibly go wrong, then turning every doubt into what could be possible. After the pros and cons with my head and heart, I came to terms with the fact that a qualitative case study would be open to whatever happened and whatever created meaning. Once I

settled with the fact that I just needed to be part of the study and let it unravel itself through the process, I was able to be much more reflective with the experience.

After the administrator interviews, I was relieved because it was affirmed that the topic of interest-based learning as a strategy to teach subjects was a viable approach they all would absolutely support. They were able to give examples, stories, and experiences when they had witnessed interest-based teaching in practice. I also reflected back to when I had last met with my dissertation committee while defending my proposal. We talked intensely about engaging students in learning and the ways teachers are promoting that in their classes. I went into the next set of interviews with the teacher participants open to explore what their thoughts were on engaging their students and if they were familiar or used interest-based strategies to teach content.

Between the administrator interviews and the teacher participant interviews, I wrote in my journal about the need to focus on gathering data. I found myself wanting to analyze the administrator's answers to the interview questions and knew by doing that, I was not being fair to the study. In my writing, I gave myself some techniques for staying in the moment, capturing the present, and not going into my thoughts too deeply throughout the next phases of the study. Whenever I found myself delving into the "why" something was done or said, I took a deep breath and said, "Stay in the now, honor the work."

Upon finishing the teacher participant interviews, I was hit with feelings of guilt. I felt guilty that they believed so strongly in interest-based teaching but they struggled to find time to collaborate and plan the lessons to incorporate the strategy. Here I was cutting into what little extra time they had to do a case study. My mind was eased by

knowing that if I ever had the opportunity to give back to the profession, I would make sure all of the participants in the study knew they were part of contributing something significant to student achievement. At the time, I didn't know if I would have anything significant to share but I did make sure I treated the participants with value, dignity, and many coffee gift cards.

Transitioning into classrooms was so exciting for me. I wanted to capture everything I could and leave nothing out of the picture. After an observation, I would journal for pages on how it was to teach in my own classroom. I missed that but my memory kept the passion alive. The teachers I worked with throughout the months of the case study reminded me that there are sophomore educators everywhere. It is a shame that the public perception is so narrow. One example or incident of poor teaching hits the media and the entire world forgets that in the midst of a small bit of negativity, there is a downpour of brilliance happening in classrooms across the nation.

When I was about to finish the last classroom observations, I could see some common threads coming through the data I had thus far gathered. Again, I had to journal about staying true to the process and not begin collecting commonalities until we were done making meaning together by co-constructing meaning. Because I had gained such respect and adoration for the administrators and teacher participants in the study, it was easy to not breach the commitment to finishing the data gathering before the next steps could take place.

There were many entries in my journal stressing about time. Would I have enough time to do all of the components of the study? Would I have time to transcribe things in a timely manner? Would I be able to give the participants enough time to

validate and check over the work? Would I find the time to do what I believed was important to student learning, just like the teachers struggling to find time to incorporate interest-based teaching in their strategic repertoire? I reminded myself often to breathe, breathe, and have faith that I would never have taken this on if it wasn't supposed to be--one day at a time.

The day before the focus group interviews, I wrote about the most exciting teaching practices I observed in the classrooms that engaged students to be creative, questioning, exploring, wanting to learn more, and being reflective about all the elements of their learning. My concerns of time were coming to a point of relief--all of the things that needed to happen were getting done.

After the focus group interview, my journal writing consisted of quotes from great educational leaders who have inspired me to want to do more, give more, and be more of a leader. It was time now to gather the many layers of data: administrator interviews, individual teacher participant interviews, notes from classroom observations, artifacts from the teachers, focus group interviews, and my own reflections as researcher participant. Now I could begin the work of pulling it all together and finding the emergent themes, convergent threads, and the answers to my research questions.

Summary

The methodology I used was a qualitative case study method in a high school. The selected high school had many of the challenges relating to graduation and students dropping out before graduation. However, the school had established many interest-based instructional strategies as a way to engage students. The school's population was diverse and many specialized programs had been established to address students' needs.

Through the study, I hoped to construct meaning of what teachers and their administrators were doing to engage their students in learning.

The goal was to keep an open mind, gather detailed data, and implement a constructionist's view in the hope of painting a picture that would bring to the forefront some of the best instructional practices around interest-based learning and how administrators' leadership supported this kind of teaching. In the following chapters, data and themes were revealed as I delved into the interviews, observations, artifact gathering, and journal reflecting.

CHAPTER IV

CONTEXTS FOR STUDY AND CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how teachers are engaging their students in learning and how their administrators support them. I used the following questions to guide the co-constructing of meaning with the participants of the research. The following research questions guided this inquiry:

- Q1   What interest-based instructional strategies are teachers using to promote student engagement and learning?
- Q2   How are the administrators in the school helping to support teachers as they implement interest-based instructional strategies to promote student engagement and learning?

This chapter details the context of the settings, the participants in the study and their classrooms, and the researcher as participant. By describing the outside or macro-environment, a better micro understanding of the study is captured. Working from outside in (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) creates a picture and story that frames the context and what was found through the research.

The case study was conducted in one Colorado Front Range high school (for this study--Greenview High School). Interviews were conducted with three administrators and three teachers. Institutional Review Board approval was granted by the University of Northern Colorado to gather data from the interviews (see Appendix D). Throughout the portraits, all of the participants were given pseudonyms to retain anonymity. A focus

group interview with the three teacher participants was completed at the end of the case study. The teacher participants shared bodies of artifacts, student work, lesson ideas, and instructional descriptors of assignments. As the researcher participant, I kept a detailed reflective journal throughout the process of the case study. Over the course of four months, more than 30 hours of observations were documented in participant classrooms, administrative areas, and throughout the case study high school. During this qualitative case study by using the lens of portraitist, I was able to capture common themes and insight to get clarity and answers to the guiding research questions detailed in Chapter V.

Context for Setting

Greenview High School is located along the Front Range of Colorado. Because of the unique programming and passion of meeting students' interests to engage them in learning, I selected Greenview High School. It was originally built in 1978 to accommodate a growing population within the city. Over the years, the school has grown to 1400 students, 9th through 12th grade. Students are involved in a variety of sports and have access to many extra-curricular opportunities after school. Within the last 10 years, the community has approved increases in mill levy and bond dollars. Greenview High School has benefited greatly from those passages and also from involvement in community partnerships. Within the last two years, the school has experienced an entire building renovation project as well as the addition of programs that align with the demands of the 21st century. Entering the doors of this school today, you would not know that not too many years ago they were challenged with a large at-risk population, high incidents of gang activities, and dismal scores on standardized tests. There most definitely has been a transformation.

Walking up to Greenview, there is a feeling of a warm welcome with wide steps that are tiered by open space, then another eight steps to the tall glass doors that lead you directly into the front office. Greeted with the warmest smiles, open gestures, and head nods of hello, it is evident everyone is accepted into Greenview. The colors of the office area are warm and calming; the newly decorated sitting area tempts you to want to take a seat and just revel in the positive energy of all who work in the area. Administrators are hustling back and forth through the area, students are entering and signing in, and secretaries are busy accomplishing their tasks. The unknown researcher is greeted as if I belong in the school. Upon registering and receiving the appropriate visitor badge, I am allowed to enter the main corridor.

Entering the main hallway that leads to the school's common area, you can still smell the coats of fresh paint on the walls that reach high to an open area. The tiles on the floor are new and polished, although you can see the many footprints of the students who have entered their "new" school. The walls display pictures of student scholars and accomplishments of the school. As I walk down the wide, brightly lit corridor, straight ahead is a large area filled with lunch tables, vending machines, and a view of the Rocky Mountains; the entire wing that is encased with glass from floor to ceiling. The inspiration the view brings to the area invites students to want to sit with friends and socialize; others choose to find a corner in solitude as they listen to music or read a book. The energy of the area is inviting to all who enter--even an outside researcher who is observing and writing on frequent visits to their school.

Through the glass encased common area, the grounds of the school are covered with thick green grass that rolls over smooth hills of landscape. The entire school is

surrounded with well groomed grass, shrubs, and mature trees that are an aesthetic addition but not overbearing. If you turn your back to the large glassed display of the mountains, you have a choice to go left or right down very different halls.

While standing at the “T” of the commons area, a walking ramp leads to the second floor; you also see a library that is open to the interior by glass windows and doors. In the decision to take a left down the hall from the “T” in the commons area, there is a glimpse of the school’s past. Older trophy cases are filled with history of sports and activities. The walls and floors are clean and shiny, not because they are new but because they have been maintained with pride. Down this hall are many classrooms from business to history and English. Walking down the hall, I can hear the noise of basketballs hitting a wooden floor and students cheering each other inside the gym in the middle of the long narrow hall. As I scan the halls, there are classrooms on the left and the gymnasium takes the right side of the long hall.

At the end of the long hall, I turn around and retrace my steps, arriving again at the commons area. This time, I pass the brightly lit commons areas and run into another shorter hall that turns into an entire wing of the building. I have entered the wing of Greenview’s 1000 seat auditorium. Because their auditorium is so grandiose, not only do all other schools in the district utilize their facility but many community organizations as well. The stage is something you would imagine from Broadway; the technical elements are state of the art and the house seats 1000 on two levels. You can feel the history of the plays, dance recitals, assemblies, and presentations. This type of auditorium makes sense for a high school of this nature since their students excel at the arts. In fact, over the last few years, the school has added a Visual and Performing Arts Academy to allow students

the opportunity to expand their interests. Leaving one of the two sets of doors to the auditorium, there is a 15 foot wide staircase. Walking up the flight of stairs, I am in awe of student murals that are colorful and alive, depicting great heroes of history with bold details while telling the story of why the arts are so important to the school. At the top of the stairs to the right, steppers are entertained by the painting all the way up the curved wall, forcing a sharp turn around. At this point, if I go left I am entering the classrooms of the visual and performing arts wing along with additional classrooms. Newly constructed dance rooms and performing centers are next to existing classrooms; all have been updated, painted, and filled with new furniture. Turning right at the top of the stairs, I see a ramp that will take me into the school's library. Continuing to walk over the ramp, I approach the school's largest recent renovation--the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) wing. Impressive labs filled with technology and innovation are all state of the art; Greenview's goal is to prepare students to enter the future with a foundation that is not offered at any other high school in the area. During tours of the school, it is easy to get confused where you are and what wing you might be in, e.g., S.T.E.M. or V.P.A. However, when looking toward the center of the school, whether on the first or second floor, the brilliant light of the sun illuminates the center of the commons area because the entire ceiling of the school is covered with windows. After I have traveled through the light, the halls, the art, and the smell of fresh paint, I end up at the front office and am greeted with curiosity by the staff as to how I loved their "new" school; I am encouraged to come back anytime. Throughout the course of the study, I came back to the school over 20 times; I was always greeted in the same manner as the first time I visited Greenview High School.

Setting the Context for Administrators

This case study involved three administrators through in-depth interviews. Administrator participants were the principal of the high school, an assistant principal, and their professional development administrator.

Ms. Rene Davis, the principal of Greenview High School, has been an administrator at the school for over eight years. She was an assistant principal at the same school prior to becoming the principal. Her passion for teachers and teaching is evident when she shares her own experiences as a physical education teacher over 10 years ago. The 20-plus years she has invested in education, mainly at the high school level, have prepared her to transform the school into a state of the art institution that offers students many interest options. The energy you feel from Ms. Davis as you enter her office stems from her love of students. Frequently she says, “I am so proud of these students; they come from tough backgrounds and they are excelling.” Her walls show pictures of her with students, their recognitions, and accomplishments. The office furniture is solid oak; a table in the middle of the room is circled by cushioned chairs. Anyone who enters feels comforted and open to talk about anything. Her personal desk is orderly with a lap top to the left. Some personal pictures are hidden unless you are close to the area. Many projects and papers are organized in piles on cabinets behind the desk. Entering Ms. Davis’ office, I am welcomed with a calm caring voice that gives you the illusion she has all day to spend with you. I am not rushed and she leans in toward me as we have a conversation, sitting not across the table but right next to each other.

Aside from the joy she exudes when talking about students, she seems just as proud of her teachers. There is no doubt that her expectations of each and every teacher

are that they are focused on student achievement. Ms. Davis demands, “Everyone is expected to do whatever it takes to ensure every student is stretched, and every student has what they need to be successful.” Setting high expectations for students and assuring they meet those goals is the given; there is no room for anything less than the best. She tells me that she has been known to pull students into her office when they are not performing at the level she feels is acceptable and tells them, “This is not what we expect at Greenview, you know that; now what do you need to step up and do what we know you can do?” Not only does she stand by her mission of what is expected, she inspires her staff to stretch themselves--to do whatever it takes to engage students and take them to success. When you leave her office, you feel like you want to carry a torch for her cause. She is a champion for the at-risk student. The belief and expectation that all students WILL learn and graduate resonates with every other word she uses to describe her school and the programs they have put in place to make that dream a reality for every student.

The office right next to the principal is small and efficient. The assistant principal, Mrs. Heather Wright, has many papers of business spread over the top of her desk. The desk faces her door and you have the choice of two chairs to sit in. There is enough room for an L-shaped desk ensemble and a couple of book cases to the side. The cases are full of administrative guidance books on discipline, culture change, and content in math. Prior to becoming the assistant principal, she spent over seven years as a mathematics teacher at the school. She has been their assistant principal approximately five years. She is thrilled to share her latest responsibilities (aside from her disciplinary role) as academic director of their STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and

Mathematics) and VPA (Visual and Performing Arts) Academies. Mrs. Wright beams as she explains, “I thought I would really miss teaching, and I do. But I am so busy connecting with kids everyday in a way that I never did as a teacher. I feel so much more beneficial as an administrator than I did as a teacher.” With so much on her plate, she is very busy; her energy to get everything done makes you want to get into her office, grab a seat, and get to it. However, once I began talking with her about her work at Greenview, she shared, “There is nowhere else in the entire area that I would rather be!” Her loyalty and commitment to the students is awe inspiring. When she talks about teaching math prior to becoming an administrator, she slows down, her face softens, and you see her recollecting what joy she had being in the classroom. With a shift of subject, she is able to alter that joy from a memory of the classroom to the desk where she is sitting. The love she has now is different; you can see in her eyes and through her words that her dedication to the students and school carry on and transfer to her daily work. As I finish talking with her, I detect her energy increase so she can tackle her next opportunity to contribute to the mission of the school.

Moving from the lower level of the school to the upper or second floor, I walk straight into the library. It is organized in a most orderly way--purposeful and functional. Upon opening the doors to the library it is evident things have been renovated with fresh paint, clean lines, and some new pieces of furniture. The open windows lining the area of the library bring in natural sunlight. Students are trusted as they move about, finding places to sit and work because no one is asked for a pass or even questioned what their purpose in library will be. Long wooden tables are full of sets of portable laptops that classes are working from while the teacher circulates and helps those who are in need.

Across from the circulation desk is a newly built interactive technology lab filled with students and their teacher. It is fascinating to watch the engagement of every student working towards finding pieces they need to complete their projects. Next to the technology lab but around the corner, a door is propped open. The room is much larger than even the principal's office. It has the feeling of a mini-library with magazine racks in the corner, a large white board with plans on one wall, and bookcases stretching across an eight feet area. The shelves are full of books you would find in a professional development library of a large district. This makes sense since the administrator, Mrs. Janet Dolan, shares this area with the resources as the school's Instructional Coach of Professional Development. In the far corner of the large area, she has her desk angled facing the door. Her desk is organized with minimal papers and few books of reference. As I walk through the door to this area, she immediately jumps up and welcomes you to come in and sit at the large oval table in the middle of the room. When I compliment her on the wonderful office, she corrects me by saying, "This isn't really my office. That's my desk but this area is for teachers to come and get support or resources." The role she fulfills is that of an instructional leader for the mission of the school--high student achievement for all students, no matter their obstacles. With over 30 years experience in education and a passion for how the brain works (having completed her Ph.D. in Psychology/ Neuropsychology), she understands teaching and learning. She proudly elaborates, "When I see students engaged, active in a classroom, I know their brain is connected to what they need to be learning." When the school added the specialized academies (S.T.E.M. and the V.P.A), many community partnerships and grants infused the programs and opportunities in ways other schools may not have financially been able

to expand. One of those opportunities Greenview High School took advantage of was to add a coach that could assist the teachers with 21st century skills and learning. The instructional coach works one-on-one with teachers on lessons, ideas, and thoughts, as well as directs most of the professional development for the entire school. Although she could be working at a university, she chose Greenview High School because the principal supports her personal vision/belief--the critical need in public education today to maximize students' thinking, learning, and potential contribution to our world today through sound instruction and challenging problem-solving experiences. Through this work at the school, she feels she is contributing to a greater cause. She stands by her belief saying, "The real learning of what works for students in schools is to be working inside the school, not teaching what it might or should look like." Sitting at the large conference table, she shares that she wants to contribute in her role as instructional coach to "help teachers change their practices to align with what research says is 'best practices' to engage all students."

After hours of conversation and observation with the administrators, the common threads that wove through all three experiences was their focus on a common mission--passion from their hearts that fuel their energy and a realistic view that they know the work ahead will not be easy.

Setting the Context for Teacher Participants

Teacher Participant Kay Janis

Teacher Participant Kay Janis has been teaching mathematics for close to 20 years. Of those years, over 10 have been at Greenview High School. She has been at the school long enough to experience a variety of leadership styles. At this point in her

career, she could choose to teach math just about anywhere. However, she feels adamant that, for the first time, she is working for a leadership team of administrators who are focused on the right things and she doesn't want to go anywhere else. I smile while she says, "I would do just about anything for Rene if she asked me to do it."

Her repertoire of teaching stretches from lower level math with struggling students to Advanced Placement students preparing for higher level math at the college level. She told me that she doesn't care at what the level the student is performing. She knows the most important thing is to find out where they are and move them through good instructional practices to the next level. Her commitment to rich curriculum that works for students is evident in how she talks about her lessons. Students have shared success stories with genuine vigor saying, "I didn't understand during high school why you were making us do all of this work; you were so tough and you wouldn't let us cut any corners." However, those are the same students who came back and share with her that she was one of the few teachers who prepared them for college math. When she shares these anecdotes, she is very humble; her head tips down and her pride for her students and her work with them is not boastful. Through her stories with students, it became clear that she is following the mission of their school. The expectation for all of her students is math achievement and she is focused on keeping that bar high.

When I ask her how she gets the students to attain success, she comments, "It's not easy. It's about not allowing them to give up." She does that by working with them on her free time, getting to know them personally, and pushing them when they don't think they are good at math.

Like many of the classrooms in the school, Ms. Janis' too has been updated. All of the walls are a soft cream color with clean white trim. Around the room, on all the walls are posters promoting mathematical operations along with inspirational pictures with phrases that resonant the "Can Do" attitude. With so many of her students in fear of math and not believing they can "do" math, she takes the opportunity with posters to try and instill a sense of accomplishment by pushing through obstacles with her students.

The focus of the class and learning is on students. She shared that much of her instruction is student-centered; thus, the desks in her room are in three- to five-group clusters. Ms Janis said, "As difficult as it is sometimes to group students and allow them to do more of the learning in groups, I know it is the best way for them to learn." During the lessons she instructs, there is always a time when students need to discuss and work with each other to problem solve and explore tasks. Bookcases and shelving around the room are very organized--everything in its place and nothing that shouldn't be there is in the way. In the front corner of the room is her desk, positioned at an angle so that her view is of the door and the clusters of student desks. The technology cart is positioned in the center of the room and equipped with the latest interactive instructional tools (lap top, projector, document reader, and even head set for sound). Although all rooms have been equipped with state of the art technology through bond and mill levy dollars, many teachers like Kay Janis are in need of additional training to fully maximize the power of the technology.

Students entering her room know exactly what to do and where they need to sit. The motion is orderly and expected; there is no testing of anything outside of what is normally done every day they come to class. She is a firm believer in routine and

structure as each day has a specific order and rhythm. The logic is clearly defined in her explanation, “I believe that students need to know what is expected, what we they are learning, and how they are going to get there.” With each class operating in the same pace and flow, Ms. Janis isn’t so rigid that, when something breaks the pattern, she doesn’t stop and enjoy a question or comment that could throw the lesson off just a bit.

In a soft voice and with a small body frame, her expertise of the content establishes respect amongst her students. Her small stature comes across like the Statue of Liberty. Students never test her directions or requests. Her friends have tried to tell her she doesn’t have to be a teacher all the time when she’s not in school. She says in her mind, she does because she is. When I asked her what makes her who she is, she said, “It’s teaching.” Her passion is obvious as she works with her students. They are actively engaged in what is asked of them during a lesson. They want to know what she has to teach them because most students are following the expectations of focus and hard work set up by the mission of the school.

The bell rings, student tidy up, gather up, and move to their next destination. Their faces have smiles, their bodies stand tall with confidence, and they believe they are mathematicians being prepared for the future.

Teacher Participant Kay Janis Observations

While I was fortunate to observe a variety of Ms. Janis’ classes, I always left eager to return as no two classes were identical. Walking into the classroom, you can feel the order and routine--everyone swiftly moves to their table groups, notebooks are taken out, and on the screen in front is the warm-up lesson to get the brain started for a lesson filled with mathematical interactions.

Although Ms. Janis is small in stature with a very soft spoken voice, her presence is bold and authoritarian. Students respectfully follow the established routine; when it's time to focus on the lesson for the day, all eyes look toward their teacher and bodies are facing the front interactive screen. Technology has served this classroom well with a document reader, light projector, and sound system. All of the technology is used to enhance the instruction and it seems to intrigue students' attention to the daily learning.

During the lesson for the day, students raise their hands and ask clarifying questions or questions that show they are completely lost. Ms. Janis masterfully poses a question back to students that allows them to rethink what is getting in the way of understanding the lesson. By taking the student's question and then asking a specific question back, she waits for the student to answer and you can see the light bulb come on. Once she knows the student has explored his or her mind to arrive at the correct answer, only then does she move to the next concept.

It is refreshing in a math class to see students beam with confidence; there is no fear of taking a risk because no question, thought, or answer is wrong. Every action is met with a positive word of encouragement: "Good question," "Great answer," or "That's one way to think of things, now try another." All of the words are backed up with eye contact and head nods. Students are working hard for the teacher and she is working hard for them; the expectation of what is going on during the time of the class is explicit.

I was fortunate enough to observe at the beginning of a new unit. Kay Janis set up what exactly would be learned in the days to follow, how they would go about learning the concepts and skills, and, in the end, how students would be expected to show what they had learned. There were options or choices for how the student would show

their knowledge in either a project type assessment or a written assessment. More time was spent on the outcome of the learning by answering questions and showing students exemplars of past projects in the event they chose the project. Once students had the opportunity to get their questions answered, which ironically most of them were answered by either the student who asked or a peer sitting close by, the lesson for the day was ready to begin.

At the front end of the lesson, students were given instruction more directly through example and articulation of how to figure out the problem. Ms. Janis' actions guided the students to turn to their table groups to tackle a few problems on their own. During the table work, students explored possibilities, interacted with each other on strategies, and discussed the many options to find the answer. While students are working together, Ms. Janis is floating through the classroom, listening, and watching. At times, she stops at a table group, kneels down, and engages with the group in their exploration. One day during table group work, I watched her tap one student on the shoulder who turned out from the circle; this allowed the student and teacher to have a private one-on-one conversation. From across the room, it seemed that the conversation was not just about the math challenge but a more personal interaction.

Students and groups were allowed to make a mess of their ideas; then with masterful guidance, they were asked to go back at it from another view. Before Ms Janis would allow a group to rework anything, she would challenge the group to think about why and how they got to their first answer. They would be expected to reflect and then write out the why and how with a recorder from the table. Once that was completed and

along with the guided questions posed to them, they were ready to tackle the task again, usually with success.

Just as students entered in an orderly fashion, they concluded their learning experience with their teacher in a clear, organized plan. Homework was discussed and all students were asked to clean up their areas, which they did. As the time drew to a close, the students are saluted with a wave and “Have a nice day”.

Teacher Participant Mr. Bryan Stewart

Teacher Participant Mr. Bryan Stewart is on the opposite spectrum of energy in comparison to his peer participant, Ms. Janis. There is nothing soft or low-key, structured, or orderly. He is put together like a picture out of a men’s style magazine with button down cotton shirt and smart tie. Mr. Stewart almost mixes in with his students in size but has an elevated, more mature style. Entering his classroom is like entering a carnival ride; you’re not sure when it will stop. It’s exciting and breathtaking at the same time. Students hustle in talking, chatting, laughing, even engaging in some horse play as they make their way to their assigned seats. The desks are in rows, touching each other edge to edge, with about a foot behind each row. The rows of desks are split down the middle with about a four foot isle that allows for flow from the front to the back of the room. There is barely enough room around the edge of the classroom for bookcases and storage units. File cabinets--some turned out and some turned to their sides--fill one wall of the classroom.

Before you can appreciate the covering on the walls and artifacts around the room, it’s important to understand the background of Mr. Stewart. He has a double major in English and Humanities, having traveled to London to study and a semester at a school

abroad. He completed his student teaching at Greenwood High School and is approaching his ninth year as a teacher of American Literature that he lovingly calls his baby. He had dabbled in private teaching and tutoring at different centers until he found his niche in the community by getting involved with low-income housing complexes. He mentored, tutored, and counseled the students at the residence. Through the passion and guidance of his principal, he has even started a youth council group at the school for the population of students needing additional support. He loves his community and the opportunities it allows him to help nourish and grow those around him. Mr. Stewart has a firm commitment to community and Greenview's multicultural community, which in his words "is a mirror for the rest of the nation, revealing a pluralistic community that thrives and can flourish beyond imagined."

Knowing Mr. Stewart's background explains why his walls and room are full of posters that encourage students to look outside themselves. There are many pictures of third world countries and their peoples. Maps from various nations and countries are pasted on all walls. In the midst of all the color and busyness of the walls, there are flyers promoting scholarships. There are tee shirts from adventures he has experienced. Posters of social justice and awareness are squeezed next to the maps of countries. Bookcases are tucked into the corners of the room. Novel sets of reading materials line the shelves; there are miscellaneous genres and levels of multiple books stuck in wherever they will fit. The bookcase at the front of the room is tightly stuck in the corner by a cart with an overhead projector. Even with the newest options of technology, Mr. Stewart likes to bust out what he calls "Olde School" technology and remind his students where he comes from. School pride illuminates one entire corner of the classroom with a

large storage cabinet in the colors of the school and some school memorabilia decorates the top of the cabinet. The many organizations he promotes and is involved in are shown by flyers and posters throughout the classroom.

Through all the color, posters, promotions, and motivational quotes on the walls, there is room in the farthest corner of the class, opposite the door, where Mr. Stewart has established what appears to be a working office without walls. The teacher desk is large and angled to face the class. Behind the desk is a small desk with a computer; it is in the corner behind the window on the outside wall that reaches from floor to ceiling. It is tightly framed with a cork bulletin board that is filled with personal pictures of adventures, friends, and of course the students in the groups he sponsors. The cork board is immediately touched by two older file cabinets pouring papers from the drawers. Papers not sneaking out of the file cabinet are layered in high piles on his desk. There is a system to the piles and papers filling the top of the desk because he is able to retrieve what he is looking for in seconds. Then in the center of all the very important papers (student's work, mainly), he has two cups of beverages in recyclable materials that he periodically hydrates himself from during his lessons that are jam packed with enthusiasm and involvement.

Within seconds of the last student entering his class prior to the period beginning, Mr. Stewart takes his place at the center front of the room and leans over a turn of century type podium. Students quiet down as they look to the front of the class and what Mr. Stewart has in store for them today. It's a read-aloud from Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. Before beginning, he turns to the double white boards nestled between the bookcases and memorabilia to review the purpose of the lesson. The class

roars in laughter as they notice someone before them changed Huck with the letter “F.” Mr. Stewart pointed out the humor of Twain’s intelligence, chuckled with his class, erased and fixed the edit, and then without a breath launched right into the lesson for the day.

There is an expectation of involvement with his students. He wants them to engage, throw their ideas and thoughts into the air, and he captures them by acknowledging their participation. The students have been set up with a free-flowing structure. They know only one person leaves the classroom at a time to use the restroom, with the pass hanging next to the door, and they are quick to return. Abuse of the freedom and privileges doesn’t seem to be a problem; the students are more interested in not missing what could be happening in class. The story begins with dialect, pauses, volume, and implications; everyone is following along in their own books. After chapter one is finished, the class begs him to continue into chapter two, which he does after some discussion and input of understanding from his students.

What seems like a very short time in his American Literature class is a 90 minute session of energy, enthusiasm, content, involvement, and colors of inspiration all over every available space and on every wall of the classroom. He takes a sip of beverage to hydrate and does it all over again.

Teacher Participant Bryan Stewart Observations

As I described throughout this portrait of Bryan Stewart, his boundless energy and enthusiasm never let me down each time I visited his class for observations. Mr. Stewart has the energy of his room--full of school spirit, adventure, and colors popping everywhere. While he is busy at his desk organizing, students are clustering, laughing,

talking, and mingling about the room. A small group of students is huddled around Mr. Stewart's desk as they share something from an electronic device. After a breakout of laughter, he vocalizes that it's time to get started and asks everyone to take their seats. After some movement and chattering comes to a close, he stands behind his vintage podium, looking put together with a tie and nice dress pants. Once he looks around the room to make sure all eyes and ears are on him, a story breaks out about the importance of education and where it can get you, which led to the importance of doing your best work, specifically referring to writing. He was referring to the recent essays that were done and the additional revising, editing, and reworking needed. No sooner had he broken that news to his students, he immediately began pointing out many positive attributes that came out of the recent essays. Again, he shifted to details the class would need to fix, i.e., essays are formal writing, not text talk. The class chuckled and he did as well. Ending his podium lecture with the incredible energy he opened the class with, he had the students turn to the board on the right of the room where they were given the details of the lesson and the outcome of the learning. The class would be reading and analyzing the novel *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. Mr. Stewart moved to his desk and brought out a variety of creative projects from handmade books, a packet of poems, and an artist's book cover; all were examples of what students might choose to do at the end of reading *Huckleberry Finn*. They were guided by their teacher as to what they needed to show in the project they selected; expectations were high for the students to perform their best, most creative work. A few questions were asked, heads were in affirmation of understanding, and now it was time to get to the novel.

Students got up from their seats, got their own book, and then quickly sat back down, not without a splattering of chatter and socializing. The energy in the room was in constant excitement; even I wondered what was going to happen next. Mr. Stewart took a walk about the room to make sure everyone was ready with a book in front of them; then he moved back to what I refer to as his “power place” behind the vintage podium. He introduced the author and then the story, which broke the students into a lively discussion about the time period of Realism and what was important. Questions were asked that forced students to dig deep into their reflective souls about how they would feel and fit into Realism. Silent pauses through the thick of enthusiasm captured everyone’s attention. When Mr. Stewart wanted to draw his students in even deeper, he called them by name and posed questions. A question about Mark Twain was posed and why he changed his name, which led to what he must have dreamed about being a writer. Pause . . . with a compassionate tone, eyes looking through the souls of his students, he says, “I encourage you to dream, other kinds of dreams, dream better.” A pause of silence cuts through the thick air of thought, then students are asked to open their books to the first page.

The chatter of socializing has stopped; all eyes are on the book--their teacher has them in the palm of his hand. With a strong southern dialect, he begins to read chapter one out loud. Everyone follows along, mesmerized by the story that is unfolding right before their eyes, ears, and hearts.

On any given day that I entered Mr. Stewart’s classroom, there was a variety of instruction modalities, energy, and enthusiasm. You never knew what to expect because no two days were alike. Within one class, you could be entertained with what he lovingly

called “Old School Technology.” He would break out the overhead projector to share verses, pictures, or examples of former student work. Immediately after the show on the overhead, he would have students turn to one another and reflect on what they just learned. His style of teaching and approach of tapping into what his students cared about ran through each of his lessons. One important topic that was often brought up was relevance. He was constantly referring to why what they are learning was relevant to their lives now and how it could impact their lives in the future.

You must be ready for anything when you go into Mr. Bryan Stewart’s class. Definitely expect to work hard--not just writing, but thinking and then thinking deeper. He won’t be sharing the coffee or tea he is constantly refreshing himself with throughout the 90 minute blocks of teaching but you may want to make sure you have your energy drink prior to the start of class.

Teacher Participant Ms. Gwen Taylor

Teacher Participant Ms. Gwen Taylor creates an environment that is a mixture of her peers, Kay Janis and Bryan Stewart. She exudes a balance of order and structure, yet she has a random manner about her work and classroom. She describes confidently, “I’m all about shaking things up.” Before her classroom can be clearly understood, it is important to know that her classroom could be anywhere. It could be the library, a technology lab, or a shared space with a colleague she co-teaches with and shares an accordion door, double room most days. This means that their two rooms are only separated by a movable door, which also serves as the back of the room for the magic Ms. Taylor creates in her space.

Ms. Taylor welcomes students and visitors with the entire day's lesson visible on the large white screen from the projector in the ceiling. The plan for learning and key essential concepts, along with supporting resources, are detailed and shown in the front of the class for students. Students act as if they have rehearsed the routines expected by Ms. Taylor; they come into the class, sit down, look at the large screen, and write down the plan for the day--they do not miss a beat. It could be because they are anxious to participate in what their teacher has planned for them. Ms. Taylor takes her work very seriously but has so much fun delivering and working with her students, especially one-on-one. Maybe because of her 15 years teaching in middle school, she possesses that gift of keeping students guessing and then leaving them wanting more. Ms. Taylor has been at Greenview High School for the last four years. When I asked how she liked the switch to high school, she said, "I absolutely love it!" Her enthusiasm in front of her classes is in evidence; she is not exaggerating. Her tall physique, long styled dark hair, and trendy glasses all establish a powerful her presence. She dresses with pizzazz by using large items of jewelry to accent her colorful shirt and dark pants. The students respect her guidance; they don't question any requests when she directs them to act. However, as I watched the flow of her classes, it also seemed students were eager to engage because she was constantly "shaking things up," doing different things to get the lessons learned. Her innovation with technology, along with a mixture of clear, guided expectations on assignments, made the 90 minute blocks of time pass quickly. Rarely did she stay in one spot for more than a few minutes; she floated around every open space she could find every other minute of class time.

Finding open space to travel is no easy task. The desks are in rows touching end to end with only a little space behind rows, all facing the board/screen in the front of the room. They are all paired up with an isle on each side of the paired desks. Ms. Taylor has two internal lanes to travel around and one lane on the right side of the room when she is facing the students. However, there isn't much room to smoothly walk up and down because many unique items line the wall. Probably because she teaches World History and a WIRED class that is part of the STEM program, it's important for her to have a variety of supplies. There is a silver, metal filing cabinet topped with a giant globe, a blank white board with stick people drawings all over it, a large fan, and a futurist floor lamp with three wired bulbs coming out of the base pipe. In the back corner of the room along the busy wall is an orange wooden cabinet with another large globe on top. In front of the orange cabinet sits a plastic drawer set that resembles a filing cabinet. The back of the room is a blank accordion door. As you wrap around to the opposite wall, a silver metal file cabinet acts as a separator for the shared room. A bookcase stands next to the cabinet with two cork bulletin boards. One board seems to show school paperwork and work related items; the other board is full of many colored pictures of personal friends, experiences, and animals. Directly in front of the bulletin boards is Ms. Taylor's desk. Everything on top of the desk tells you that this is an interactive classroom--several scissors are in cups, file stands and papers are in piles--but all are organized. Many tape dispensers, staplers, and colored papers are available for class projects. The top of the desk screams engaging activities. Behind the desk, on the wall next to the second bulletin, is a computer desk; another floor lamp leans over the computer that is facing the front of the room. At the front of the classroom, there is a

student computer station that is used for presentations and multi-media productions. The corner of the room is lit with a window that reaches from floor to ceiling. Arriving at the front of the room again, there is the screen brightly lit with the day's lesson. Behind the projector screen are two mounted white boards. One board has the daily schedule or bell schedule, a school calendar, and a couple of personal pictures of Ms. Taylor and peers smiling out at the students. On the other board, there is only one poster; it has an icon of a cell phone with a line angled through it. On the bottom of the picture, it reads: Please NO (picture) Thank you! In the corner of the room that backs up to the entrance of the classroom are three additional tri-bulbed floor lamps. I could only imagine that there must be times during the shaking up of lessons when the lights go off and the floor lamps are used to create a certain environment. Most curious is the very deep shelving unit directly in front of the class that is filled with textbooks and resources. The unit is so large you cannot get to the white boards if you want to write on them. All elements of the classroom encourage students to create, interact, and be part of the learning.

On some days, it would be hard to find Ms. Taylor in her classroom. However, if I searched the school and went to the second floor of the school, I would find her and her students either in the library at long tables using multiple lap tops or possibly in the technology lab working on gathering research or creating a presentation. Wherever I might find the class, I would always see Ms. Taylor circulating amongst the students, answering and asking questions, but always ready to help anyone who needed it.

The rhythm of any day was an observation mixed with structure and control but flowing and moving about as well. Ms. Taylor was not shifted with a planned break, a move to another area, or time for students to process with peers.

When I asked Ms. Taylor where she got her ideas and energy to teach with such vigor, she immediately responded, “That’s easy. Everything comes back to the students. They inspire me then I work with great colleagues to create and refine lessons that will engage them and get them hooked into what I want them to learn.”

Teacher Participant Gwen Taylor Observation

More than her word, Gwen Taylor walks the talk. I found this out every class I observed her teaching; she never missed an opportunity to inspire her students. Observing any class you could hear her saying, “Guys get your notebooks out and write down what is on the screen. Let’s go.” This is how everyone is greeted when entering the room of Gwen Taylor. Every day is started with technology ready, the lesson for the day, and agenda clearly charted out on the large white screen at the front of the room. Students don’t complain or socialize; they get their notebooks out and begin jotting down what is expected. Although I feel the routine and order, there is a congenial tone in the room that allows students to comfortably go to the desk of their teacher and ask questions or just share a story. She is attentive and engaged in whatever they want to say.

The plan for the day is to head into the library and work on gathering research on specific part of the country they are studying. Ms. Taylor creates what she calls rotations; students group into threes or fours, select a certain element of the country they will study in-depth, and then present to their peers. Before heading to the library to gather data for the rotation, she outlines the expectations of what will happen when they get to the library. They will utilize headphones with the laptops. She doesn’t want them listening to music; headphones are for listening to videos or music that will be used in their presentations. Some chuckles erupt and she gives the lifting eyebrow, corner smile

look to the entire class. Once the details of the day's work have been completed, I was surprised there were not a lot of questions. However, I remembered in our initial interview that the rotation approach to learning is something not new to her students. She often uses this type of instructional strategy because it allows for choice; when the student has options, she feels there is more "buy in." Because I was fortunate to observe the class when presentations were given to their peers, it was clear that the students had "buy in." They were proud of their innovative creations. The presentations for this unit were all done using the projector and interactive technology. Students watching the presentations took notes on a handout given to them; they were also expected to do a reflective piece about the learning from the group presentation. Another reflection was expected at the end of the presentations on how they felt they personally did on their work and what they learned. During this activity, it seemed that the students were not excited about jotting down ideas on a handout. When I asked why they were grumbling, they responded, "This is the boring part; we don't like handout types of work." Although Ms. Taylor's classes were typically lively and interactive, there were some moments when she fell into using mundane activities like handouts.

It is time to head into the library for today's work on their specific topic of choice. While walking from the classroom to the library, Ms. Taylor walks closely with one student as she has a private conversation before everyone was seated at their individual laptops. Ms. Taylor acknowledges each one by name. She takes the opportunity to sit next to the ones who had questions. Those who are struggling she gathers up in a small group so they have a chance to get their questions asked. However, she does not answer the questions personally; she has others in the group help their peers.

Moving about the students as she observes what they have gathered and how they have chosen to put their information together, Ms. Taylor encourages the students for gathering good data and great information. She genuinely engages in the student's work by giving specific praise and guiding the students who are lost in finding a path of information. What makes her so genuine is that she is real with her students. When they ask her questions, their response could be "I don't know why," "I don't remember, but I'll figure it out," "I don't know what is happening with this thing, oh gez." Her students appreciate her vulnerability, yet they respect that she will work with them to find the answers. If they show they care about knowing something, she will do whatever she can to help guide them to their knowledge.

One of my favorite statements from Ms. Taylor is how she excites the students with enthusiasm and joy saying, "We're not here just studying history. We are studying what is happening in and around the world." She is constantly anchoring reality to the content they need to be learning. Students work hard and don't waste a minute of time they have to gather the information they need for their rotation. Her transparent style shows students she is not the end all; they are all vessels that can be filled with wisdom and knowledge. There are times when she is working with a student and will grumble, "Boy, this is hard, isn't it? We really have to tease through a lot of information to get to the most important thing to share."

When the class comes to the end of time, she explains that they aren't going back to the classroom today. She asks them to share out loud the most significant data they found during their time. After about five students shared, she set up what was going to happen the next time they met. But before she excused them, she said, "Oh! Something

smells awesome over here.” She asked if a student put something on. The student pulled out a bottle of peach spray and the teacher raved about the scent. Some students rolled their eyes but all smiled with a loving head shake that showed me they are used to Ms. Taylor taking notice of their personal business. With that sidetrack, she prepared her students to be ready to “hunker down” the next class since it was the their last time in the library. The gesture was given to depart; just about every student stopped by and wished their teacher good-bye or have a great day.

Teacher Participant Artifacts

Throughout the teacher participant observations, they all were kind enough to share a multitude of artifacts from their work with students. In the following section, I have identified common types of artifacts and their significance to this study.

All of the teacher participants shared student projects. The common element throughout all of the projects was choice. Students had at least two different options to determine how they would want to show their learning. Another common element to the projects was creative flare. Students were allowed to use some type of artist element if they chose to, i.e., drawings, pictures, music, or crafts they could create. The expectation for the level of work or what was expected of students to earn their evaluative grade was detailed in assignment and/or assessment rubrics. All of the teacher participants created and gave rubrics to their students for most of the assignments and/or assessments.

When the teacher participants gave me their class syllabus (all explicitly detailed), students were expected to do their best work in everything they did for the class. They were also expected to be active participants within the class by engaging in discussion and being open to giving their ideas, thoughts, and comments with peers.

One final common artifact all three teacher participants used was some sort of graphic organizer that students could manipulate to capture the learning during the lesson or presentations. Students were expected to keep data of what was being taught in some sort of organized way, whether it was using the graphic organizer provided by their teacher, two column notes in their notebooks, or simply taking key words down as concepts were being taught.

Several samples of reflective writing were gathered in either journal form or in chart form specific to certain learning. This showed that the teacher participants wanted their students to think about how and what they were thinking.

The artifacts shared through this study aligned with criteria of interest-based instructional strategies in the ways of giving students' choice, allowing open-minded or hands-on type of activities, and encouraging students to be reflective of their work and their learning. Exploration was encouraged through the options the teacher participants allowed their students; however, all three provided some type of parameter that students could explore. Through the analysis of the artifacts, I was able to verify an alignment to what the teacher participants said during the interviews and what they actually implemented through their instructional practices.

Setting the Context for Researcher as Participant

Participating in this case study from the outside looking in was a process that soon turned into me being on the inside. I can only attribute that transformation to the fact that the experience of research made me alive, which made the study alive. Margaret Wheatley (2009) wrote that human conversation is the most ancient and easiest way to cultivate the condition for change; if we can sit together and talk about what's important

to us, we begin to come alive. The hours, days, and months I spent with the participants of the case study brought us to deep conversation about things in education we all found meaningful. Through their stories and sharing their environments, we began making meaning together. We started co-constructing an understanding that would unravel some insight and answers to the questions I sought to answer. Just as I got to know the environment and all of the participants, they too began to know me and how I fit into the study as an equal participant of the study.

Like all of the participants of this study, I too work in a school. My experience has kept me in one middle school for the past 15 years. I should clarify that nothing has kept me in the same place except the joy I have every day to wake up and do my life's work. I started at the school as a drama teacher and then moved into seventh grade to teach language arts. After finishing my master's and earning a principal's license, I was fortunate enough to be offered and accept the position of assistant principal. At the end of this year, I will have completed my seventh year as principal. If you enter my office, my desk sits in the corner like an "L" that separates me from the public. The angle of the desk and the fact that my system for keeping all balls in the air is to have everything and anything I could possibly need all over my desk. Most days, it is rare to find even a square of the wooden oak top. However, I know what every paper and file represents and I also know exactly where to find them in the scattered art of work. If I am not able to find what I need on the top of my desk, I can look to the left and on top of the matching oak credenza. I can retrieve it from the more organized four piles of work reaching at least a foot high each. Directly to the right of all the papers, the center of the largest wall showcases the most incredible view of the Colorado mountain range. At any time in the

midst of school chaos, all I need to do is look out that window and breathe. Across from the window is the door to the office. I am able to see people walk into my office while at my desk, which often happens because I keep an open door policy. I encourage anyone to come in anytime the door is open; some even come in when it's closed. When entering through my door, there is a small round table with a mix of various kinds of chairs, all shapes and colors. Bookcases fill an entire corner. There are also two additional five foot bookcases--one just left to the door and the other against the wall with my desk. Most of the books in the cases are educational leadership genres. However, one bookcase next to the door is solely for music selections. Every Friday, we have "Inspirational Friday" and play a jazzy or sometimes profound message song over the announcements.

Most days, you won't find me in the office detailed above. I am in the halls and classrooms, with the energy of what makes a school work. I am in awe of great teachers and the work they put into outstanding lessons that motivate students and inspire them to engage in their own learning. As I watch great teaching in the building I reside and within Greenview High School (the case study school), I see many common practices across the miles.

My true passion of being an administrator is to find ways to serve the community that fills my bucket. When your bucket is full like the cup that runneth over, we have a positive outlook and renewed energy (Rath & Clifton, 2004). Working with educators who are excited about teaching and learning as much as I am is what fills my bucket. I would hope to fill teachers' buckets is by finding through this research ways they can engage students so deeply there would be no stopping them.

I'm a principal with a teacher's heart. Together with other administrators and teacher participants, we'll converse, explore, and co-construct meaning of what secondary teachers are doing to engage students in interest-based instruction and how their administrators are supporting their work.

Construction of Meaning

Through the gathering of data using interviews, observations, artifacts and researcher journal reflections, a co-construction of meaning can emerge. The portraitist draws out the refrains and patterns and creates a thematic framework for the construction of the narrative (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). In the portraits that follow, participants are grouped as individual data sources, administrators, teacher participants, and researcher as participant.

Wheatley (2009) explains, "It's not easy to begin talking to one another. We stay silent and apart for many reasons. Some of us have never been invited to share our ideas and opinions" (p. 28). It takes courage to express our real thoughts and practices. The participants in this study were courageous, which allowed for us to co-construct meaning together. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, i.e., how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world (Merriam, 1998). Through the unwrapping of how the participants made sense of their world and experiences, along with observations and other data, I was able to construct meaning that could be solidified through the study.

Once in the field, the portraitist begins by listening and observing, being open and receptive to all stimuli, acclimating to the environment, documenting initial movements and first impressions, and noting what is familiar and what is surprising (Lawrence-

Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). After hours of working together with the participants, I was able to gather enough data to synthesize the information, accompanied by generative reflection and interpretive insights.

Administrator Interviews

The case study began with first interviewing participants--principal, assistant principal, director of professional development, and classroom teachers--from the selected case study high school. Each administrator was asked the same 12 questions, spanning from general knowledge of the research topic to more specific beliefs and examples of evidence that might link to the focus of the research (see Appendix A).

After identifying with the administrators and their understanding of interest-based instructional strategies, I was able to immediately establish a common ground. All three stated they believed it to be an approach to learning that allows students to investigate areas of interest to them within the context of the content they are studying. Once it was clear that the administrators had a common understanding of what the research topic was, we were ready to broaden into a deeper level of questioning.

Since they had an understanding of interest-based instruction, I could explore what they thought the educational strengths or benefits to this type of approach could be for students and learning. One of the administrative participants expounded on her commitment to student learning by sharing this insight:

I think that is important and kids trust the environment in order to learn. It's exciting, it's dynamic and kids are so on. You walk into those classes who allow students to explore their interests and they are buzzing. I think you have to have a teacher that understands differentiated instruction. You have to have a teacher who is willing to be a facilitator, provide resources, and different strategies used for different types of learners and they need to understand who their class is made up of, instead of pulling out the worksheet or doing straight lecture, so they have

to be more savvy, have more tools in their toolkit of instruction. They have to be willing to let the kids self learn.

The educational strengths and benefits were layered with many components that impact teaching. Another administrator focused more on the intrinsic values by sharing,

I think one of the key words is engagement; if students are engaged in the learning I think, as a psychologist, it promotes natural curiosity and creativity in students. If it's done correctly I think it can contribute to a collaborative experience for the student's learning that is effective. It taps into their motivation.

While the administrators were participating in the interview, it was exhilarating to see their faces; they lit up and their eyes widened. Their entire bodies elevated from the crumpled posture they began with prior to launching into the interview.

All three of the administrators affirmed their knowledge and understanding of the benefits to interest-based instructional strategies. However, they were stretched to actually find examples or observations of what they all felt should be practiced in the classroom. Each participant took several seconds to retrieve examples from their experience files. Finally, one of the administrators openly and honestly stated,

I have not seen a lot. I've seen teachers use an interest inventory with their students. They were asking about interests as a way to get to know them. I believe one of the teachers actually wanted to do interviews with the students, I don't know if that actually happened.

In contrast to this administrator's experiences, the other two were overflowing with examples once they took time to gather their thoughts. There were examples of teachers allowing students to have choices of reading books around their interests and then anchoring the literature to the content. Observations of teachers allowing students to select an area of interest to show their knowledge through whatever means within some parameters was detailed:

Students did an awesome piece where they got to decide as a group their individual role in the group. They picked their books and then did video trailers so they were looking up the story line and creating a video clip and then their group had a discussion and asked questions of other students. It was incredible and the kids rose to the occasion, all kinds of kids. The teacher allowed them to decide where they wanted to take this. They used technology as another level of understanding as to how they were going to present the material and what the material was they learned.

Several examples revolved around activities teachers were allowing students to do within the lesson, e.g., getting up moving around and talking through math lessons, and allowing students to direct the learning using document readers or illustrations they created through pictures using a camera.

The interview questions were framed to identify if the case study school was using any of the criteria the Ohio Department of Education uses to define if teachers are using interest-based instructional strategies. One of the criteria was whether teachers used choice as a regular part of students' learning experiences. When the administrators were asked if they observed teachers allowing student choices and how it looked within the teachers' lessons, it was interesting that all three agreed in their observations. All had witnessed teachers allowing choices but in a limited or structured manner. Choices were offered to students as they decided options for how they wanted to show what they had learned. Given limited options, examples were largely based around using technology. Students would have the choice to show their learning through a written product or through technology using a power point presentation or graphic illustration. Although the choices the administrators had observed were limited and had somewhat of a structure to them, they all agreed that the teachers who incorporated these types of choices had more students engaged in the lesson. There seemed to be level of excitement with the

students that they didn't see when there was one way given for students to show what they had learned.

Engaging students in open-minded, hands-on learning activities is an established criterion to determine interest-based instructional teaching. I asked the administrators to think about observing in core (English, social studies, math, science) classes and talk about when they had seen experiences within those classes where students were doing hands-on activities or engaged in open-minded type activities. Because this could be perceived as two separate questions, they all took the liberty of addressing it in two parts. One of my favorite examples of observing this type of experience was a recollection of a history class:

I have seen in a social studies class the instructor using, in a historical sense, man's movement into inventions. He allowed his students to study inventions of their choice. Like how did the sewing machine come about, how did toilets come about. The culminating activity was to team and let the students create their own invention and then present it to the class. It was like a hierarchy, this is where it came from this is the totalitarian aspect. The inventions allowed them to be creative. The hands-on kind of thing.

Equally fascinating to imagine was when one of the administrators was sharing an example from an integrated class they observed that combined English with World Geography.

I've got two really great teachers and they were doing Romeo and Juliet with the kids. That class was all about themes and it was driven thematically from the history and the geography part of it. The essays they were writing fit into the literature piece, the speech they were giving. Romeo and Juliet is a really tough fit into that thematic piece, but what they have done is they took the period of the story and then they expanded on where it was located, the theme was that period of time, now what other types of historical events happened at that time period? But the kids who were not very good readers were very engaged, acting the play and the theatrical part, but they were also drawing scenes and sets designing the drawings when Juliet was up on the balcony. Then they were making it relevant with what was happening in today's world, so they were talking about the pressures of social pressure, peer pressure, and taking your own life. Kids were

really talking about how that really stinks, he died because of a mistake. They were really into it. I thought that was an interesting way to grab the kids, pieces they were learning about to make sense.

At first when I asked the question, all three started with a sigh of anguish and then quickly shifted their sighs into “Ahs,” proceeding with enthusiasm.

Another criterion used to define interest-based instructional strategies is when teachers encourage exploration. When the administrators were tackled with describing exploration in the learning environment as an instructional strategy, I was surprised by their eagerness to share examples. Immediately, one of the administrators talked about their new STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) Program:

Well our whole STEM Academy is built on the concept of the design process which is adding the creative and exploring what works and what doesn't work. Also explores what is out in the real world and bringing that in. They are really exploring career opportunities and options. They are exploring, “Does this really work, or not?” The biggest thing we want to make with connections in the STEM program is that can they be inventors and creators with other students?

Another administrator took an interesting approach to thinking about exploration. She took the teacher perspective and what they might need to do in order to allow for exploration to happen within a classroom. She felt teachers would need to know where their students were starting from; then they would be able to vary instruction. They might even need to bring in previous knowledge and then allow them to go toward problem solving or working collaboratively. The teacher would also want to tap into a student's style of learning to explore what would work best. However, she ended the answer by saying, “If they (students) are walking down the wrong road in their exploration, you have to bring them back and explore another avenue.”

A spirited answer came from one of the administrators that resonated 21st century learning and what we hope all schools are implementing:

We are trying to tap into our SPED (special education) population, we have kids with disabilities and in computer science they are working with kids around prosthetic hands, perception of things, trying to figure out how kids can manipulate instead of typing maybe they just hit a button. That's the real world, if they can start doing this in high school, that's exploring the possibilities and opportunities of their knowledge base and creativity along with critical thinking skills. Then relating it all to the real world, that I think is exciting, it just turns kids on!

The question was not structured to specifically focus on core content classes. I found it interesting that most of their examples were on classes outside of the core. In fact, one of the administrators went so far as to share, "This type of work is not happening at all in the traditional settings, or very rarely."

Taking the question of exploration further, we talked about any experiences they had observing students being engaged with exploring a content using their personal interests. All three administrators echoed one common variable: in order for this exploration to happen, the teacher must possess the quality of being a facilitator of learning and not a sage on the stage type instructor. Ironically, all three administrators indicated that they rarely observed this type of exploration going on in core content classes. However, all of them could give a multitude of examples in other areas: art, computer science, and in the specialized programs of STEM and VPA (visual and performing arts). They all conceded that in order for this type of exploration to happen, where students use their personal interests to learn, it would require the teacher to allow students to take over the learning. This requires a shift in the paradigm of most teachers.

A final criterion based on what the Department of Ohio uses to define interest-based instructional strategies was that teachers are encouraging reflection from their students. Administrators were asked if they observed any of their teachers using reflection with their students and in what context had they seen it being used. Their

answers were very thoughtful and took the students to the metacognition level of thinking. One of the administrators commented,

I think it requires that self direction and knowing where the student is going, that self awareness is a better word to use here to identify through journal writing, through talking, I think they allow that reflection to take place. That self evaluation piece, that is where I see the reflection. We have some teachers who are big on journaling for the students and for themselves.

Two of the administrators tapped into core content usages of reflection and when they had seen this strategy used to anchor student's learning through the examples below.

In science, kids write down in a notebook type book, but it really is a reflection on how their lab went and what they learned, what worked and what didn't work; how to correct things So I see that reflection in a scientific way. In English, reflection I see in the questions that are asked in short essay responses to subjects, topics, and books they are working on then kids are asked to reflect on different things. Kids are asked to journal and asked reflective questions, then asked to write in their journal. They can share out or they don't have to. I see that on a regular basis. I think teachers choose to incorporate the reflective questions and journals as part of their lessons. It's teacher driven.

The examples were a good blend of what teachers need to think about and what their students accomplish in order to implement the strategy of reflection.

Shifting the interview questions to how administrators support their teachers in incorporating interest-based instructional strategies, a focus was common to all three administrators. It was grounded in keeping the standard of content learning explicit in whatever strategies were used by teachers to engage students in learning. Teachers are expected to keep standards as the framework; however, having a menu of choice integrated in their plans is ideal. They all emphasized the importance of teachers "front loading," i.e., planning their lessons thoughtfully by taking time to specifically incorporate interest-based strategies to teach the content standards. Another reference made by the administrators was "keeping the end in mind," as illustrated in the following:

I listen to their planning, do some questioning. I always have them keep in mind the end, what standard they are trying to benchmark, that is uppermost as they are planning these interesting and interest-based lessons. Keeping the standards as the framework, however having a wonderful menu of choice integrated in their plan. A lot of front loading, I can't emphasize enough the planning involved months ahead of time if they are choosing to incorporate interest-based. It can't just be spontaneous, "Let's go do something we are interested in." No. This is the kind of thing I'm working on with teachers, if they want to do an interest-based unit, it will take months of planning and work.

One way the administrators emphasized their support to teachers was to be very clear of the accountability expected as it was articulated through each of the interviews.

It's content driven, but we want to address and see student achievement. That cycle is the accountability piece. They have to do a rubric, common assessment, and then analyze the data then come back to the table to discuss what worked and what didn't work.

Through the data, how administrators supported their teachers was that they are very clear of what is expected in their planning and how they were held accountable.

According to all three administrators, supporting the teachers in the planning process was crucial to the implementation of interest-based strategies to teach content learning.

Incorporating any new type of instructional strategy in the repertoire of teaching a lesson depends on whether the teacher is at that stage or level of experience. When asked what abilities a teacher would need if they were ready to embed student interests into their instructional strategies, all of the administrators agreed that the two most important characteristics a teacher needs are the willingness to allow students to drive some of the learning and strong relationships with their students. Each of them expressed their belief in ways unique to their experiences with working with teachers. One of the administrators expressed it this way: "I think if teachers are open to different kinds of strategies then and if they are about relationships with kids, if they have that piece to them they tend to be more open to having kids drive some of the learning and engagement piece."

Another administrator elaborated in more detail by saying,

When teachers have shown their ability to tap into students intrinsic ability, that's when I think they are ready to do an interest-based unit with their kids. They have to be very on board with good planning. And have good relationships with their students, there has to be a level of trust. A tremendous, explicit amount of trust that I know my students can go there, I'm going to relinquish a little control, let me fly.

All three of the administrators stressed the importance of relationships with students, the ability to allow classes to be student driven, or allowing students to explore the content while using their own interests.

When I asked what classes or seminars they had taken that contributed to their understanding and implementation of interest-based strategies, none of them could name a specific class or workshop but all could reference experiences that weaved or referenced student interests as a way to engage them in learning. Although they all supported and believed in the benefits of interest-based strategies as a viable instructional tool, they also felt more training was needed. One administrator shared,

I'm sure some people in professional development would argue that certain classes talk about interest-based learning. They, the instructor must have a very sound understanding of the depths of knowledge, Bloom's Taxonomy. What are we trying to achieve, to what level. A good instructor that understands and can use the verbs that go with the lesson, and set up the goals, they are the kind of teachers who are right for this kind of work. They not only understand that it's ok to say facts, they know to take it to the next steps. They are the ones who are going to be the most effective teachers and produce a plan to have the brightest, most creative students that become the life-longer learners.

Many references were made by all administrators of various classes and training experiences they have had that used interest-based learning of students. However, none had deep, specific classes, seminars, or training in how to implement the strategy in the instructional planning of content teaching and learning.

Final thoughts and comments regarding interest-based instructional strategies to teach content learning were consistent. They agreed that this type of strategy is the direction we need to go in the educational setting. If teachers understand how to implement interest-based strategies in their teaching, students reach their ultimate goal of achievement. This is best summed up by one of the administrators: “I honestly have to say that my final thought is what I think all this means is having a student understand the value of learning and having a good quality of the experience of learning that is as important as achievement.”

Teacher Interviews

A second component of data gathering was through individual interviews (see Appendix B) with three teacher participants who were selected by the administrators by using the Ohio Department of Education criteria of Interest-Based Instruction. Administrators matched the criteria with teachers in their school who practiced some of the criteria in their classes with their students. The interviews were conducted prior to classroom observations.

As teacher participants were asked their understanding of interest-based instructional strategies, their answers varied from a vague idea to actual ways of incorporating the strategy. One teacher participant stated, “What I know about it is that you want to get the kids tied into what they like and if you do that they will be more motivated, more self directed. They’ll develop their own projects that they work on and hopefully the goal will be they learn.” She was also concerned how it would work with all the standards that need to be covered. In comparison, another teacher participant actually shared key components to implement the strategy: “Well it’s essentially giving

kids choices and options, not only in the subject matter but in the delivery. That way they can speak to their strengths, in fact I give them a list of choices.” Interestingly enough, none of the three teacher participants had a clear definition of what they understood interest-based instructional strategies to mean.

Although they may not have had a technical definition, they all had strong feelings of how interest-based strategies had educational strengths and benefits. Woven through all their answers were common statements such as “increased motivation of students,” “more excitement in the learning because they are making decisions,” and “students will bring energy to the lesson because they are interested in what they are studying.”

Teacher participants were asked what strategies they used to find out their students’ interests. While their strategies to arrive at this information were varied, some had common threads. All of the teacher participants had given some kind of student interest inventory to identify their students’ interests. Getting to know their students and having one-on-one conversations with them was another common way the teacher participants were able to find out students’ interests. One of the teacher participants did a mixture of both:

I’ve done some direct questioning of the class, which is sometimes hard because some kids are shy, they don’t want to put their necks out and respond. I’ve tried some surveys and that seems like a lot of work more for me than the kids. So you know I think in all these things you get things from kids that I don’t like anything, “I have no interests” to “I like everything” and then how do you narrow it down. More recently, I spent more time just trying to get to know the kids, when they are in their little groups I try to get to all the groups and talk with them.

Aligned with one of the criteria used to determine interest-based instruction, one of the teacher participants shared this:

We do reflections. In the beginning of school, I always do a true/false test about me, because I have a Forest Gump life. I was in the first super bowl halftime, I was a zoo keeper with Siberian tigers, I use to work with Lionus Pauling, it just is funny. When I'm going through the stories, I was in Berkley in the 60's in college, got tear gassed and everything. So they buy into me immediately because I use a lot of humor in my class. Then they do reflections so I get to know them and we always reflect at the end of a project.

An interesting strategy used by another teacher participant was to watch his students and opening himself up like a book.

Body language is huge, you see students with a downcast look, with a smile whatever and you are able to elicit the interests from them as a result of reading their body language. I also offer up myself entirely, you can make fun of me, I say things that are hair brained in order for them to see I am open to them.

All three teacher participants had commonalities and unique, individual ways to find out what their students were interested in and how they might tap into that through their teaching of content material.

Interest-based instruction uses exploration with students as they explore the content and their personal interests. Some examples the teacher participants gave in the interviews to help their students explore their own personal interests to learn content material are detailed below:

Teacher Participant Kay Janis said,

I think the most I have really done on this is when we do projects I'll let kids select certain topics. An example is calculus after the AP test, we have some time, I let them do a research project or read a book and tell us about it, or something. It is their choice as to what they want to do as long as it is math related. Students like it, last year I gave them a book to read on finances, I had some kids saying this is more important than anything I've done in high school. So they were excited about that.

Teacher Participant Bryan Stewart said,

One would obviously be the "Hero's Journey" unit, where they were required to present their own Hero's Journey. I will often time implement a creative project that will allow students to tap into their own artist side, but it is not limited to art,

it could be interpretive dance, anything that students will be able to tap into. Some don't dance, sing, anything ... maybe you could build something. It's those creative projects that can be very interest based.

Teacher Participant Gwen Taylor said,

When I'm telling my stories I am hooking them in with stories they are thinking about. I am always trying to get them to tell stories. Once they are able to connect through my stories and then they understand the content so much more. The content is fluid, it is not rigid, the lectures are the same using technology and the microphone, but the classes are always different.

Individualizing the three teacher participants above showed that their understanding and implementation of "exploration" or "exploring" to allow students to find their interests was varied with little overlapping of ideas.

On the other side of the continuum, all three teacher participants had many similarities when asked to share example of when they gave students choice in their lessons or assignments. All of them agreed that they gave students choice with some parameters. None of them opened up a lesson or assignment to pure choice; it was more practiced that students could choose between two or three options to show their knowledge of content.

When asked how open-minded, hands-on activities were incorporated into their teaching, one of the teacher participants elaborated on how she used her content and sensual elements to teach the lesson:

We do these rotations where students select the topic they want to dig deeper into. They have some basic information; climate, geographic and now I want them to get connected more on a sensual basis where we listen to music and they evaluate it, they listen to folk tales and write a biopoem. So what they have are some choices within this, I try to have as many as possible doing very different activities, again everything is based in writing.

Using a variety of ways to teach content material while using choice of what the student wanted to study deeper was how one teacher participant described open-minded, hands-

on activities. Another teacher participant used the term “Stream of Conscientiousness” when incorporating open-minded or hands-on into his lessons:

All I’m asking is to write and whatever comes to mind you write. Stream of Conscientiousness is invaluable for creativity and what brain storming can create amazing ideas. Open minded even just in my Advanced Placement class I try to stress with my students giving them the option of interpretation. Be open minded if you can support your interpretation.

Through all the answers, open-minded and hands-on activities were weaved with giving students choices and allowing them to explore.

When asked about exploration, all teacher participants commented on students driving the learning. One of the examples was best described by Teacher Participant Bryan Stewart when he said,

The key about exploration is that it is student driven, that is obviously going to be crucial for finding interests. Exploration could also be connected to experimentation which allows students to even tap into new interests, discover new interests. It’s invaluable for students to be able to explore the possibilities.

For exploration to be successful, all three teacher participants were adamant that students had to be in charge of what they were going to learn.

Referencing the criteria from interest-based instruction, a question was asked concerning how teacher participants used reflection as a way to anchor or enrich the core learning of their lessons. All of their examples were mainly based in some sort of writing sample. One good explanation of how it was used came from Teacher Participant Kay Janis:

You know over the many years I’ve tried many things, sometimes I do exit tickets to compare and contrast two things we have learned about to solidify what we’ve learned. I’ve tried writing as a reflective piece. Ultimately in a math kids always scream, “Why do I have to write in a math class, this isn’t an English class!” It’s curriculum I say. When I correct their grammar or English, they get mad. I don’t dock their grade just give feedback.

Teacher Participant Bryan Stewart described a specific method:

Inquiry is going to be huge for me to determine the effectiveness of my teaching, a lesson, whether students are grasping the objective for the activity itself. A good example is journaling, but obviously it is a means for me to determine interests, student engagement.

Using some form of reflection was implemented in all of the teacher participants' lessons as a way to anchor or enrich the content learning they wanted their students to gain.

Just as administrators were asked how they supported their teachers in using interest-based instructional strategies, the teacher participants were asked first if they felt supported and how their administrators supported their work. Every answer was given with enthusiasm and excitement as the following was shared,

Teacher Participant Kay Janis said, "I absolutely think our principal supports whatever we can justify. If I go to her and say I think we should do these things and these are the reasons why I believe she will find a way to make it happen."

Teacher Participant Bryan Stewart said,

Really there seems that there is no limit to what our principal will allow us to do., If the resources are there and she can see the connection to a population that is often times underrepresented, she is all over An example is when we wanted a specific novel that wasn't in the line up, but it would reach our population.

Teacher Participant Gwen Taylor said,

Oh yes! She or the other administrators come in and they get really involved. I have them (the students) reflect about prejudices in their life so they talk about what they hear at school, home or in the community and then they talk about prejudice within themselves. Administrators are very supportive.

The teacher participants felt extremely supported due to examples that their administrators trusted their decisions of how they would guarantee students were learning the content and achieving. There was a level of confidence and respect that resonated

with the teacher participants and through their examples of what they did with the students.

Asked if they had taken any professional development classes or seminars that contributed to their understanding and implementation of interest-based learning, all of the teacher participants could give examples of how interests were mentioned or eluded to in various classes they had taken. They all were able to talk about many classes they had taken on teaching strategies but none that taught them about interest-based strategies or specifically how to implement them into their instruction.

The interviews ended with gathering final thoughts or comments regarding interest-based instructional strategies. The teacher participants all voiced that interest-based learning was the way to get students “hooked.” One teacher participant best culminated the three answers of their thoughts on interest-based strategies through the following articulation:

I would add that it is invaluable because no longer are we creating mindless drones, these students today need to have the autonomy to explore, to take initiative and to potentially come up with innovative ideas in this competitive world market.

Similar to the administrators, the teacher participants answered the questions with commonalities and some with differences. Also like the administrators, they all agreed that interest-based instructional strategies had educational benefits to engage students in learning content subject material.

Focus Group Interview

After hours of interviews, observations, and gathering of artifacts, I sat down with the three teacher participants to conclude our work in a focus group interview (see Appendix C). This was the first time throughout the case study that all three teacher

participants had the opportunity to meet together. The unfolding of meanings and how we all made sense of the experience were brought out through their answers in the focus group interview.

When the teacher participants talked about the opportunities they had to work collaboratively with peers on interest-based learning in their content areas, the overarching answer revolved around time. All three participants were eager to talk with colleagues about how to incorporate student interests into content learning but struggled to find the time. They all agreed that in order to benefit from interest-based learning, it would take a lot of time, which was lacking in their lives and schedules. One of the teacher participants shared a different experience. He had a unique situation with his content peers; he actually called it a “harmonious marriage” because everyone in his department believed strongly in focusing on interest-based practices. He also added that they were far from perfecting this art of mixing student interests with the content but had conversations whenever they could find time to meet.

A follow-up question on working collaboratively with peers on strategies to promote interest-based learning was whether they personally worked more collaboratively or autonomously. All three admitted that they typically found themselves working autonomously but saw their school encouraging more collaboration. All of the teacher participants were open to this approach and saw it being implemented more within their distinct content departments. They agreed that collaboration and working together was the greatest way to share ideas, get ideas, and build more choice, interest, and achievement in their curriculum.

Since all of the teacher participants agreed that collaboration and sharing were essential to student success, the next question I asked was how they had shared strategies or ideas of teaching through interest-based learning. One of them said that their department had talked about the concept of interest-based learning and some had tried it. He also added, “With all new things, it takes a lot of effort from the teacher to change their thinking and ways. Even when I have given choice to students, it has been like pulling teeth to get them to try and do anything. It takes time to perfect.”

Another teacher participant extended her experience with sharing saying,

There is little resistance to the sharing and adoption process of ideas and strategies, but colleagues have to be willing to break out of a comfort zone that could lead to a trial and error administration of curriculum, that will optimally lead to the betterment of teacher instruction and thus student learning.

Given that there was complete consensus that sharing was crucial and some of it was happening, the ultimate factor of implementation was whether a teacher was ready to try and believed it was best for student learning.

Along with the benefits and positive aspects shared amongst the teacher participants, they also talked about the challenges of incorporating interest-based practices into their core curriculum. The first input that set the tone for the responses was the comment referring to form versus free-style. He elaborated,

What I mean by this is I want to encourage students the freedom to develop their ideas, not feeling constrained by strict English conventions, but I also need them to understand the function of organizational techniques that will improve the ability to convey ideas and compartmentalize information for easier retrieval. It is a balance between student voice and the rigid, often rote memorization of guidelines.

With this lead in, the other two teacher participants supported his claim that interest-based practices could only be implemented if the core curriculum of what was expected

to be learned stayed at the forefront of all choices and instructional strategies. Again, they brought up the challenge of time--time to collaborate, time to share, and time to thoroughly plan lessons that use interest-based strategies while making sure the core learning of the content stays pure.

As a focus group, I asked if they felt there was support in their school for interest-based learning to engage students and teach their core subjects. All three said they felt that the administration would support this approach to teaching. If they needed resources, they said the administrators would find ways of getting them whatever they needed to maximize learning. One of the teacher participants suggested that the approach should not involve professional development and let it be by teacher initiative. Ultimately, it falls on the shoulders of individual instructors to initiate an idea. The other two teacher participants absolutely agreed that any initiatives or new ways of approaching teaching must come from the ground up, i.e., it would have to be teacher driven. If a good idea comes from teachers and departments, the administration at the school will do everything possible to support the work if it is embedded in student achievement.

After hours, weeks, and months of working together on this case study, they were asked if it changed or impacted their teaching. Ironically, as reflection was a criterion in interest-based learning, all three teacher participants shared that they had become very introspective and more reflective of not only what they were teaching but how they were teaching to engage their students. One of the teacher participants went home after our first interview and questioned herself, "Am I doing enough? I need to find more things to keep students interested and engaged." Another teacher participant was refreshed by the

case study--to be able to share and collaborate through feedback of practices that are sometimes taken for granted. She smiled and said, "This experience has allowed me to reflect on the value of good teaching instruction." She summed up her experience in these words, "It is invaluable that we engage in such collaborative efforts to more flux into an educational system that engages in very archaic approaches to teaching, such as the island mentality."

Wrapping up this final exchange of thoughts and feelings was bitter sweet. When asked if they had any final thoughts or comments with regard to interest-based learning/teaching or the case study itself, a smile came across each of their faces that I had seen filled with enthusiasm, excitement, and even frustration at times. Each teacher participants said that they wished they could do more; they were honored and appreciated the opportunity to participate. More than personal gratification, all of them felt the approach of interest-based teaching as a strategy was the way we should be moving. They weren't exactly sure how we move towards that but they all agreed it was worth finding time to figure it out. One of the teacher participants ended the focus group interview with these thoughts:

Yes, we have limited time to add this to an already overwhelming schedule, but much like convincing students of the intrinsic value of learning, we as teacher must find the intrinsic value of our collaborative efforts, even if it means we break contract time.

Our interview and time together ended but our passion for good instructional practices has been crossed through the experience of this case study.

Summary

The creation of the portrait doesn't just start from the outside, move to the inside, and strictly remain inward. Throughout this study, there was a weaving into the narrative of external contextual elements that helped provide a clarifying backdrop to the action at center stage (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). By putting the external setting in context as the foundation of the case study, it allowed for a deeper understanding of the context of the administrators, teacher participants, and researcher as participant.

This case study that involved interviews, observations, reflections, and artifacts offered only a snapshot of what is being practiced in secondary classrooms and how teachers who are doing the work are being supported. Through the portraits of context, some common practices or beliefs started emerging. Threads that resonated in the various contexts were (a) the common energy and enthusiasm each participant had for teaching and educating students, (b) a belief that all students can meet high expectations, (c) and the importance of relationships with students, colleagues, parents, and community members.

Through co-constructing meaning with administrators, teachers, and researcher as participant, I was able to support the answers to the research questions that guided this qualitative case study. Through the lens of portraiture, the unfolding of the stories opened meanings and evidence to identify emergent themes.

By constantly reminding myself to stay in the present and focus only on gathering data and not analyzing until the study was complete, a whole picture was created and then written in a way that invites the reader into the school and classrooms of the study participants.

Choosing to keep the individual components of the study separate and then allowing common themes to emerge made for a clearer understanding of the answers to the research questions. After the themes of the separate groups of data were identified, I could triangulate the three with commonalities and create the six major themes that emerged. I used the teacher artifacts and researcher journal entries as a secondary anchor to the emergent themes identified in the following chapter.

CHAPTER V

EMERGENT THEMES, CONVERGENT THREADS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

While collapsing and sorting the variety of data sources, emergent themes became common threads. After identification of themes, I was able to take the research and support the findings with literature. Many examples could be used to support interest-based instructional strategies; even more examples showed how the teacher participants were implementing those strategies in their teaching.

The research questions that guided this study were answered and supported in an affirmative way through the words, actions, and commitment of the administrators and teachers who participated so openly in this portraiture of a case study.

Once in the field, the portraitist begins by listening and observing, being open and receptive to all stimuli, acclimating herself to the environment, documenting initial movements and first impressions, and noting what is familiar and what is surprising (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). After hours of working together with the participants, I was able to gather enough data to synthesize, accompanied by generative reflection and interpretive insights (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 188).

Through the gathering and co-construction of meaning, three key emergent themes were identified. This work was a blending of the various components of the case

study, melting into one body of data that could be used as a tool for knowledge and further studies.

The literature supporting engaging instruction, laid over what was uncovered in this case study, gives the details of the convergent threads. In the end, all of the components crossed and came together as one body of research.

Emergent Themes

The findings co-constructed with the participants of this case study were identified by collapsing, coding, and analyzing the data gathered through interviews, observations, artifacts, and reflections.

To keep the data pure and then triangulate the findings, I looked at each set of data as individual bodies of research. The administrator interviews were the first separate pieces of data to emerge. Individual teacher interviews served as the second set of data. A third and isolated body was the teacher/classroom observation. As secondary components, I looked at the artifacts teachers shared and the journal reflections I kept throughout the process. With all of the data coded and then analyzed, emerging themes were identified.

For a theme to be emergent, it was imperative that the practice, belief, or statement ran through the data several times in various components gathered through the research. Once themes had been established, it was possible to answer the research questions that framed this qualitative case study.

In collaboration with administrators, teachers, their practices in the classroom, secondary elements of teacher/class artifacts, and journal writing from the researcher as participant, co-construction of the meaning of interest-based instruction, how it was used

and how it was supported could be created. Identifying common emergent themes through the research narrowed the focus to three key areas. According to study participants, including the researcher, the following themes emerged:

1. The interest-based instructional criteria established by The Ohio Department of Education (2008) appeared to increase student engagement.
2. Administrative support, not direction, was necessary for teachers to develop, implement, and incorporate instructional strategies for student engagement.
3. Time for teacher collaboration was a challenge; however, imperative in developing more wide-spread student engagement practices.

Given the findings from the emergent themes, it was possible to overlap educational theories with data and practices identified through research of the case study. The purpose of this case study was to examine the questions:

1. What interest-based instructional strategies are teachers using to promote student engagement and learning?
2. How are the administrators in the school helping to support teachers as they implement interest-based instructional strategies to promote student engagement and learning?

Through the research, it was determined that there were emergent themes aligned to interest-based instructional strategies that secondary teachers were using to promote student engagement. It was also determined that there were some specific strategies administrators used to support their teachers in this type of instructional practice. It was evident in the research that administrators were very involved with their teachers' work and were able to share specific examples of watching interest-based instruction being implemented. Teachers felt supported by their administrators. They all agreed that if they went to their administrators and needed something to implement interest-based

instructional strategies or any type of instructional strategy that would promote student engagement and learning, they knew their administrators would get the required resources.

Convergent Threads

Combining the literature with what I found in the data gathered through this qualitative case study linked what was happening in secondary classrooms to promote learning through interest-based instructional strategies.

In 2006, Bridgeland et al. conducted a survey and study funded by the Gates Foundation. They identified the following reasons high school students were dropping out of school: disengagement, boredom, and lack of interest in what was being taught. As evident in the classrooms and instructional practices I observed through this case study, teachers addressed these reasons with good instructional practices. The teachers engaged students by allowing them choices. They got to know their students and what interested them so they could use that as a way to hook them into the subject they were teaching. By using elements of interest-based instructional strategies, teachers were combating “The Silent Epidemic.”

Another aspect of the literature Elmore (2003) described was that schools were failing in academic accountability. He did not blame individual teachers but said that the educational system had not tried to establish the conditions for theories of effective strategies to be successfully implemented. In contrast to his belief or statement, this case study would argue that educational systems can be established to create conditions where teachers feel empowered to implement instructional strategies that engage students in learning. Given the research of this case study, it would seem that a school is an

educational system. Administrators of a school can create conditions that encourage teachers to implement the most effective instructional teaching strategies they deem successful, ultimately achieving student and school success.

Richardson (2008) challenged educators to get to know the student's potential, urging schools to help students seize their potential and identify their interests. Each of the teachers in this study took time to get to know their students. They all elected to use a one-on one-conversational method versus a survey or inventory. The relationships they forged with their students were used to engage them in the subject by using what they knew interested their students.

The case study school valued students as social beings who need to have choices in how they learn. Students need to be encouraged to explore and then reflect on what they have learned. Alliance for Excellent Education (2008) concluded that academic and social engagement are integral components of successfully navigating the education pipeline. Teachers and their administrators understand that engaging instructional strategies keep their students in school and meet graduation requirements. The case study school was aware of their population; they had high expectations and set a bar for every student's potential. Rumberger's (2004) research showed that a lack of student engagement was predictive of dropping out, even after controlling for academic achievement and student background. The teachers and administrators of the case study school were committed to student engagement.

Given the emphasis placed on levels of academic achievement in schools, the way in which students acquire knowledge through the learning process has become a primary

concern (Mathewson, 1994). This study emphasized that the way students acquired knowledge was through interest-based instructional strategies as the learning process.

According to Marzano (2003), if students are not interested in what they are learning, corresponding academic and behavioral performance in school will probably suffer. The case study teachers took time and compassion to get to know what interested their students. Then through choices, they would allow and encourage their students to incorporate those interests into showing their knowledge of a given subject.

Deci (1975) proposed that intrinsically motivated behaviors are based in people's needs to feel competent and self-determined. In short, people engage in the activity or, in the case of school, the task of learning because they have a personal interest or connection to what the teacher wants them to learn. The administrators gave several examples of observing their teachers engaging students in activities that interested them as a means to teach core content material. Teachers connected their students to what they wanted them to learn by encouraging them to dig deeper by making choices, exploring, creating through hands-on activities, and then reflecting about how and what they had learned. The most convergent thread woven through this case study aligned with Deci's self determination theory. The parallels to what Deci determined as motivating behaviors and what the case study participants implemented affirmed that interest-based instructional strategies are one viable method of effective teaching and learning.

As one of the teacher participants said, "I think this is the way we should be moving in education, it's about finding the time to make it happen." If after this case study I don't promote interest-based instructional strategies, I would not be a good servant to my calling.

The literature is rich in ways the brain learns, how students are motivated, and why it is so important to engage students in their learning. Aside from the fact that students are dropping out of school before graduation when they become disengaged, bored or aren't interested in what they are studying, there is the element of commitment. Educators, administrators, and teachers need to find ways to get students engaged in the skills and subjects they are expected to learn in school. Students no longer are compliant to do whatever is served up instructionally. They can get more information and be more multi-stimulated through the various modes of technology that many have at their finger tips. The challenge we have is to get them excited about learning. One way we can get students excited and engaged in learning is to tap into their interests. When students are working in areas of interest as a means to learn a core subject, they see relevance in the learning; but more than that, they are motivated to take on the tasks that will lead to learning.

Educators in the 21st century realize that students entering the classroom today are much different from those who have come before (Jacobs, 2010). Jacobs stresses that teachers have to make connections with students; there must be a change in strategies of teaching to fit this new age of students (p. 197). When more of our students are engaged and learning, achievement will be increased, more students will graduate, and we will have a more prepared workforce for the 21st century. Given all of this reality and what we have learned through this case study, it seems only logical to figure out how we can implement interest-based instructional strategies in our classrooms.

Through the focus group interviews, it was clearly stated that the time and training needed was through collaboration with content colleagues. They stated that this

should not come from professional development training; that avenue has developed a feeling amongst teachers in this particular school that initiatives were being pushed down from the top. The teachers suggested that implementation come from teachers--let it be teacher driven. Educators who are building professional learning communities recognize that they must work together to achieve their collective purpose of learning for all (DuFour, 2004). Therefore, teachers need to create structures to promote a collaborative culture. The benefits of professional learning communities (PLC) concepts will speak for themselves if educators demonstrate good faith toward one another as they honestly assess both best practices for helping all students achieve at high levels and the current reality of their own schools (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004).

Two variables must be worked through for Greenview to implement a professional learning community successfully: one variable to conquer is time and the other is a common knowledge of what interest-based instructional strategies are and how to implement them in their individual content subject teaching.

Because time is one of the biggest challenges teachers and schools face, it is imperative that administrators are supportive of this type of work. Teachers who have opportunities for collaboration increase in wisdom about how teaching can be shared (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993). Administrators of the school must find ways to carve time into tight schedules and contracts that most schools are tied to operate. Senge (1990) emphasizes that a strong learning environment puts learning at the center of everything the organization does. Time can be given to teachers by prioritizing what is important to the work of student achievement and using all minutes currently built into

the contract month to focus on interest-based instructional strategies or strategies that engage students in learning.

If it is to be teacher driven, then the best work of implementing new ways of teaching is for teachers to have time to collaborate. Developing collaborative cultures is the work of leaders who realize that a collection of superstar teachers working in isolation cannot produce the same results as interdependent colleagues who share and develop professional practices together (Garmston & Wellman, 1999). Some will naturally plan and articulate on their own; however, significant change or implementation can only happen if time is allocated specifically for teachers to learn the strategies and then have time to discuss how they can incorporate them into their teaching. The unified commitment to work together, learn together, and continually reflect on what they are doing is collaboration (Senge, 1990).

Once time is established for teachers to collaborate on the work of interest-based instructional strategies, the next variable to tackle is the training or knowledge of how to incorporate it into their own subjects. This is a delicate balance; schools will need to decide how to get what they need. Sergiovanni (1994) suggests a paradigm shift from the traditional concept of the historically effective educational leader to a collaborative model of leadership that includes teachers. Through this study, it became obvious that much of the work done at the secondary level was done more in departments rather than schoolwide. This type of model shifts the training and knowledge building to teacher teams. Opportunities will be needed for the different departments of teachers to study and have examples of interest-based teaching in their specific content areas. All of the teachers and administrators indicated that they saw many benefits to the strategy.

However, it should not be assumed that all teachers thoroughly understand the concept and know how to implement it in their lessons. Through effective professional learning communities (PLC) time embedded during the work day, the obstacles the teachers identified could be penetrated. The structure of a PLC should include “time to meet and talk, physical proximity, inter-dependent teaching roles, communication structures, and teacher empowerment” (Fullan, 2006, p. 10). Through administrative leadership, a school could support a strong PLC and achieve both collaboration and time to implement good instructional strategies that engage students--one being interest-based learning.

Recommendations

The old saying of “Why reinvent the wheel” holds true in the recommendations I make based on the research and suggestions co-constructed out of the study.

There are schools and even states that are successfully implementing interest-based instructional strategies. Throughout this research, I have often referenced The Ohio Department of Education. They have framed their entire instructional focus around interest-based instructional strategies. Teachers and administrators could begin their studies by looking into what specifically Ohio is doing and what they have learned about interest-based teaching. However, before implementation of any focus, a school will need to create a culture of collaboration.

Communities of learners (administrators and teachers) can use the models of professional learning communities (PLCs) to create a system for teachers to communicate and learn how to become better teachers. Once schools have established cultural norms and have allocated time to learning, sharing, and implementing interest-based strategies, other engaging teaching strategies can emerge in classes. This type of model allows for

shared involvement and decisions about how to implement good instructional practices. Shared decision making is an important factor in a professional learning organization (Darling-Hammond, 1996).

I have found through my administrative experience that the best way to support change is to seed or suggest ideas, but not demand. Administrators need to be part of the professional learning community as much as teachers need to be part of the leadership. Schools are beginning to recognize that teachers need to be part of the leadership process (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007). One suggestion would be to give several sources that the teachers might want to use as resources to explore teaching strategies that engage students. Ohio Department of Education would be on the list. I would make sure that the list of resources had options that the teachers could choose from, allowing them to select a source that works for their focus. It would also be advantageous to ask the teachers in their departments to work with hands-on activities like lesson plans that specifically engage students. To make sure that the time is valuable and they are feeling ignited about their work, I would ask for some type of reflection, even as simple as an e-mail letting me know how the time to collaborate on instructional strategies was going. In the true form of interest-based instructional strategies from The Ohio Department of Education (2008), I would follow the criteria of allowing teachers to study what they believe is important; they would have choice of resources to use, they would be supported and encouraged to explore what works for their subjects, they would be encouraged to engage in a hands-on activity of creating lesson plans, and lastly, they could take time to reflect and give input on the value of the strategy of collaboration to implement engaging instructional strategies.

If you would have asked me a year ago how I would implement the next steps, my answer would have been much more administrator-directed. I might even have incorporated professional development classes or professional study teams. After the case study and gathering the data from the interviews, observations, and artifacts, it was shared that the best way to implement interest-based instructional strategies was to allow it to be teacher driven--a grass roots movement from the trenches. Of course, the best initiatives are derived from those who are carrying the torch-- in the field of education, the torch carriers are the teachers.

Recommendations for Future Research

Schools and teachers are challenged to find ways to increase student achievement, implement response to interventions when students need specialized instruction, and incorporate ways in their instructional practices to engage all students in their learning. All of these are expectations of the right things for student success. However, obstacles to overcome are school budgets that will not allow for resources, time within a given day to accomplish great results, and finally administrators who feel the pressure of accountability with a top-down leadership style.

Through the course of this research, I have learned that further research is needed to structure and schedule a school's instructional focus to incorporate teacher directed collaboration. Once time is established, there is a need to find a process for the individual culture of the school that will allow teachers time to learn and implement instructional strategies in their content that engage their students in learning.

Another obstacle that has forever plagued the educational system is lack of resources. Further research needs to be explored on how schools can maximize resources

within their allotment and creative means for schools to generate additional resources to implement instructional strategies that engage students.

There have been a multitude of research studies on leadership styles--what works and what does not work. Today's student comes to school with the ability to access information at large quantities and at high speeds. Schools need to do business differently, teach differently if students are going to be engaged in their learning, and be prepared for the 21st century workplace. Due to the changes in students and how learning needs to evolve, administrators must re-evaluate their role in the schools. Future research is needed on how administrators can empower staff, specifically teachers, to be the major component of change as we explore instructional practice that engage all students.

As I close out this chapter of a qualitative case study that sought to answer "What interest-based instructional strategies are teachers using to promote student engagement and learning and how are their administrators supporting their work," I am relieved that the eight years I have invested in this research and study affirmed my hope that there are ways to engage students in learning that we haven't yet touched on. However, knowledge and wisdom is woven through the tapestry of education that collaboratively we can spread across all populations and change not only the public perception of education but the level of success students have while they are moving from secondary education to their next steps of educational enrichment.

It is a great time in education with technology, communication abilities, and students who have more potential than when we were tapping traditional ways of teaching. We will need to be innovative to engage the students who will be our futures.

Next steps for me as a researcher and lover of learning is to take the knowledge I have gained through this experience and find ways to share with teachers that does not feel like a top-down approach. I will need to become versed on subjects I do not have expertise in and trust those who know their subjects to work with me as we explore how to incorporate interest-based instructional strategies into their teaching of content material. My passion is to serve teachers because teachers are the true link of ultimate education. I end my work by reiterating the quote from one of my favorite professors in my master's program in educational leadership. Dr. Chuck Luna said, "True learning happens between a teacher and a student and what goes on in the classroom."

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APPENDIX A
ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Administrator Interview Questions

1. Would you explain to me your understanding of interest-based instructional strategies?
2. What do you think are the educational strengths or benefits of interest-based learning?
3. Can you give me some examples within your school when you have observed teachers probing students for what they want to learn more about?
4. How do teachers you have observed in your school allow students choices? What does that look like within the teacher's lesson?
5. Thinking about core content classes you've observed, can you talk about the experiences students have using hands-on activities, in an open-minded lesson?
6. If you were to describe exploration in the learning environment how would you articulate that instructional strategy?
7. Could you share some experiences you have observed where students were engaged with exploring a content using their personal interests?
8. Encouraging reflection is an important element within interest-based instructional practice. How do your teachers use reflection with their students and in what context?
9. How do you specifically support your teachers to incorporate interest-based instructional strategies in the planning of their content lessons or units?
10. Can you articulate any stages or levels of implementation that signal a teachers' abilities to embed student interest in their teaching practices?
11. Have you taken any professional development classes or seminars that have contributed to your understanding and implementation of strategies using interest-based learning? If so, what specific workshops, classes, or conferences did you attend?
12. Do you have any additional thoughts or comments you would like me to add in regards to interest-based instructional strategies to teach content learning?

APPENDIX B

INDIVIDUAL TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Individual Teacher Interview Questions

In order to achieve continuity of understanding the definition of interest-based learning is to allow students to engage, design, and pursue their own personal interests through inquiry and discovery, using criteria designed by Ohio Department of Education.

1. Would you explain to me your understanding of interest-based instructional strategies?
2. What do you think are the educational strengths or benefits of interest-based learning?
3. What strategies do you use to find out what your students are interested in and can you talk about how students responded?
4. Please give a few specific examples where you taught students to explore their own personal interests and used that information to teach them content subject material.
5. When do you give students choice in your lessons or assignments? Would you please share examples of when choice was successfully used by your students in a learning objective?
6. Talk to me about how you incorporate open-minded, hands-on activities to teach your subject.
7. Exploration can mean several things when creating engaging lessons, what is your perception of “exploration” within your core class lessons?
8. How have you used student reflection to anchor or enrich your core learning within a lesson, can you share some examples of how this strategy worked within your class?
9. Do you feel that your administrator is supportive of interest-based instructional practices? What examples can you describe of support?
10. Have you taken any professional development classes or seminars that have contributed to your understanding and implementation of strategies using interest-based learning? If so, what specific workshops, classes, or conferences did you attend?
11. Do you have any additional thoughts or comments you would like me to add in regards to interest-based instructional strategies to teach content learning?

APPENDIX C
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION TOPICS

Focus Group Discussion Topics

(Some or possibly all of these questions could be changed because the essence of this focus group work will be generated from the selected teachers and the work created through the interviews and observations)

1. Do you have the opportunity and/or have you worked collaboratively with your peers on strategies to promote interest-based learning in your content area?
2. What are the challenges of incorporating interest-based instructional strategies into your lessons?
3. What is the most helpful to you as you design engaging lessons using interest-based strategies?
4. Have any of you shared strategies or ideas of teaching through interest-based learning with other colleagues? If so, how did it go? If not, why not?
5. Is there support in your building/school for the use of interest-based learning to engage students and teach your content subject? If not ,why do you think that is? If there is support, what are the ways administration supports your interest-based strategies to engage students?
6. Of the five components of interest-based teaching (finding out what students are eager to know more about; choice as a regular part of the learning experience; engaging students in open-minded, hands-on activities; encouraging exploration; and encouraging reflection), which one(s) are the easiest to implement and why? Which one(s) are the most difficult to implement into lessons and why?
7. Can you identify specific skills that teachers must have to successfully embed student interest in their teaching practices?
8. In order to involve more teachers in interest-based instructional teachers what do you feel is needed in your school and/or district?
9. Do you remember what inspired you to incorporate interest-based strategies in your own teaching? Please share your experience.
10. As a group of educators who are using interest-based teaching strategies to engage your students in learning, is there anything else you would like to share or have the larger education community know about this type of work you do in your classes?

APPENDIX D

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

UNIVERSITY of
NORTHERN COLORADO
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

April 13, 2010

TO: Megan Babkes Stellino
School of Sport and Exercise Science

FROM: The Office of Sponsored Programs

RE: Exempt Review of *Interest-based Strategies Secondary Teachers are Using to Promote Student Engagement and How School Administrators Support Their Work*, submitted by Dawn M. Macy (Research Advisor: Linda Vogel)

The above proposal is being submitted to you for exemption review. When approved, return the proposal to Sherry May in the Office of Sponsored Programs.

I recommend approval. *based on revisions*

Megan B Stellino
Signature of Co-Chair

7/6/10
Date

The above referenced prospectus has been reviewed for compliance with HHS guidelines for ethical principles in human subjects research. The decision of the Institutional Review Board is that the project is exempt from further review.

IT IS THE ADVISOR'S RESPONSIBILITY TO NOTIFY THE STUDENT OF THIS STATUS.

Comments:

*email Spz
revise consent, detail procedures, permission letter?
emailed again when
revisions attached*

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