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HOW A SECONDARY SCHOOL AS AN ORGANIZATION DEFINES AND EMBEDS THE TERM COLLEGE READINESS

by
Michele Critelli

A Dissertation

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Leadership
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Doctor of Education
at
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Dissertation Chair: Ane Turner Johnson, Ph.D.

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Dedication

For their patience, love, and support in its completion and in me, this work is dedicated to my sons Andrew, Sean, and Ryan, my daughter-in-law Anna, and my husband Larry. I also dedicate this work to my parents Jean and Mickey and my sister Barbara who are looking down from above with love and pride.

I do not know where this endeavor will lead me, but I will relish the trip as this effort has been well worth it.

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My career as an educator and a leader, including this work, would not be possible without the help of those with whom I have the privilege of sharing my journey.

To my family and friends, thank you for your love and support. Thank you for understanding my many "I can't" to dinner outings, family and friend gatherings, and the many social events that I had to pass up. This journey would not have been possible without you.

To my professor and committee chair Dr. Ane Turner Johnson, for your relentless patience, encouragement, coaching, and support throughout this time. You are a true educator, mentor, and leader and have inspired me to do something that I never thought I would be able to do. You called us "scholars" on that very first day of class providing the opportunity to believe in the potential from within. You will always have a special place in my heart.

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To my cohort of peers during our coursework, I am honored and privileged to have experienced this journey with you. I will cherish our collaboration, encouragement, laughter, and conversation and wish each and every one of you much love, happiness, and success in all of your endeavors.

Finally, to my cohort of peers during the final stages of this dissertation process, I thank you for sharing your time, knowledge, and experiences. Your support has made a difference.

Abstract

Michele Critelli
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2013/2014
Ane Turner Johnson, Ph.D.
Doctorate in Educational Leadership

With the many reforms and initiatives regarding college readiness, understanding how organizations use rhetoric to determine and define what college readiness is and what it looks like can either reinforce dominant institutional structures and practices, or create new definitions and understanding leading to institutional change. Through a rhetorical framework (Alvesson, 1993), members of an organization are not only conformists but also strategic agents who through the use of rhetoric construct and shape knowledge and institutional life.

A case study was conducted of one secondary high school that included administrators and teachers who work within the context of college readiness. Through the lens of institutional theory this study used interviews, focus groups, and material culture to explore how an organizations understanding and interpretation guide the activities within the organization coupled with the internal and external expectations to conform to the norms placed on them by the policy environment and the need to maintain legitimacy in light of increased scrutiny.

Findings demonstrate how institutional expectations guide the behavior and actions of this secondary school and how organizational rhetoric is used to construct the appearance of what it means to be college ready in an effort to conform to the expectations and norms of the institutional environment.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Education focuses on continuous improvement and innovations in the way work is done yet educational institutions establish policies and practices that support conformity, stability, and legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Institutional scripts found within educational organizations are the texts that guide behavior and action, lend legitimacy to school organizations, come with state and federal regulatory systems, deeply embedded professional norms, and long standing socially approved practices (Rowan & Miskel, 1999). Policies, rules, procedures, and standards within educational organizations are all institutional scripts that guide member behavior and action. The script has a persuasive effect on members within an organization as well as the audience that the organization is attempting to inform (Rusch, 2005). Words, discourse, structures, and cultural artifacts reinforce the claims of a particular competency, influence meaning, and shape action (Alvesson, 1993). These socially approved practices lead to homogenous schools and systems throughout the U.S. (Rusch, 2005) and include such features as program designs, curriculum, standards, student classifications, and teacher and administrative credentials.

In order to produce myths which are the beliefs that people adopt in an effort to show legitimacy and conformity to the norms set up as a result of the structures embedded within an organization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), members of an organization engage in rhetoric as a way of producing convincing accounts, regulating impressions, and images (Green & Li, 2011). Organizational members who deploy language strategically, actively construct perceptions of reputation, prestige, and

expertise in order to create institutionalized myths within and across organizational boundaries (Alvesson, 1993). Institutionalized myths become the effective practices or principles that take place within an organization (Meyer & Rowan, 1991). According to Alvesson (1993) the ambiguity that exists in organizational and institutional life forces its members to use rhetoric to construct the appearance of knowledge or institutional myths in order to provide meaning and legitimacy to the practices and beliefs established within an organization. Secondary schools adopt policies and practices in an effort to ensure that all students will be college ready by the time they graduate (Callan & Finney, 2003; Callan, Finney, Kirst, Usdan, & Venezia, 2006; Conley 2007), but are all high school students truly college ready by the time they graduate? How does the behavior and action of educators within a secondary school organization define what it means to be college ready and what role does rhetoric play in providing meaning to the behavior and actions that take place? Is being college ready an institutional myth that educators have come to believe? Even though organizational knowledge is critical to organizational performance, knowledge is ambiguous and open to rhetorical construction and interpretation (Alvesson, 1993). How does that rhetorical construction and interpretation provide meaning to the term college readiness?

Societal Norms and Expectations

Social norms and institutional expectations create pressures for schools to conform or to respond to policies and initiatives in manner that is acceptable to societal constituents (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1987). Institutional arrangements and societal procedures are important in the formulation of organizational action (DiMaggio & Powell, 1981). The action and behaviors that take

place are a reaction to the pressures of the external environment. In education there are many examples of reforms that have been implemented in an effort to bring about major change leading to a restructuring of core processes, programs, and procedures (Burch, 2007). External pressures and cultural values give shape to educational agencies such as federal and state departments of education which help to determine what schools are and what we expect from them. Public schools and the agencies that oversee them operate in a regulatory environment (Rowan & Miskel, 1999; Scott & Meyer, 1991) developing administrative structures that become critical components of public school governance (Burch, 2007). This external environment includes an organizational field consisting of a community of organizations that partakes of a common meaning system and whose members interact more frequently and fatefully with one another than with those outside of the field (Scott & Meyer, 1991;Scott, 1995). It includes constituents such as the federal and state government, professional and union organizations, special interests groups, and the general public.

Constituents who impose a coercive, normative, or mimemic influence on an organization can be considered part of an organizational field (Di Maggio & Powell, 1991; Scott & Meyer; 1991) which is seen as a social area where organizations interact and take one another into account in their actions (Fligstein, 1991). These fields have organizations that have relationships with one another that can be cooperative or hierarchical (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Fligstein, 1991) Members in these organizations have cognitive frameworks that incorporate shared cultural understandings of the rules and allow them to make sense of the behavior of other organizations in the field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). They impose normative influences that emphasize values

and norms about how educators should pursue valued ends through legitimate means. The cognitive influences imposed by constituents help educators make sense and provide meaning to their world and the mimemic influences occur when an educational organization consciously models itself after an organization believed to represent a higher level of success. Organizational action becomes a reflection of the perspectives that are defined by the members of the institutional environment (Scott & Meyer 1991; Scott 1995) This action is not a choice among endless possibilities but rather a choice among a narrowly defined set of legitimate options that schools adopt in order to conform to what is expected with the end goal of appearing legitimate (DiMaggio & Powell 1983; Meyer & Rowan 1977; Scott 1987).

With the growing concern regarding the number of high school graduates not college ready, (Aldeman, 2006; Greene & Forster, 2003; Haycock, 2010), the educational reforms and initiatives that address college readiness, and the expectations placed on school districts to ensure that all students are college ready, the organizational environment and the way that it reacts to institutional processes and interprets and constructs meaning to new knowledge can determine and drive organizational behavior (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The practices and policies adopted by schools and governing agencies reflect the rules and structures in wider society (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer & Scott, 1983). The purposeful and strategic use of rhetoric in adopting practices and policies is the primary means through which organizational change is accomplished (Alvesson, 1993). Critical texts that include state and federal government findings, recommendations, and mandated policies contribute to the creation of knowledge that normalizes a certain way of believing, speaking, and behaving with respect to the issues

of concern (Rusch, 2005). These texts use rhetoric to persuade constituents that they are necessary, truthful, plausible, and authoritative (Brown, Ainsworth & Grant, 2012). The dynamics that exist between policymakers and the agencies that mandates such policies, centers around the language that is used and deployed. Through the context of multiple logics rhetoric is used to provide meaning and interpretation (Alvesson, 1993). This meaning and interpretation invokes behaviors and actions that can inhibit or enhance organizational performance.

In education, goals tend to be ambiguous subject to one's own interpretation (Hanson, 2001). Organizations adopt externally defined goals and processes in an effort to establish legitimization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) in the eyes of society. Through legitimization schools protect themselves against attacks on its activities and procedures. Schools can claim that they are doing what the educational agencies such as state and federal departments of education require (Hanson, 2001). As a result of legitimacy educational organizations are rewarded for their conformity to correct structures, programs, and processes rather than the quality of their program (Rowan & Miskel, 1999; Scott, 1991). A school can claim that they have processes and practices in place that will ensure that every student is college ready yet the processes and practices that are in place may not necessarily be effective (Rowan & Miskel, 1999; Scott, 1991).

Policies and Reform Initiatives that Address College Readiness

Public policies and reform initiatives hold schools responsible for preventing school failures (Bellamy, Crawford, Marshall, & Coulter, 2005). Federal and state initiatives include educational standards and accountability in an effort to promote excellence and equity in the American school system (Musoba, 210). Various groups

such as the Commission on No Child Left Behind, the Education Trust, the Fordham Foundation, and the American Federation of Teachers have been strong proponents for the development and adoption of national standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2011). These groups are the organizations that make up an organizational field where goals are aligned and interactions take place. This organizational field places pressure on schools to adopt policies and practices. The adoption of the Common Core State Standards set a consistent level of academic achievement for Math and Language Arts (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2011). With an emphasis on building and expressing logical arguments and applying math to real world issues, the Common Core State Standards goal is to align high school lessons in those subject areas with college and work expectations to meet the goal of ensuring that all students will be college ready by the time they graduate from high school (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2011).

A school environment is characterized by the rules and requirements to which it must conform if it is to receive support and legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Schools do have reforms and policies in place, yet how effective are they in doing what they claim to do? Members within an organization use rhetoric as a way to construct perceptions of conformity to policy and reforms, expertise in carrying out those policies and reforms, and provide meaning and legitimacy to the practices and beliefs maintained by a school organization (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). Does the Common Core State Standards help students to become college ready or do schools claim that students are college ready because they have adopted the Common Core State Standards? Rhetoric

and the meaning that it provides shifts attention from institutional outcomes to institutional processes (Alvesson, 1993).

Elementary and Secondary Education Act

As part of educational initiatives and reforms, federal mandates have been adopted and implemented to improve student learning (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Laws and policies are formulated for this purpose and schools are required to carry out educational mandates. One such example is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. To achieve President Obama's goal for the U.S. of ensuring that all high school students will be college and career ready when they graduate, the Obama administration has created a blueprint for a re-envisioned federal role in education through the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education ACT (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This act calls for raising standards for all students in language arts and mathematics, developing improved assessments aligned with college and career ready standards, and implementing a complete education through improved professional development and evidence based instructional models and supports (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). States will be asked to have data systems in place to gather information that is critical to determine how schools and districts are progressing in preparing students to graduate from high school college and career ready (National Governors Association and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act is carried out through various levels beginning with the federal government, moving to state governments and departments of education, school boards of education, central district administration, school administration, and the teaching staff. Any school that moves away from what is

expected risks the loss of financial support, social support, and legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Policies are carried out as a result of the meaning and interpretation that members of an organization give to such mandates. Through rhetoric members within an organization reinforce institutional structures and practices or create new definitions and understandings leading to institutional change (Green & Li, 2011).

Race to the Top

The Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative asks states to continue to make progress towards college and career readiness for all students by using data to measure results, guide decision making, and reach to achieve college and career readiness goals (Achieve, 2009). This initiative was created to inspire innovation and reform in state and local K-12 districts. Indicators are in place that asks states and school districts to move from collecting data for accountability and compliance purposes to begin using information from state longitudinal data systems for continuous improvement. Several steps are in place to help states move their data systems from colleting information and compliance function to using information to drive improvement (National Governors Association and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Race to the Top is relying on state leaders to make college and career readiness the driving force behind instructional improvement, public discourse, stakeholder engagement, and reporting accountability (Achieve, 2009).

States that are selected will be awarded grants, which will then funnel money to local school districts (National Governors Association and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). School districts would need to abide by the rules and requirements if they are expected to receive any type of financial support. This initiative asks schools to use data to improve student learning. Schools can show that they have data systems in

place and make claims stating such, but how will this practice be assessed and will it really do what it is intended to do? Strategically deploying language can construct and reflect the actions within an organization (Green & Li, 2011) that again focus on processes rather than outcomes.

P-20 Council

Schools need to respond to the external demands and expectations in order to survive (Scott, 1995). College and career readiness is an expectation placed on schools by external constituents that consist of various education agencies such as federal and state departments of education, professional unions and organizations, and parents (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Since large percentages of students are being judged not college ready (Greene & Forster, 2005) they need to have the college readiness skills to attain academic success (Aldeman, 2006; Greene & Forster, 2003; Haycock, 2010). Defining what it takes to succeed in college is a key component in determining what it means to be college ready (Aldeman, 2006; Conley, 2011; Porter & Polikoff, 2011; Schneider & Yin, 2011). As more and more schools prescribe to a P-20 Council which sets a formal expectation and venue for collaboration that includes Pre-K through postsecondary institutions of learning (Achieve, 2009), the schools that do not prescribe to such a council will face increased pressure to do so in order to maintain legitimacy and to conform to the practices established by other schools (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

In an effort to ensure that students graduate from high school college and career ready, many states are initiating P-20 Councils and policies to address alignment of programs from preschool through postsecondary education (Achieve, 2009). Continuous

gaps in student achievement and lack of postsecondary and workforce readiness are indicative of a need for P-20 reform (Kirst, 2009). Many of the high school state mandated tests are not in sync with college entrance requirements and college curriculum (Achieve, 2009). Practices and procedures at the secondary level are not adequately preparing student for college and the workforce (Krueger & Rainwater, 2003). P-20 education reform seeks to bring these gaps together by ensuring a continuous path of knowledge and skills leading to college and career readiness (Kirst & Venezia, 2006). P-20 reform initiates also aim to improve early childhood, elementary, middle, and high school standards to ensure higher education preparedness and workforce expectations to meet industry specific skills as it facilitates students progress through the numerous paths to college and careers for the 21st century (Kirst, 2009). Longitudinal data systems can generate data that can be shared at every level of the educational system to improve instruction and strengthen the preparation of all students for success upon graduation from high school (Achieve, 2009). The rhetoric used to navigate through this process will provide meaning that will either enhance or diminish the behavior and action of a school. Is a P-20 Council effective in doing what it claims it can do, or does it appear effective because it is a process that schools claim is in place?

Gear Up

The Gaining Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Program (GEAR UP) is a grant program created to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter a postsecondary institution (U. S. Department of Education, 2013). GEAR UP offers grants to states and partnerships to provide services for students at high poverty middle and high schools. These students become part of a cohort that starts in

middle school and follows the same cohort of students through high school. State grants are competitive that must include an early intervention component that will increase college attendance and success and raise expectation of low-income students. State and partnership grantees are required to provide mentoring and supportive services to students who participate in the program. The governor of each state designates who can apply for and administer a GEAR UP state grant (U. S. Department of Education, 2013).

GEAR UP is another example of how initiatives are carried out in exchange for financial support. GEAR UP is a way to show accountability for low-income students. This reform emphasizes increased school productivity and accountability (Finn, 1990). Processes and procedures can be clearly delineated in text and educators can use language as a means to explain what they do. Do they appear effective because of the organizational rhetoric that they use or are they effective because of the outcomes that they produce?

The New Jersey College and Readiness Task Force

The New Jersey Department of Education is focusing on secondary education in the hope of challenging every student to achieve academically so that they are college and workplace ready (New Jersey Department of Education, 2009). New Jersey formed a task force comprised of a broad representative of stakeholders from the educational communities within the state. Stakeholders included a superintendent, principal, teacher from P-12 which included a former Abbott district, and vocational districts varied by geographical location, presidents and vice-presidents of two and four year colleges and universities, and Rutgers (New Jersey Department of Education, 2012). Also included were executive directors of the state's higher education agency and the state colleges,

universities, and county college associations, members from the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce representing the business community, the New Jersey Department of Education Technical Advisory Committee, and chief executive officers and directors of various units within the New Jersey Department of Education. This task force held six meetings and two regional public hearings between October and December 2011. The Commissioner of Education required a final report by December 31, 2011.

The New Jersey College and Readiness Task Force came up with a number of recommendations by addressing the following question: What is the goal of our educational system? Their answer addressed the establishment of rigorous standards, competent measures that will address those standards, and the collaboration of the higher educational community, business community, and the P-12 school community (New Jersey Department of Education, 2012).

If schools want to conform to the norm of preparing all students to be college ready and appear to be legitimate (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) due to the fact that they are carrying out the goals outlined by the New Jersey College and Readiness Task Force then the recommended reform initiatives will need to be addressed by school organizations. The language used by key constituents that can effectively and persuasively explain reform initiatives will provide knowledge and meaning to members of a school organization (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). The interpretation of that knowledge and meaning will guide the behavior and actions within the organization (Alvesson, 1993).

College Readiness

With the increased number of high school graduates planning to pursue some level of postsecondary education many students do not have the college readiness skills needed to attain academic success (Aldeman, 2006; Greene & Forster, 2003; Haycock, 2010). Remedial course work taken during freshmen year of college is a major indicator showing that students lack college readiness (Romer, Hyman, & Coles, 2009). As technology advances and society becomes more complex, the necessity for holding a college degree is increasingly important (Callan & Finney, 2003; Maruyama, 2012; Rupert, 2003) for individual economic stability and opportunity (National Governor's Association and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010; New Commission on the Skills of American Workforce, 2008; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2010). In order to be competitive in the 21st century workforce a post secondary education is critical and that educational success is reliant on students being college ready (Lavin, 2000; Nitri, 2001)

Yet while there is an increasing number of high school graduates aspiring to continue their education in some form of postsecondary education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007) large percentages of these students are being judged not college ready (Greene & Forster, 2003; Kirst, 2003). More than 90% of high school seniors state that they plan to go on to postsecondary education (McCarthy & Kuh, 2006; Kuh, 2007), but many do not have the college readiness skills needed to attain academic success (Aldeman, 2006; Greene & Forster, 2003; Haycock, 2010). With the number of students going on to college 30% of students attending 4-year institutions and 60%

percent of students attending community colleges take one or more remedial courses (Aldeman, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

One of the major indicators showing that students lack college readiness is the degree to which they are required to take remedial courses in their first year (Romer et al., 2009). Remedial coursework teach incoming students content that should have been learned in high school (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2012). Many of the students taking one or more remedial courses do not experience success and as a result do not continue past the first year (Porter & Polikoff, 2011). The effectiveness of postsecondary education increases when students who aspire to go on to college do not need to enroll in remedial coursework and have developed academic skills that will prepare them to succeed in college entry level course work (Kirst & Venezia, 2006).

It is important that educators understand the skills needed to pursue a postsecondary education and put into place programs, practices, and interventions that will prepare all high school students to become college ready (Reid & Moore, 2008). Indeed, many scholars attest to the need for K-12 school systems and postsecondary institutions need to work together to improve student preparation so that once students enter college they may immediately enroll in general education without the often demoralizing discontinuity of remedial coursework (Kirst, 2009; Kirst & Venezia, 2006; McCormick & Johnson, 2013; Moore, Slate, Edmonson, Combs, Bustamante, & Onwuegbuzie, 2010; Romer et al., 2009). According to Aldeman (2006), the need to take remedial education course work reduces the probability of achieving a degree due to lack of knowledge, low self-esteem, and the time constraints of obtaining a college degree.

High school graduates who are academically, socially, and emotionally prepared will have greater opportunities to meet the challenges and rigor of postsecondary education. (Romer, et al., 2009). Student's who have a strong knowledge base, can think critically, communicate effectively, and collaborate with others will have opportunities to experience success in the endeavors that they pursue (Conley, 2007; Romer et al., 2009). Key content knowledge, application of cognitive strategies, setting goals, academic behaviors that include self-management, and contextual skills and awareness are skills that will help students to become college ready (Conley, 2005; Kirst & Venezia, 2006; Romer et al., 2009).

When schools implement policies and practices in an effort to ensure that students will be college ready by the time that they graduate, schools operate in institutionalized environments that are characterized by ill-defined technologies, ambiguous goals, and outputs that are difficult to measure (Rowan & Miskel, 1999). Teacher pedagogy at times consist of vaguely specified platitudes and teaching is often not judged according to agreed upon measures of performance or sanctions for deviance (Davies & Quirke, 2007). Schools are instead subject to strong pressures for legitimacy that occurs as a result of meeting the expectations placed upon them (Rowan & Miskel, 1999). Schools use persuasive and convincing language to convince internal and external constituents that they are in fact preparing all students to be college ready. The use of rhetoric helps to establish legitimacy for school organizations because its members actively construct perceptions of accountability, expertise, and reputation (Alvesson, 1993).

As a result of resource dependency, ambiguity about knowledge and goals, and reliance on academic credentials, how does a school organization effectively ensure that

all students are college ready and well prepared for life long learning? How does organizational rhetoric play a role in the practices within a school that define college readiness? Demands of the institutional environment, existing cultural rules, adoption and implementation, and meaning and interpretation are important considerations that will be addressed in this research study.

Problem Statement

The key product of schools is whatever educational stakeholders define as an indicator of school quality (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Educators, students, parents, and constituents use the same institutionalized categories to provide the appearance of legitimacy. This legitimacy can include credit hours earned, diplomas awarded, degrees held by teachers, programs offered to students, and the number of students going on to college. Organizations adopt the practices that they do to look like other organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). The dependence between organizations and their institutional environment produces organizational forms and policy practices that often are loosely coupled with policy maker's intentions (Spillane & Burch, 2006). Organizations seek survival and legitimacy as opposed to efficiency (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

In order to produce these claims organizations and their employees engage in rhetoric as a way of producing convincing accounts, regulating impressions, and images (Alvesson, 1993). Organizational knowledge, although critical to organizational performance, becomes ambiguous and open to rhetorical construction and interpretation (Alvesson, 1993). Through rhetoric members within an organization either reinforce dominant institutional structures and practices, or create new definitions and

understanding leading to institutional change (Green & Li, 2011). Through a rhetorical framework (Alvesson, 1993), members of an organization are not only conformist but also strategic agents who through the use of rhetoric construct and shape knowledge and institutional life.

With the many reforms and initiatives regarding college readiness how does an organization determine what college readiness looks like and what it means when knowledge is ambiguous and open to rhetorical construction and interpretation? How do we know if our students are college ready if as an organization practices and procedures are put into place in an effort to claim that all students are college ready? Through rhetoric members within an organization either reinforce dominant institutional structures and practices, or create new definitions and understanding leading to institutional change (Green & Li, 2011).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the evolution of a secondary school's understanding of the term "college readiness" and to describe the influences and practices used to embed college readiness into organizational rhetoric. Through the lens of institutional theory this study will illuminate how an organizations understanding and interpretation guide the activities within the organization coupled with internal and external expectation to conform to the norms placed on them by their environment and the need to maintain legitimacy. The setting took place at Ryanville High School in Anytown, New Jersey. Participants in this study included a district administrator, a high school principal, one assistant principal, a high school coordinator, and three high school teachers. Data collection was limited to interviews, focus groups,

and material culture such as organizational documents, in order to understand the creation and embedding of college readiness at this organization.

Research Questions

The research questions addressed in this study include the following:

1. How does a school as an organization define and institutionalize college readiness?
2. How are decisions concerning the adoption and implementation of college readiness embedded within an organization?
3. How do cultural rules from the environment shape or constrain organizational action?
4. How is a school organization responsive to the demands of their institutional environment?
5. How does an organization respond to organizational change and initiation of institutional change?
6. How does conformity to institutional norms enhance or diminish organizational performance?

Theoretical Framework

Institutionalism

The theoretical framework that supports this study is derived from institutional theory. Concepts of legitimacy, conformity, and rhetoric were addressed to explain the practices and processes of a school organization in the adoption and implementation of the term college readiness. Rhetorical institutionalism was used to explain how rhetoric is used to construct the appearance of knowledge and institutional myths in order to provide

meaning and legitimacy to the practices and beliefs that are inherent in school organizations.

Institutional theory was used as the theoretical framework for this case study to discover how the institutional environment can strongly influence the development of formal structures within an organization. Institutional theory looks at organizations and the appropriateness of their structures and processes, as assessed by relevant environmental actors (Scott, 1987). Legitimacy was explored to discover its role in the adoption of new structures. External and internal forces were addressed to understand the role they play in the institutions adoption of new structures. This theory was used to understand how a school as an organization defines and embeds college readiness.

Institutional theory posits that organizational environments are characterized by rules and requirements to which individual organizations must conform if they are to receive any type of support and legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Scott, 1983). Educational organizations establish policies, procedures, and routines that embody the school's knowledge and beliefs about student learning and behavior (Hanson, 2001). Values and beliefs external to the organization play a significant role in determining organizational norms (Di Maggio & Powell, 1983). Organizations conform to rules and requirements to increase their legitimacy, resources, and survival capabilities (DiMaggio & Powell 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Institutional norms deal with applicable domains of operation, principles of organizing, and criteria of evaluation (Scott, 1987). Institutions "consist of cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and activities that provide stability and meaning to social behavior. Institutions are transported by various carriers, cultures, structures, and routines and they operate at multiple levels of

jurisdiction" (Scott, 1995, p. 33). Cognitive structures shape individuals meaning and views of the world (Hanson, 2001; Scott, 1995). Normative structures emphasize values and norms about how educators should pursue goals through legitimate means and regulative structures prescribes actions through formal and informal rules that establish, monitor, and sanction activities (Hanson, 2001; Scott, 1995). Educational organizations exist in an organizational field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991) constituting a recognized area of institutional life that includes accreditation agencies, teacher training programs, state boards of education, state legislatures, local, state, and federal courts, universities, and parent groups. This field that surrounds an educational system has actors with their own rules and expectations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).

Institutions shape organizational life (Morphew & Huisman, 2002) and influence the organizations habits, ideas, and norms. The practices and structures within an organization must conform to institutional norms and ideas to retain legitimacy. Institutional pressures that come from organizational choice is limited by a variety of external pressures (Scott, 1995) and need to respond to external demands and expectations in order to survive. Organizations conform to institutionalized beliefs or practices when these belief and practices are validated and accepted by the stakeholders they influence. Several institutional theorists have stated that conformity makes organizations less efficient while at the same time more effective by increasing an organizations ability to obtain cultural support and resources for the organization (Zucker, 1987).

Institutional theory offers understandings into organizational environment relations and the way organizations react to institutional processes (Tolbert & Zucker,

1983). This perspective illustrates how non-choice behaviors can occur as a result of habit, convenience, or social obligation without consideration of the organizations interest or contribution to organizational efficiency. It explains how the external environment can add to the social validity and survival of an organization and how values, meanings, and myths rather than efficiency and autonomy can determine and drive organizational behavior when considering external pressures. Meyers and Rowan (1977) believe that organizations incorporate the practices and procedures that are defined by prevailing concepts of organizational work and institutionalized in society which reflect the myths of their institutional environments instead of the demands of an organizations work activities.

Organizations and the Institutional Environment

Suddaby (2010) looks at how organizations attach meaning to some elements of their institutional environment. Organizations engage in structured patterns of collective interpretation that involves the connection of meaning to events and the immersion of value into organizational processes and outcomes. Institutional change occurs as a "consequence of negotiations and contests over which logic and thus criteria by which organizational legitimacy is assessed will dominate" (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005, p. 36). Institutional theory works with three foundational elements to explain how new organizational practices emerge (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). The first is the knowledge of legitimacy, which is a critical component of institutional change. Institutional change is also linked to institutional logics that support actors' framework for reason and belief (Scott, 1995; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). A third element in

institutional theory suggests the use of persuasive language or rhetoric by which shifts in institutional logic are secured.

Rhetorical institutionalism

When addressing institution actions an important consideration is the use of rhetoric in institutions and institutional processes (Green & Li, 2011). Rhetoric is the use of language to persuade audiences to make judgments and engage in social action (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). Through rhetoric, actors shape, justify, rationalize, and seek to modify perceptions of what is sensible, right, and good (Greene, 2004). Alvesson (1993) noted that stakeholders use rhetoric to build an appearance of knowledge or institutional myths as a way of demonstrating meaning and legitimacy to the practices and beliefs of an organization. This emphasis on rhetoric within institutional theory brings attention to the symbolic rather than material, subjective meaning instead of objective, and to institutional processes instead of institutional outcomes. "Rhetorical institutionalism is the deployment of linguistic approaches in general and rhetorical insights in particular to explain how the strategic use of symbolic practices enable and constrain agency" (Green & Li, p. 1666). Rhetoric is classified into three types of justification: logos, which appeals to logic, pathos, which appeals to emotions, and ethos, which appeals to morality (Greene, 2004; Green & Li, 2011). In building moral legitimacy ethos appeals connect actions and institutions to cultural norms and encourage judgment regarding character and what is felt to be right (Greene, 2004).

It is through the use of rhetoric that members of a school organization rationalize and justify what they do (Greene, 2004). They use rhetoric to build an appearance of knowledge when in fact that knowledge can be ambiguous and based on subjective and

personal meanings (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). Rhetoric lends itself to processes instead of outcomes providing opportunities to use language that is persuasive and convincing (Alvesson, 1993). A school can claim that they prepare all students to be college ready, but how effective is this process?

Significance of the Proposed Research

This study explores how a secondary school as an organization defines and embeds the term college readiness. There are several stakeholders that would benefit from this study that include secondary school teacher's and principals, central office administration, postsecondary institutions, and state and U.S. Departments of Education.

Policy

K-12 school districts and postsecondary institutions function in separate professional realms. Public policies are exclusive of one another such as funding, accountability, assessments and governance systems. There are also separate state boards of education, legislative committees, and boards that coordinate one level without involving or aligning with another (Kirst & Venezia, 2009).

Many states have begun to organize consults or commissions that include K-12 and postsecondary representatives (Tierney, 2004). High schools and postsecondary institutions, which include defining programs and instructional goals, will better prepare high school graduates. Increased attention to the college and career readiness problem by state leaders and policymakers can help to improve the numbers and percentages of students who graduate from high school college and career ready (Spence, 2009). The distinction between ready for college and college readiness is critical. There is a need to establish an understanding of what increasing readiness means. It is also important to

understand how rhetoric can either reinforce dominant institutional structures and practices, or create new definitions and understandings leading to institutional change (Green & Li, 2011).

There have been groups such as Achieve and the American Diploma Project (Achieve, 2009) that have worked with states to develop college readiness standards, however there has not been a college and career readiness initiative that totally involves pre-K -12 and post secondary education (Spence, 2009). K-12 and postsecondary institutions need to agree on a set of readiness standards as well as the measures taken to help students become college ready. Policies can be used to embed practices into the classroom and efforts must be made to build capacity for schools and teachers to meet expectations.

Practice

Leaders throughout the country in public and private schools, postsecondary institutions, charter schools, foundations, education and policy organizations, and state and federal government have taken up the challenge to ensure that students are college ready (Callan, Finney, Kirst, Usdan, & Venezia, 2006). With reforms focusing on college readiness and the understanding of why such reforms are important, it is critical for schools to be able to understand what it means to be college ready and collaboratively put structures in place that will improve educational achievement for all students. Bridging the gap between secondary and postsecondary institutions need to be addressed. It needs to begin with a clear understanding of what it means to be college ready as well as what it means to embed that concept within an institution.

The focus on high school has been on college eligibility requirements, however educational leaders as well as policymakers are realizing that meeting eligibility requirements does not equate with being college ready (Conley, 2005). This concept focuses on preparing students to be successful in college level work rather than completing the necessary coursework to gain admission into a postsecondary institution. With an understanding and an expectation that students who complete required courses for college admissions are prepared to meet the demands of college level work, the need for remediation once in college has turned attention to the term college readiness and exactly what that means. As a result there needs to be a cohesive alignment between high schools and post secondary institutions that clearly delineates what skills and knowledge postsecondary institutions expect of their students entering college (Kirst & Venezia, 2009). The term college readiness means different things to different people. How then can students be college ready when those who are preparing students to be college ready are not quite sure what this means?

Due to the technological and educational demands of today's workplace (Romer et al., 2009) the knowledge and skills that students need to succeed in postsecondary education are equal to the skills needed in the workforce. If the understanding is that skill sets are different, expectation of student performance will vary (Dougherty, Mellor, & Smith, 2006). Information and resources need to be shared and discussed with all stakeholders in an effort to provide understanding and awareness. High schools need to create an educational environment that provides all students with the knowledge and skills that students will need to possess as they continue their education and training beyond high school (Callan et al., 2006).

Research

In a study conducted by Byrd & MacDonald (2005) there were many factors that contributed to a student's readiness for college level work. In addition to understanding how students become college ready further research needs to include the non-traditional student population and the opportunity to advance towards the goal of becoming college ready. An understanding of what it means to be college ready must be looked at through many different lenses in order to provide opportunities for all students.

The type of high school courses that student's take and the grades that they receive help to determine early college success and can be included among readiness indicators (Aldeman, 2006). Continued research is needed that includes constituent groups from secondary schools and postsecondary schools to collectively determine what college readiness means, what actually makes a student college ready, and how this determination should occur. This will help to provide broader thresholds better aligned with actual success rates.

Current school reform in K-12 school districts focus on accountability (Musoba, 2010). Such reform efforts emphasize increasing school productivity and accountability (Finn, 1990). Further research is needed on how the efficiency of carrying out such reforms is effective and how such effectiveness improves student learning. State level policies that are in line with accountability need to include teacher understanding of such accountability and how that understanding effects practices and processes within a secondary school. Are accountability school reform policies positively or negatively associated with college readiness for all students?

Given the importance of organizational learning and those seeking to lead change within an organization, the understanding is that educational leaders will benefit from using an organizational lens in assessing how to plan and implement the routine improvements to policies, practices, and procedures that are the daily realities of a secondary school (Friedman, LIpshitz, & Overmeer, 2001). However in an effort to understand institutional theory and how the environment controls processes and procedures within the school, it is recommended that further research take place to appropriately understand how institutional meaning systems are understood and interpreted within organizations. Researchers will need to conduct research at the organizational level of analysis and view organizations as interpretive mechanisms. Since institutional features of the environment are important determinants of the structure and functioning of organizations (Scott, 1987), institutional theorists need to continue to direct attention to the importance of symbolic aspects of organizations and their environments.

Delimitations

As a researcher, many choices are made that may limit application of the findings from this work to other contexts. It is important to acknowledge that this topic and school district where the research took place are of personal and professional importance to me. As the K-12 Supervisor of Guidance my experiences pose potential limitations and biases for this study. Delimitations of the study are the boundaries that I will set in order to control the range of the study. I have set these boundaries because research is limited to a secondary school's adoption and implementation of practices and procedures and the behaviors and actions as a result of those practices and procedures. My interests address

how key constituents play a role in what happens at the secondary school level. The time frame was limited to before, during, and after the school day in an effort to promote convenience for the study participants. Data collection procedures began in the fall of 2013. Data analysis was simultaneous continuing through the spring of 2014. The qualitative research study employed delimits the stakeholders to central office administration, the high school administration, and a limited number of high school teachers. Purposeful sampling was used because the participants selected were based on specific criteria. Administration mandates certain policies and practices, and members of the school organization carry out those mandates and practices. Defining and embedding college readiness is delimited in scope to focus this study on institutionalizing college readiness within the framework of institutional theory and rhetorical institutionalism.

This research study will be limited in scope because the data collected will only be retrieved from central office administrators, high school administration, and high school teachers from one public school district in New Jersey. Multiple data sources were used to enhance data credibility (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2009). Data sources included interviews, focus groups, and material culture. Data from these multiple sources was converged during the analysis process in an effort to add strength to the findings. Interviewees responses are subject to common problems of bias, poor recall, inaccurate information, and poor articulation. Also, individuals who desire to portray themselves in a positive light may be reluctant to make a negative report. Participant withdrawal from the case study research can take place for a variety of reasons that may include feelings of uneasiness, time constraints, and/or lack of interest (Krathwohl & Smith, 2005).

Conclusion

Chapter 1 introduced conformity and legitimacy within organizations and how rhetoric provides meaning and interpretation to organizational practices and processes. Reforms and initiatives that address college readiness were introduced and the role organizations play in adopting such reforms and initiatives. This chapter also identified the research questions that were used to guide this study. Institutional theory was discussed as the conceptual framework to explain how the institutional environment can strongly influence the development of formal structures within an organization. Legitimacy was explored to discover its role in the adoption of new structures. External and internal forces were addressed to understand the role they played in the institutions adoption of new structures. This theory was used to understand how a school as an organization defines and embeds college readiness.

Chapter 2 will include a review of the relevant literature related to college readiness and why there is a need to define and embed the term college readiness within a secondary school. Test assessments will be addressed, academic rigor, college readiness and ready for college, practices and strategies that promote college readiness, and the need for support strategies along a P-16 continuum.

Chapter 3 will include the research questions, the methodological framework, and the research setting. Participant selection will be addressed along with confidentiality and ethical considerations. Data collection, data analysis, credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability will also be addressed.

Chapter 4 will capture the case study findings from the interviews, focus groups, and material culture. This chapter will present a discussion of the study and its findings

from the perspective of conclusions drawn by the researcher. Additionally, conclusions will be presented in accordance with the research questions guiding this study.

In the place of traditional Chapters 5 and 6, I will complete manuscripts for publication based on key findings and provide recommendations for policy, practice, and research as each relates to college readiness.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Organizations that are built around efficiency attempt to maintain close relationships between structures and activities. Conformity is maintained through inspection, quality of work continually monitored, and efficiency evaluated. Institutionalized organizations protect their formal structures from evaluation and inspection (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Monitoring and evaluation are minimized and coordination, interdependence, and mutual adjustments among the structure of the organization handled informally (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Elements of structure are decoupled from activities and from one another in an attempt to maintain legitimacy (Di Maggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Illustrations of decoupling within schools include the avoidance of integration, the neglect of program implementation and the absence of monitoring and evaluation of processes and activities to determine efficiency. In its place are processes and activities that are ceremonialized (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The advantages of decoupling help formal structures to appear to be working because these structures are buffered from the inconsistencies and anomalies that are found in technical activities (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Integration is avoided minimizing disputes and conflicts; therefore decoupling enables organizations to maintain the legitimate formal structures while the activities within the organization vary in actual practice (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). What legitimizes institutional organizations is the confidence of their internal participants and their external constituents with the assumption that everyone is acting with competence and good faith (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer & Scott, 1983). When evaluation and

inspection take place the assumption is that competency is neglected and actors are not operating in good faith (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer & Scott, 1983). This undermines the ceremonial aspects of organizations producing illegitimacy (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, Meyer & Scott, 1983).

Organizational and institutional environments will be defined drawing attention to how institutional environments shape organizations creating environments bounded by legitimacy and conformity. Institutional theory and rhetorical institutionalism will be explained to provide a theoretical framework for this research study. College readiness issues and concerns will be addressed to understand the importance of such concerns and the inherent qualities within an environment that can either enhance or diminish the effectiveness of the behavior and actions that promote college readiness for all students.

Organizational and Institutional Environments

Organizations consist of arenas where rules are created, meaningful action occurs, relationships are formed, and concrete forms of socialization are in place (Fligstein, 1985). Organizations have strategies, goals, structures, and physical limits that shape and constrain action (Fligstein, 1985; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995). These forms of organization emulate systems of power and operate to support those that control them. Formal authority exists that include a hierarchical structure while informal authority refers to claims by actors for power and expertise that can allow them to direct resources of the organization (Fligstein, 1985). The changes that take place within an organization occur when either a new set of actors gains power or it is in the interest of those in power to alter the organizations goals (Fligstein, 1985).

Institutional environments are characterized by rules and requirements to which organizations must conform if they are to receive support and legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995). The requirements may result from federal and state mandates, professional organizations, and from generalized belief systems that define how certain types of organizations conduct themselves (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995). "Institution represents a social order or pattern that has attained a certain state or property; institutionalization denotes the process of such attainment" (Jepperson, 1991, p. 145). According to institutional theory, conformity to the norms and social expectations of the institutional environment improves an organizations survival chances significantly (Zucker, 1987). Appropriate conduct also contributes to survival. This type of conduct helps obtain rewards such as legitimacy and status (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995).

Institutions shape organizational life (Morphew & Huisman, 2002) and influence an organizations habits, ideas, and norms. The practices and structures within an organization must conform to institutional norms and ideas to retain legitimacy. Institutional pressures that come from organizational choice is limited by a variety of external pressures (Scott, 1995) and need to respond to external demands and expectations in order to survive.

Institutional theory emphasizes the survival value of conformity with the institutional environment and the need to adhere to external rules and norms (Morphew & Huisman, 2002). Organizations conform to institutionalized beliefs or practices when these beliefs and practices are validated and accepted by the stakeholders they influence. Several institutional theorists have stated that conformity makes organizations less

efficient while at the same time more effective by increasing an organizations ability to obtain cultural support and resources for the organization (Zucker, 1987).

By mimicking changes and reform initiatives in the field of education, members within an educational organization establish the reputation of being reformers even if nothing of significance really changes (Hanson, 2001). Projecting the image of change through rhetoric affords members of an organization the opportunity to construct and share institutional myths within and across organizational boundaries that enhance prestige, reputation, and legitimacy (Alvesson, 1993, Hanson, 2001).

Student Academic Readiness

Are high schools preparing students to be college ready? High schools seem to think that they are and use rhetoric as a way of convincing parents and postsecondary schools that students are college ready. School profiles list the percentage of students going on to college, average SAT scores, Advanced Placement test results, and curricular offerings that list challenging core courses, yet a major barrier to a postsecondary degree is the lack of academic preparedness for college level work (Aldeman, 2006; Greene & Forster, 2003; Haycock, 2010; McCarthy & Kuh, 2006; Reid & Moore, 2008; Romer et al., 2009). The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and Southern Regional Education Board (2010) noted that nearly 60% of all first-year college students are not college ready. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2006) noted that the need for remedial reading is the leading predictor that a student will drop out of college. Bettinger and Long (2007) reported that many students who enroll in remedial coursework do not complete it, further noting that approximately 36% drop out before they finish math and language arts requirements.

If secondary schools believe that they are preparing all students to be college ready yet the statistics claim that this is not the case, then where is the disconnect between a secondary school's understanding of the term college readiness and students being college ready? How does rhetoric play a role in a secondary school's understanding of the term college readiness and what practices are used to embed college readiness into organizational rhetoric?

K-16 Alignment

An important component of academic rigor is the importance of the vertical alignment of courses from pre-school through college so that when students complete a course it will signify that they have mastered the content and skills needed to move on to the next level in either a subject or discipline. The alignment of curriculum is critical (Romer et al., 2009) and needs to include communication and collaboration across elementary, middle, high school, and postsecondary institutions. Institutions of higher learning have certain expectations for college level work as compared to high schools and what they identify as college readiness (ACT, 2007). Secondary and postsecondary partnerships can improve college readiness by focusing on an agreement of outcome standards, better alignment of curriculum, setting common academic expectations, and designing preventive strategies (Alliance for Excellent Education 2011; Conley 2005; Conley 2010; Kirst, 2007). Agreement on content knowledge and expected self-management skills (Conley, 2005; Conley 2010) such as studying and time management can establish common ground on student learning.

> Ongoing communication across institutional boundaries using the language of student learning means in practice that it is easier to identify when students are really ready for postsecondary practices as opposed to

> when they have simply run out of classes to take at High school (Conley, 2005, p. 77).

There is a movement to combine efforts to establish common achievement objectives and align curriculum with creating shared data systems between education levels (Conley, 2005; Kirst, 2007). Shared data systems have the potential to result in much tighter connections between K-12 and postsecondary learning with a push to standardize reporting on student knowledge & skill (Conley, 2005; Kirst 2007). Collaboration between colleges and secondary systems is recommended to determine effective processes for using the shared data on student performance to improve success rates (Kirst, 2007). Kirst (2007) recommends K-12 and postsecondary institutions continue to address the alignment of college readiness preparation.

For this to be effective organizations would need to explore the forces that constrain organizations from changing. In the field of education there needs to be an understanding of why education systems are so isomorphic and why they give the appearance of change without the realty of change. How does a school as organization process information, formulate plans, interpret environments, generate strategies and decisions, assess practices, and learn from them?

American Diploma Project

In 2002, four organizations came together in an effort to support state level K-12 and postsecondary education leaders who wanted to collaborate in developing standards between high school and college (Haycock, 2010). Achieve, which is a bipartisan non-profit organization that helps states raise academic standards, improve assessments, and strengthen accountability to prepare all young people for postsecondary education, work,

and citizenship, the Fordham Foundation which works to advance educational excellence for every child, the National Alliance of Business which focuses on business and education, and the Education Trust which promotes high academic achievement for all students at all levels pre-K through college in an effort to close the achievement gap, came together to start the American Diploma Project attempting to define what high school graduates need to know (Achieve, 2004). This project was part of an initiative to raise expectations and achievement in U. S. high schools so that all students graduate with the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in college and work (Achieve, 2004).

While there are many organizations attempting to work with school districts in an effort to raise student achievement so that all students can be college ready, how do reform efforts make a difference within secondary schools? Do members within a school organization understand what it means for all students to be college ready and how do they use subjectivity to construct meaning and understanding? If interpretation is based on subjectivity and if knowledge is ambiguous (Alvesson, 1993) how does rhetoric construct the appearance of knowledge in order to provide meaning to organizational practices and beliefs?

Institutional Theory

When there is a need for educational initiatives and reforms, the action that takes place within an organization is a reaction to the pressures of the external environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1981). Institutional theory asks questions about how social choices are shaped, mediated, and channeled by the institutional environment. Practices and policies adopted by schools and governing agencies reflect the rules and structures

created by society (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer & Scott, 1983). Schools adopt policies and practices that are very similar (Rowan & Miskel, 1999). Organizations adopt practices that they think others view as exemplary or that are considered routine and are visible through the practices of organizations and reside in public discourse (Burch, 2007).

Institutional theory is used as the theoretical framework for this research study to discover how the institutional environment can strongly influence the development of formal structures within an organization. Institutional theory looks at organizations and the appropriateness of their structures and processes, as assessed by relevant environmental actors (Scott, 1987). Legitimacy was explored to discover its role in the adoption of new structures. External and internal forces were addressed to understand the role they play in the institutions adoption of new structures. This theory was used to understand how a school as an organization defines and embeds college readiness.

Institutional embeddedness refers to the interconnections between a population and its institutional environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This increasing interconnectedness enhances the survival and growth of its population overtime. The long run survival prospects of organizations increase as state structures elaborate and as organizations respond to institutionalized rules. School organizations show considerable ability to survive because they are absorbed by their institutional environments (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Institutional theory challenges the notion that rationality is the central organizing principle around which organizations operate (Rowan & Miskel, 1999). Schools are characterized by ill-defined technologies and ambiguous goals, and outputs that are often difficult to measure (Rowan & Miskel, 1999). This perspective views

theories of pedagogy consisting of vaguely specified platitudes with teaching rarely judged according to agreed upon measures of performance on sanctions for deviance (Davies & Quirke, 2007). Unable to transmit their effectiveness, schools are pressured to submit to legitimacy (Meyer, 1977). If a public school organization conforms to legitimacy its odds of surviving are greatly enhanced especially since funding is usually guaranteed by complying with these expectations. (Davies & Quirke, 2007). New institutionalists recognize that schools are rewarded standard, rationalized practices, even those that may be ineffective (Meyer, 1977).

New Institutional Theory

One of the core insights of new institutional theory is that schools are loosely coupled buffering school operations from external inspection (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). According to new institutional theory any close monitoring of instruction only exposes problems that can undermine public trust (Davies & Quirke, 2007). In order to avoid monitoring, schools allow teachers a degree of professional discretion within the classroom. This discretion allows schools to maintain a façade of legitimacy for external actors such as governments and their constituents while protecting their core operations from external inspection (Meyer et al., 1981). To appear legitimate educational organizations embrace standardized processes and procedures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Chubb & Moe (1990) noted that federal and state funding encourage schools to conform to what is asked of them rather than to provide effective services. Union demands, boards of education policies, parent expectations, and state and federal leveraging of school practices through a multitude of funding formulas encourage conformity (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Education has evolved hard fast professional norms

that when combined with practices of successful schools provide templates for schools identifying practices and procedures that have been successful (Davies & Quirke, 2007). As a result schools may decide not to deviate from what works in an effort to remain legitimate (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Meyer et al., 1981).

Loose coupling. Schools seen as legitimate within a community guarantee survival by structuring themselves to conform to both societal rules and beliefs (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Meyer et al., 1981). Schools have partially insulated themselves from many of the environmental demands while at the same time retaining their core activities, school culture, and legitimacy (Meyer et al., 1981). They achieved this buffering by decoupling their technical core from their institutional environment. The term loose coupling implies that there are autonomous units in an organization (Weick, 1976). For example, what takes place in a classroom may not tightly be coupled with a school's other units.

Institutional isomorphic change. As the population and its institutional community become more connected, the population is brought increasingly under the jurisdiction of institutional meanings and controls and can become increasingly isomorphic (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). There are three mechanisms through which isomorphic change occurs: coercive isomorphism that stems from political influence and the problem of legitimacy, mimetic isomorphism that results from standard responses to uncertainty, and normative isomorphism that is associated with professionalization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Coercive isomorphism occurs when organizations are pressured by other organizations and by cultural expectations in society (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).

Change that takes place in organizations can be a direct response to a government mandate such as the directive to comply with educational state standards such as the Common Core State Standards (Meyer, Scott, & Deal, 1981). Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue that organizational structures increasingly reflect rules institutionalized and legitimated by federal and state mandates. Due to federal and state mandates organizations become homogeneous and organized around rituals of conformity (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).

Mimetic processes within organizations occur when organizations model themselves after other organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). This occurs when goals are ambiguous, or when the environment creates symbolic uncertainty (Meyer et al., 1981). Due to the need to be legitimate and the want and desire to be successful, organizations will model themselves after similar organizations that they view as legitimate and successful (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). One such aspect that places pressure on school districts to be viewed as successful in New Jersey is the New Jersey School report card that in addition to providing data on every school district in New Jersey, compares school districts to one another increasing schools desire to be seen as successful as the top schools (New Jersey Department of Education, 2009).

Normative isomorphism stems from professionalization, which is the conditions, and methods of work that define what members do within their profession (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Professionalization is seen as the collective struggle of individuals within an organization to define the conditions and methods of their work that includes the establishment of a cognitive base and legitimatization for the autonomy of their occupation (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Professionals must compromise with

nonprofessional clients and are subject to the same coercive and mimetic pressures as are organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Mandates placed on schools can be highly visible and formal with forceful rules that schools are required to develop (Davies & Quirke, 2007).

The Institutional isomorphic processes continue in absence of evidence that it increases organizational efficiency (Di Maggio & Powell, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). When organizational effectiveness is enhanced it occurs because of the organizations similarity to other organizations within their fields (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). The similarities found with other organizations increase its legitimacy and reputation.

With the adoption of educational reforms and initiatives school districts can maintain legitimacy and be viewed as conforming to expectations. Effectiveness is overshadowed by conformity, which promotes legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Reform initiatives in education are implemented yet these initiatives fall short of sustained improvement (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer & Scott, 1983; Spillane & Burch, 2006).

Institutional Theories of Organization

Institutional theories of organization are influenced by normative pressures that at times occur from external forces such as the community, state, or federal government and at other times from within the organization itself (Zucker, 1987). When pressures from external or internal forces occur, organizations become guided by legitimated elements from standard operating procedures to professional certification and state requirements that often have the effect of directing attention away from task performance (Tolbert & Zucker, 1983; Zucker, 1987). When organizations respond to external institutional

pressure or to coercive pressure (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) they guard their technical activities by means of decoupling elements of structure from other activities and from each other, which reduces their efficiency (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The core tasks of institutional organizations are not performed as well and basic organizational objectives are often deflected (Zucker, 1987).

Institutional theory offers understandings into organizational environment relations and the way organizations react to institutional processes (Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). This perspective illustrates how non-choice behaviors can occur as a result of habit, convenience, or social obligation without consideration of the organizations interest or contribution to organizational efficiency. It explains how the external environment can add to the social validity and survival of an organization and how values, meanings, and myths rather than efficiency and autonomy can determine and drive organizational behavior when considering external pressures (Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). Institutionalized organizations must not only conform to myths but must also maintain the appearance that "myths actually work" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 356).

Neo-institutional theory. The central concept of neo-institutional theory within organizations has been the organization field (Scott, 1991). This field represents a community of organizations that contribute to a common meeting system with on going interaction among all of the participants within the organizational field (Scott, 1995). The constituents that make up the organizational field have influence on the organization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Scott, 1991) and are comprised of state and federal agencies, professional and union organizations, accreditation agencies, and the general public. The behavior and actions of organizations within the organizational fields is said

to be guided by institutions, which are the cultural, cognitive, normative, and regulative structures that provide stability and collective meaning to social action and behavior (Scott, 1995). These structures act as social facts which members of organizations reference when determining appropriate action (Meyer & Scott, 1983; Zucker, 1977).

Organizational design and practice. Institutional theorists continue to look at how organizations align themselves to changing conditions within their environment and the disconnect between organizational design and actual practice (Burch, 2007). Many of the practices and policies adopted by schools and the agencies that govern them reflect the rules and structures of society (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer & Scott, 1983). Schools are affected by external pressures and cultural values that help to determine what schools are and what we expect from them (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Educational agencies that govern public schools develop elaborate administrative structures, which are seen as critical components of public school governance (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Rowan, 1982; Scott & Meyer, 1991). While organizations adopt policies, plans, and programs that show conformity to socially sanctioned purposes, they may also decouple these formal structures from practices within the organization to buffer internal routines from external uncertainties, enhancing flexibility while still maintaining legitimacy with external stakeholders (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

There are many initiatives in education that are implemented yet these initiatives fall short of sustained improvement (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer & Scott, 1983; Spillane & Burch, 2006). When there is dependence between organizations and their institutional environment organizational forms and policy practices are produced that are often loosely coupled with policy makers intentions (Spillane & Burch, 2006; Weick,

1976). Actions taken to align organizations with what is expected by societal norms and values can conflict with the technical activities that are meant to foster goal attainment (Burch, 2006; Weick, 1976).

Rhetorical Institutionalism

When addressing institutions actions an important consideration is the use of rhetoric in institutions and institutional processes (Green & Li, 2011). Within institutional work there is much attention to the role of discourse and how rhetoric can persuade audiences to make judgments and engage in social action (Green & Li, 2011; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). Alvesson (1993) noted that stakeholders use rhetoric to build an appearance of knowledge or institutional myths as a way of demonstrating meaning and legitimacy to the practices and beliefs of an organization. Rhetoric within institutional theory brings attention to the symbolic rather than material, subjective meaning instead of objective, and to institutional processes instead of institutional outcomes (Green & Li, 2011). For example, the rhetoric found within school mission statements exist because they are expected to exist (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Institutional theorists address organizational artifacts such as mission statements and describe them as ritualistic or mythological (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer et al., 1981). From this perspective mission statements are important because they serve as a legitimating function (Morphew & Hartley, 2006) and become valuable because they show that the organization knows how to function. Institutions are supported by institutional logics, which are frameworks of assumptions within which reasoning takes place and which provide guidelines for practical action (Brown, Ainsworth, & Grant, 2012). Institutional logics are encoded in discourse, which specify norms and establish meanings.

Rhetorical institutionalism uses classical and new rhetorical ideas and insights to formulate how social structures are co-embedded and intertwined with meanings. Classical rhetoric focuses on how we use words. It accentuates the intentional and deliberate use of persuasive language to influence meaning and shape action (Aristotle, 1991). New rhetoric centers more on how words use us. Where classical rhetoric focuses on persuasion as influence, new rhetoric centers on persuasion as communication (Aristotle, 1991). New rhetoric focuses on the unintended ways that language can be considered epistemic shaping identities, motives, and the interests of both those who speak and those who listen. Rhetoric is considered epistemic discourse in as much as it encodes meaning in an attempt to reflect, discover, and understand the interpretation of reality (Zhao, 1991). By recognizing the ways in which words use us, language can hold back as well as permit constituent's thoughts and actions (Green & Li, 2011).

College readiness is a term that, while amorphous is being used to make policy decisions, therefore it is important to understand the connections between rhetoric and practice and how rhetoric can prompt actions and behaviors that can either enhance or diminish and organizations effectiveness.

Conclusion

Current initiatives that include standard based reforms place demands on governing agencies and schools that exceedingly outpace their capacity (Burch, 2007). The organizational field made up of federal and state agencies, professional and union organizations, accreditation agencies, school boards of education, and the general public serve as intermediaries between policy designs and policy practices and through their interactions with school and district offices act as carriers of broader cultural norms that

may at times reinforce the very practices that reform initiatives aim to change (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

There is a need to understand how and why schools do what they do in an effort to ensure that reform initiatives are both efficient and effective. Institutional myths provide the appearance that structures are in place and rhetoric reinforces the appearance of knowledge and institutional myths in order to provide meaning and legitimacy to what takes place within an organization (Alvesson, 1993), however do the behaviors and actions within an organization truly enhance student achievement just because we say that they do?

Institutional theory was used as the theoretical framework for this research study that looks at organizations and the appropriateness of their structures and processes as assessed by relevant environment actors (Scott, 1987). New institutional theory, institutional isomorphic changes, and the organization and institutional environment were addressed to provide understanding in the role institutional theory plays within organizations. Rhetorical institutionalism provided insights of structural and agency institutionalism emphasizing the centrality of meaning and language in institutional processes (Green & Li, 2011).

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore a secondary school's understanding of the term college readiness and to describe the influences and practices used to embed college readiness into its organization. Through the lens of institutional theory this study will illuminate how an organizations understanding and interpretation guide the activities within the organization coupled with internal and external expectations to conform to the norms placed on them by their environment and the need to maintain legitimacy. The setting took place at Ryanville High School in Anytown, New Jersey. Participants in this study included one district administrator, the high school building principal, one high school assistant principal, a high school coordinator and three high school teachers. Data collection was limited to interviews, observations, focus groups, and documentation.

The research questions addressed in this study include the following:

1. How does a school as an organization define and institutionalize college readiness?
2. How are decisions concerning the adoption and implementation of college readiness embedded within an organization?
3. How do cultural rules from the environment shape or constrain organizational action?
4. How is a school organization responsive to the demands of their institutional environment?
5. How does an organization respond to organizational change and initiation of

institutional change?

6. How does conformity to institutional norms enhance or diminish organizational performance?

The Assumption and Rationale for Qualitative Inquiry

The interpretive design of this dissertation is grounded in the field of qualitative research and as defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) qualitative research is characterized as:

> A situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (2005, p.3).

Qualitative research employs a naturalistic approach that attempts to understand phenomena in real world setting (Hoepfl, 1997). Merriam (1988) describes a qualitative study as one that exemplifies certain characteristics, such as: (a) an understanding of the phenomenon of interest from the participant's perspective and not the researchers; (b) the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection; (c) involving fieldwork; (d) using an inductive research strategy; and (e) producing findings that describe the phenomenon being studied. Merriam (1998) asserts that researchers conducting qualitative studies seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and views of the participants involved. In this single case study I use case study methods to explore the organizational and institutional environment to understand

how as secondary school as an organization defines and embeds the term college readiness.

Qualitative research will give me an understanding of process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). This study focused on process; the evolution of a secondary schools understanding of the term college readiness. Using qualitative research strategies will provide insight into the practices used to embed college readiness into organizational rhetoric from the participant's perspective. It will allow me to keep a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the topic of study, not the meaning that I as the researcher bring to the research (Creswell, 2009). Listening to the participant's views of reality will enable me to better understand their actions and behaviors. Being able to observe behavior and action within the context of the site will provide rich information (Patton, 1990).

Strategy of Inquiry

Yin (2009) describes a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). Merriam (1998) states that qualitative case studies "can be characterized as being particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic" (p. 29). Case studies are particularistic because they focus on a particular situation, event, or phenomenon. In this case study the focus was on organizational rhetoric within a secondary school. The case study is descriptive when it offers details and thick description (Yin, 2009) of the phenomenon under study such as what was expressed by the participants of this study who shared their perspectives on how a secondary school as an organization defines and embeds the term college

readiness. Case studies are heuristic in that they contribute to new meanings of a situation or confirm what is already known. The intent of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of organizational behavior and the actions and the meaning given to such behaviors and actions as they pertain to college readiness.

A single case study method of inquiry was used to explore the term college readiness and how college readiness becomes institutionalized within a secondary school environment. This single case study is a typical study where the objective was to capture the conditions and circumstances that are representative of a secondary school (Yin, 2009). According to Stake (1995) a single case study is an instrumental case study when it serves to help understand phenomenon or relationships within, writing more for the illustration of an idea than an understanding of the individual's life. The phenomenon in this case study was how a secondary school uses organizational rhetoric to embed the term college readiness. This strategy of inquiry allowed me to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristic of real life events and explore the how and why of such events (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). One of the defining characteristics of a case study research that differentiates it from other types of qualitative research is that it is the study of a bounded system (Yin, 2009). The bounded system in this research study was the setting and the participants within the setting. The unit of analysis was organizational rhetoric and the processes and practices used to embed college readiness into organizational rhetoric.

As a qualitative researcher I want to focus on the rhetoric of the participants in this study as well as the behavior and action that take place within their work setting in order to gain an understanding of how they make sense of the term college readiness.

Case study research will afford me the opportunity to explore and describe a phenomenon in context using a variety of sources. This ensures that the topic of study is explored through a variety of lenses, which allow for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). This strategy of inquiry enabled participants to describe their views of reality, which helped me to understand the study participant's actions as well as the institutional logics encoded in discourse that provided vocabularies, specified norms, and established meaning.

Research Paradigm

Social constructivism as a paradigm, views knowledge as socially constructed (Creswell, 2009) and guides the planning and implementation of this study. Constructivism appreciates multiple realities that people have. Social constructivists claim that truth is relative and that this truth relies on a person's perspective. Constructivism is built on the foundation of a social construction of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). One of the advantages of using this approach in a qualitative research study is the close collaboration between the participant and the researcher, enabling participants to tell their stories. Qualitative research is directed through a constructivist paradigm, which suggest that information and understanding is a shared process between the researcher and the participants. These connections provide meaning and are dependent on an individual's perspective (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Multiple methods of data collection were employed such as interviews, focus groups, and documents that lead to more valid, reliable, and diverse construction of realities (Golafshani, 2003). The data collection provided research participants the opportunity to share their views and experiences, and the researcher the opportunity to construct and interpret meaning from

such views and experiences. Meaning and understanding occurred through interactions with people, objects, and the environment. This research study explored views and complexity of ideas, focused on participant meaning, and engaged in inquiry that was inductive and interpretive.

Context of the Case Study

The research study took place in the Ryanville Public School District in Anytown, NJ. Ryanville Township is a growing suburban community consisting of approximately 43 square miles. The township is made up of families of all ages including several adult communities. Ryanville High School is a rapidly growing school with approximately 2000 students and 200 staff members. Approximately 92% of the students continue their education with 60% going on to four-year colleges and universities. Ryanville High School has received accreditation by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools and the New Jersey Department of Education.

Most school districts throughout the country are challenged to increase student opportunities to pursue a college degree, yet 30 to 60% of the students who get into college require remedial courses once they get there (Aldeman, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The statistics representing Ryanville High School claim that 92% of the students who graduate from the high school continue their education. What does this mean and how does this discourse influence the processes, practices, and beliefs within this secondary school?

As an administrator of Ryanville Public Schools I have seen and heard the confusion that remains as to what it actually means to be a college and career ready. If the goal is to prepare all students to be college and career ready and as educators there is

uncertainty as to what that actually means, how then can we accomplish this task? With the knowledge and experience that I possess in this setting and the opportunity to work with individuals in the same setting, this qualitative research study will help me to explore and illuminate the understandings and interpretations of how Ryanville High School defines and embeds the term college readiness within its organization.

Site Access

Before negotiating access into the research setting, I needed to understand my reasons for wanting to conduct research at Ryanville High School and my relationships with the participants in my study. Bodgan and Biklen (1992) reference the relationship the researcher has with their study participants and what that relationship means to the researcher affects how the researcher conducts fieldwork and interprets the data. In addition to conducting the study at the site where I worked which proved to be a convenient and expeditious way to obtain the data needed, more importantly was the need to ensure that the study participants did not feel any coercion to participate (Creswell, 2009).

Site access was secured by meeting with the school district superintendent to explain my research study, my reason for wanting to conduct research at my place of work, and the ethical considerations and confidentiality that would be maintained before, during, and after completion of this research study (Appendix A).

Once site access was approved I provided study participants with an informed consent form that explained the intent of the study, my theoretical framework, and the data methodology (Appendix B). Confidentiality was addressed to ensure participants that their names would not be used (Creswell, 2009). I indicated that a summarization of

findings would be shared with each of the study participants in an effort to ensure a true assessment of the study participant experiences during the study. They were also informed that this study was voluntary with the understanding that the study participants could withdraw from the study at any time.

Participant Selection

Qualitative inquiry focuses in depth on small samples that are selected purposefully (Patton, 1990). In an effort to obtain information rich cases, purposeful sampling will help to illuminate the questions in the research study. Critical case sampling will be used that focuses on a single site that will yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge. While studying one case does not permit broad generalization to all possible cases, logical generalizations can often be made from the weight of evidence produced in studying a single case (Patton, 1990).

Purposeful sampling was used because the setting and the participants are deliberately selected for the important information that they can provide. Using institutional theory as my theoretical framework, the participants selected were beneficial in answering the research question of this qualitative case study. Purposeful sampling will help me to understand the central importance to the purpose of my case study inquiry. My interest in organizations, the organizational environment, institutional theory, and college readiness lend itself to working with participants who are part of a school organization, deal with external and internal forces as a result of the environment, and are exposed to policies, practices, and procedures that can facilitate college readiness.

Qualitative studies use small samples and focus in depth on such samples (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These samples provide "information rich-data" (Patton, 1990, p.169) helping the researcher to learn about the issues that are important to the study. The goal of purposeful sampling is to illuminate the questions that are being studied focusing on the specific rather than the general. Participants who are articulate, reflective, and willing to share information with the researcher requires purposeful sampling in an attempt to answer research questions that will provide rich information about the phenomenon being studied (Coyne, 1997). The use of purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the researcher wants to understand, discover, and gain insight which necessitates the need to select a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam, 1998). The sample size was determined based on the inquiry, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources (Patton, 1990).

Participants

The participants in this study included administrators and teachers from the Ryanville Public School District. The participants represent various roles and responsibilities typical of a secondary school high school. As part of the school organization and the culture that exists within the organization, they interact with the processes and practices that currently exist.

Administration was selected for this research study because of the role that they play in the adoption and implementation of policy, their role as educational and instructional leaders, and their understanding of the school environment including the culture, and the behaviors and actions that make up the culture. As educational and

instructional leaders they have certain responsibilities that can enhance or diminish the performance within a school organization.

Teachers for this research study were selected because of their role and responsibilities within a secondary school organization, their experience with organizational change and the initiation of institutional change, their experiences with the school environment and how those experiences shape or constrain organizational performance, and their role in the adoption and implementation of organizational practices and processes.

Data Collection

Data implies "the rough materials researchers collect from the world they are studying: they are particulars that form the basis for analysis" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p.73). Qualitative data takes on the form of words or language that is generated from observations, interviews, and documents (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Patton (1990) has described qualitative data as the detailed description of people, situations, and interaction as well as direct quotations from individuals about their thoughts and experiences; and excerpts or passages from documents or records (Merriam, 1998). Additionally, data collection is informed by ongoing analysis that guides further data collection.

Yin (2009) suggests three principles of data collection when using a case study strategy of inquiry, which include using multiple sources of data, creating a case study database, and maintaining a chain of evidence. The reason for multiple sources of data is the triangulation of evidence. Triangulation increases the dependability of the data and the process of how it is gathered (Creswell & Plano Clark 2010; Stake, 1995). Triangulation corroborates the data that the researcher gathers from other sources helping

to validate the data. Triangulation is not just about the collection type, but includes multiple sources, theoretical frameworks, observers, subject, and analytical frameworks. The triangulation of data provides an opportunity to confirm emerging findings (Merriam, 1998) and to also develop lines of inquiry (Yin, 2009) within the study. In an effort to provide an accurate account of the study participant perspectives, the primary source of data came from participant interviews and focus groups. The interviews and the focus groups were critical aspects of the study as the participant's voices were very important to my data collection efforts.

Data collected was placed in a database where data was organized and documented into categories (Yin, 2009). Narratives, notes, and tabular materials are included in the database. I created this database so that researchers or outside readers can reference raw data. As the researcher, I maintained a chain of evidence so that outside readers can follow the derivation of any evidence from initial research questions to ultimate case study conclusions.

Interviews

The use of interviews is commonplace in qualitative case study research (Yin, 2009). The interaction between researcher and the participant through the interview is the "establishment of human-to-human relations with the respondent and the desire to understand rather than to explain" (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p.366). The interview process helped me to develop a relationship with the participants providing an opportunity to understand the meaning participants gave to the words that they used. I had the opportunity to hear their words and observe body language through face-to-face

interactions. Interviewing the study participants helped me to understand their lived experiences and how they make sense and meaning from those experiences.

Interviews with the participants were semi-structured consisting of open-ended questions and included an interview protocol using a flexible emergent technique of follow up and probing questions when deemed necessary and appropriate (Seidman, 2006). Follow up questions were used to provide additional information, ask for clarification, and enhance the story telling for the participants. Through active listening I had the opportunity to move the interview forward by building on what was said by the participants (Seidman, 2006). Interviews were recorded and transcribed pending participant's permission and provided to the participants for review and member checking. Member checking is considered an important method for verifying and validating information observed and/or transcribed by the researcher (Stake, 1995) and is meant as a check and critique of the data. Handwritten notes were taken during the interviews for the purpose of extending questions or to add to my personal notes for further investigation. Interviews were conducted on school site based on participants schedule and availability. Follow up interviews took place so that the interpretation of data could be affirmed or revised, used to seek clarification and explanations, and also assist in asking follow up questions. The interview process served as the primary database for this qualitative study.

As a researcher I need to understand the deeper perspectives that can be captured through face-to-face interactions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, and assumption of the participants can be explored and interpreted through the interview process. The purpose of interviewing is "to access the perspective

of the person being interviewed" (Patton, 1990, p. 278). The face-to-face contact allowed me to observe and hear the participant's point of view and understand how the words that they used provided meaning to their experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The words and language used by the participants helped me to understand how they construct knowledge, how they interpret knowledge, and how that knowledge was conceptualized into behavior and actions. Interviewing provided me with access to the context of the participant's behaviors that helped me to understand the meaning of that behavior and the role language played in constructing and shaping participant knowledge.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were used as a data collection method and lasted for approximately ninety minutes. Focus groups are group interviews with reliance on group interactions based on questions facilitated by the researcher (Morgan, 1997). They combine elements of interviews and participant observations yet hold on to an identity of their own providing access to additional forms of data. As the researcher I captured data and insight that would be less accessible without the group interaction of the focus group. The primary use of the focus group was to encourage discussion as well as the expression of different ideas and viewpoints (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The goal was for the focus group participants to generate understandings and explanations as they reacted and responded to what others had said during the session. This form of inquiry takes on the premise that an individuals attitudes and beliefs do not take shape in a vacuum (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The need to listen to the opinions and understandings of others helped to clarify, contradict, or correct theoretical and research praxis suppositions regarding the central phenomenon (Gearing, 2004).

In contrast to participant interviews, a focus group is a way of observing a group of people discussing a particular issue (Morgan, 1997). One of the objectives of a focus group is to be able to detect diverging opinions within a group (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). A focus group can collect a variety of points of views and perceptions stimulated by interactions that provide direct evidence about the similarities and differences in the participant's opinions and experiences (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Morgan, 1997). Participants are able to hear each other's responses and make additional comments beyond their own initial responses as they hear what the other participants have to say (Patton, 1990).

The focus group provided an opportunity for me to hear multiple perspectives simultaneously and to observe how the participants used their social skills as storytellers to produce narratives that explained the practices, behaviors, and actions within the organization (Morgan, 1997). As the researcher I was able to observe how the participants used language to construct and share subjective and personal meanings and how they used that subjectivity to convince others (Alvesson, 1993). The purposeful and strategic use of rhetoric is the primary means through which organizational change is accomplished (Alvesson, 1993).

The discussion was concentrated on the topics of interest that emerged from the analysis of the interview data (Morgan, 1997). Participants were provided an understanding of the agenda for discussion and that the agenda would be adhered to in an effort to facilitate the issues of concern. As the researcher my role was to capture the voice of all focus group participants (Creswell, 2009; Morgan, 1997). I ensured that each participant had an opportunity to answer all of the research questions, affording

opportunities for rich information. (Morgan, 1997). I was able to accomplish this task by listening, observing, asking questions, and keeping the group on task. A focus group protocol was used identifying research discussion topics (this will be discussed further in the instrumentation section). A focus summary form was used that included the date, time, location, topic of discussion, and summary of discussion. This form enabled me to capture data immediately, keep track of discussion items, participant responses, and when and where this process took place (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Review of the data helped to ascertain the necessity for additional focus groups and/or participant interviews to provide further clarity and understanding (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Morgan, 1997).

Material Culture

Material culture is a less intrusive method of collecting data and will provide detail and evidence of corroboration as compared to other data collected (Yin, 2009). Documents included letters, memorandums, emails, calendars, agendas, announcements, minutes of meetings, administrative documents, and proposals (Hodder, 1994; Yin, 2009). Documents that were contradictory to other data collection methods were pursued though additional inquiry. It is relevant to know the significance of the documents and what the documents tells the researcher and others about the research topic (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Institutional theory looks at the relationships between institutions and actions and how action is embedded in institutional structures, which it produces, reproduces and transforms (Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca 2011). Documentation will provide information that accounts for the actions that are embedded within an organization and the practices of individuals and key stakeholders aimed at creating and maintaining institutions. The

written texts provide opportunities for multiple interpretations derived from the writing and reading of the text (Hodder, 1994). The written text is an "artifact capable of transmission, manipulation, and alteration" (Hodder, 1994, p.354). Rhetoric can be used strategically to construct and shape knowledge and institutional life (Alvesson, 1993).

A document summary form was created that included the name of the document, event or person(s) if any with which the document was associated, significance of the document, and a brief summary of its contents (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Document summary forms were coded and categorized in an effort to corroborate research study findings.

Instrumentation

Issues of instrument validity and reliability are dependent on the skills of the researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data collected through interviews, focus groups, and documentations required three separate protocols. An interview protocol was designed to ensure that questions were asked to cover the topic of study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) and included follow up questions and probes to pursue depth and detail (Seidman, 2006). This method was used to obtain sufficient examples and evidence in an effort to draw convincing conclusions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A focus group protocol was designed in an effort to provide discussion questions during the focus group process (Morgan, 1997). This protocol helped me to stay on task and moderate the discussion (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Morgan, 1997). A documentation protocol was designed (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to provide guidance in determining what documents were needed and how the documents could assist in answering the research questions and validate or contradict the claims of each of the participants (Hodder, 1994). The research questions

were the guiding tool in determining the types of documents to review, which helped with the organization of data as it was compiled and analyzed.

I observed, interviewed, recorded, and took notes while in the field paying meticulous attention to detail. I was non judgmental and maintained a heightened sense of empathetic engagement balanced with objective awareness. As the researcher I was able to hone in on core processes and meanings about the phenomenon being studied. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2008), "All research is interpretive; it is guided by the researcher's set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied" (p. 31). My association with this study site is recognized as a subjective factor for consideration in the analyses and conclusion drawn from this study.

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

The purpose of this single case study was to explore and describe how a secondary school as an organization defined and institutionalized the term college readiness. In pursuit of the research, semi-structured in person interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990) were conducted with administrators and teachers from Ryanville High School. The interviews were arranged to take place throughout November and December 2013. The interviews were approximately 90 minutes (Seidman, 2006) with a follow up interview that lasted no more than 30 minutes. Each interview was recorded and transcribed (Rossman & Rallis, 2006). Participants were told that I would be taking notes during the interview process. The interviewed participants were assured the right and opportunity to fully review and change the transcript prior to it being used in this study. They were also assured confidentiality prior to the interview process (Creswell, 2009). The interview questions for the semi-structured interview process were

formulated into a matrix with the guiding questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994) (Appendix C). This served as a guide for the interview process. The interview protocol was used to inform and thank interviewees for their participation. This protocol included questions and probing follow up questions (Seidman, 2006) (Appendix D).

Table 1

Research Question and Interview Protocol Matrix

Research Questions	**Interview Questions**
1. How are decisions concerning the adoption and implementation of college readiness embedded within an organization?	A. How is College Readiness an important component to a secondary school? B. How does a secondary school decide to adopt college readiness? B. How does a secondary school decide to implement college readiness within their organization? C. How do internal stakeholders play a role in the adoption and implementation of college readiness? D. How do external stakeholders play a role in the adoption and implementation of college readiness?

Research Question and Interview Protocol Matrix

Research Questions	Interview Questions
2. How do cultural rules from the environment shape or constrain organizational action?	A. How do you define cultural rules? B. How do outside forces impact cultural rules? C. How do inside forces impact cultural rules? D. How do cultural rules determine the actions of stakeholders within a secondary school environment?
3. How is a school organization responsive to the demands of their institutional environment?	A. How do you describe what an institutional environment looks like? B. How is a relationship developed between a school organization and its institutional environment? C. How do the actions and behaviors of a school organization meet the needs of its institutional environment?

Research Question and Interview Protocol Matrix

Research Questions	Interview Questions
4. How does an organization respond to organizational change and initiation of institutional change?	A. How do you describe organizational change? B. How do you describe institutional change? C. How is institutional change implemented? C. How do members of a secondary school organization respond to change? D. How do members of a secondary school organization respond to the initiation of institutional change?
5. How does conformity to institutional norms enhance or diminish organizational performance?	A. How are institutional norms developed within this secondary school organization? B. How do stakeholders react to institutional norms? C. How do institutional norms impact organizational performance?

Focus Group Protocol

The focus group was held on site and at the conclusion of the school day in an effort to provide a convenient time for all of the focus group participants. The focus

group was intended to be limited in size in an effort to ensure that everyone's voice was heard (Morgan, 1997). As the researcher, I was the focus group facilitator and the note taker during the focus group session. The session was scheduled to last ninety minutes. The focus group participants were made aware of the topic of the focus group in advance and provided discussion questions prior to the session (Morgan, 1997). The session was recorded and transcribed (Creswell, 2009). A focus group summary form (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was used to capture the data (Appendix E). The participants were assured of confidentiality and given the opportunity to review and make changes to the notes from the focus group before they were used in the study (Creswell, 2009). A focus group consent form (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was used (Appendix F). A flexible focus group protocol of discussion topics (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was also used (Appendix G) along with a Research Question and Focus Group Protocol Matrix (Appendix H) and a Focus Group Protocol (Appendix I).

Table 2

Research Question and Focus Group Protocol Matrix

Research Questions	**Discussion Questions**
1. How are decisions concerning the adoption and implementation of college readiness embedded within an organization?	A. How are you involved in the adoption and implementation of college readiness within this school?

Research Question and Focus Group Protocol Matrix

Research Questions	Discussion Questions
2. How do cultural rules from the environment shape or constrain organizational action?	A. How do cultural rules within this organization effect your behavior and actions?
3. How is a school organization responsive to the demands of their institutional environment?	A. How do you respond to the demands of the institutional environment?
4. How does an organization respond to organizational change and initiation of institutional change?	A. How has organizational change and the initiation of institutional change enhanced or diminished what you do?
5. How does conformity to institutional norms enhance or diminish organizational performance?	A. How does conformity play a role in organizational performance? Legitimacy?

Documentation Protocol

Documents were collected that included letters, memorandums, emails, calendars, agendas, minutes of meetings, and administrative documents (Yin, 2009). Documents are rich data that can either validate or contradict the claims of each of the participants (Hodder, 1994). A Research Question and Documentation Protocol Form (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was used to link material culture with the research questions (Appendix J) and a document summary form (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was used to summarize the data (Appendix K).

Table 3

Research Question and Documentation Protocol Matrix

Research Questions	**Material Culture**
1. How are decisions concerning the adoption and implementation of college readiness embedded within an organization?	• Memorandums • Letters • Central Office Administration meeting agendas • High School Administration meeting agendas • District Supervisor meeting agendas • State and Federal Agency memorandums
2. How do cultural rules from the environment shape or constrain organizational action?	• Minutes from High School Liaison meetings with Union Representatives and High School Administration • District Vision and Mission Statement • High School meeting agendas and minutes

Research Question and Documentation Protocol Matrix

Research Questions	Material Culture
2. How do cultural rules from the environment shape or constrain organizational action?	• Minutes from High School Liaison meetings with Union Representatives and High School Administration • District Vision and Mission Statement • High School meeting agendas and minutes
3. How is a school organization responsive to the demands of their institutional environment?	• District Policies • High School Policies • Student Handbook • Staff Handbook • High School Staff Job Descriptions
4. How does an organization respond to organizational change and initiation of institutional change?	• Documentation regarding current reforms and initiatives including technology initiatives • High School Staff meeting agendas and minutes • High School Coordinator meeting agendas and minutes

Research Question and Documentation Protocol Matrix

Research Questions	Material Culture
5. How does conformity to institutional norms enhance or diminish organizational performance?	• Teacher Schedules • High School Staff Job Descriptions

Data Analysis

Qualitative case study research generates large amounts of raw data therefore it is essential to maintain the data in a timely an organized fashion (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Preliminary data analysis needs to be completed immediately post-collection or even better yet, "the right way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection" (Merriam, 1998, p. 162). Data analysis uses an inductive approach meaning that patterns and categories of analysis come from the data. Inductive analysis emerges from the data and is guided by what the researcher wants to know and the meaning and interpretation the researcher makes of the data. Data analysis combined the elements of summaries, field notes, analytic memos, and outlines into a reflexive research journal that I used and referenced throughout this research study. These procedures helped to organize the data as it was collected. A matrix of categories was created (Yin, 2009) placing the evidence within such categories. Data displays were created that included flow charts and other graphics for examining the data. The analysis of this case study relied on theoretical propositions stemming from the research questions that looked at the how and why of the topic being studied.

In Vivo Coding

This was used as a first cycle coding method of data analysis used to ground the analysis from the participant's perspective. Direct language from the participants was used as codes. As I read through transcripts that represented participant voices I attuned myself to the words and phrases that seemed to call for bolding, italicizing, or highlighting. Transcriptions and readings from interviews and focus groups provided multiple meanings that were inherent in the text (Saldana, 2009). For in vivo coding, categories were created from the actual phrases used in specific text segments. Additional phrases were added to the category where they were relevant. Categories were continually revised and refined. Using the worldview of social constructivism it is important to understand and bring meaning to the way people construct knowledge. Social constructivism is based on the belief that knowledge is seen as a set of beliefs or mental models that people use to interpret actions and event in the world (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The direct words from the participants and identifying those words through the use of in vivo coding provided meaning and interpretation to the data. This type of coding provided a critical check on what was significant to the participant helping to condense meanings (Charmaz, 2006).

The aim of creating an in vivo code is to ensure that concepts stay as close as possible to research participant's own words because their words capture a key element of what is being described. Codes were then analyzed to find the similarities and grouped into categories based on their common properties (Saldana, 2009). The categories helped to find, pull out, and cluster the segments relating to the research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Hypothesis Coding

The hypothesis coding included a pre-determined list of codes that worked from the theory used as part of the conceptual framework of this research study. I used the categories created from in vivo coding and linked them to the pre-determined codes created as part of the conceptual framework of this research study to determine the causal relationship between the categories created from in vivo coding and the pre-determined codes created using hypothesis coding (Saldana, 2009). The pre-determined codes were used to explore, discover, and illuminate explanations for the data as it related to the theory. I provided a descriptive label for general categories that pertained to institutional theory. Descriptive categories included such terms as the external environment, the internal environment, legitimacy, conformity, and organizational change to name a few. Codes were developed for each descriptive term and then the code was identified to the research question in an effort to determine how the data related to the theory and to the research question. A matrix table was created that included a column with the descriptive label for the general categories and the individual codes (Appendix L). The second column showed the codes and the third column identified the code to the research question (Miles & Huberman, 1994). With the assistance of this visual display I identified where some participants did not exemplify a particular code or category necessitating the need to develop further analysis and to modify conclusions (Maxwell, 2013). Once all of the codes were generated the codes were placed into categories and themes were developed. Coded data included interviews, focus groups, and documentation. The identification of connections among different categories lent itself to explanation building.

Explanation Building

Explanation building was used to explain the how and why of this case study (Yin, 2009). It was done in narrative form stipulating a presumed set of causal links about how a secondary school as an organization defines and embeds the term college readiness. The explanations reflected the theoretical framework used in this study. Causal links were identified to reflect critical insights into how college readiness becomes institutionalized and the practices, behaviors, and actions that take place within an organization to make this happen. Rhetoric and knowledge was explored to understand the meaning language provides in adopting practices and behaviors. Using the research questions as a guide to data collection, the explanation addressed the six research questions noted at the beginning of the chapter in order to explain the evolution of a secondary school's understanding of the term college readiness and the practices used to embed college readiness into organizational rhetoric using all of the evidence produced through data collection and analysis.

Yin (2009) provides the four tenets of high quality analysis. The analysis must attend to all of the evidence gathered, address all of the major rival interpretations, address the most significant aspect of the case study, and utilize the researcher's prior expert knowledge. These four elements were used to guide the data analysis and ensure its quality.

Rigor of the Study

Rigor is a set of standards that fits different assumptions and approaches related to qualitative tradition (Toma, 2006). In qualitative research rigor starts with credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These standards help qualitative

researchers to produce findings that are extremely thorough, accurate, and exhaustive. Qualitative researchers need to challenge their own thinking about rigor and how they express this thinking in the context of their writing (Toma, 2006).

Trustworthiness and validity reflect ways that a researcher can establish truth. In qualitative research the trustworthiness of the data exists when the researcher can extract meaningful interpretations from methods used in a study that measure what they intended to measure (Creswell, 2007). Findings are considered trustworthiness when they are credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable, Triangulation (Lather, 1986) that includes multiple data sources and methods is critical in establishing trustworthiness.

Credibility

Yin (2009) refers to credibility as the extent to which the researcher captures and identifies the reality of how things really are from the viewpoints of the participants. Study participant agreement with the interpretation and construction of the research will establish credibility (Toma, 2006). Triangulating data sources drawing from interviews, focus groups, and documentation will also demonstrate the accuracy and authenticity of the study to ensure credibility (Creswell, 2009). Credibility of the findings was accomplished through in-depth data collection that included interviews, focus groups, documents, and field notes. Member checking enhances the credibility of research findings by affording research study participants and any one else who may have an interest in the topic of study to assess and comment on the research findings, interpretations, and conclusion (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These checks are important in establishing credibility for the research findings.

Triangulation. The triangulation of the multiple data sources is built into data collection and analysis for the purpose of achieving trustworthiness. Triangulation is considered a process that uses multiple perceptions to help clarify meaning and verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation (Stake, 1995). Triangulation can also be used to provide meaning by identifying different ways that the phenomenon is being seen. Seeking elaboration, enhancement, illustration, and clarification of the results of one method with the results from another method will increase credibility and dependability (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010).

Member checking. The use of member checking is an important part of triangulating the researcher's observations as well as interpretations. When the research participants review the interview transcripts, observation notes, or narrative text they provide corroboration and feedback (Stake, 1995). Each research participant was given many opportunities to review data materials and provide further response to the research questions.

Confirmability

The trustworthiness construct of confirmability was achieved by conducting a process of member checking where by participants reviewed transcripts and findings so that the data could be confirmed by someone other than the researcher (Toma, 2006). This was done to ensure that the findings represented a reasonable account of the participant's views and experiences. An audit trail was created allowing an external auditor to assess the processes and results of the study. Outside readers can authenticate the findings of a study by following the audit trail of the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). As the researcher trying to explain how the results were determined, the audit trail

used in this qualitative single case study described how data was collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry. I kept a journal throughout this study on questions, reflections, decisions on problems, and issues and ideas encountered. To check for researcher bias I kept a record of all ideas, reactions, confusions, and feelings that occurred during data collection and data analysis. I wrote down perceptions and summarized feelings after spending time with each study participant. Writing in a journal helped me to identify subjectivity and brought personal biases to a conscious level.

Transferability

Transferability took place by providing in-depth rich data that addressed the research study questions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data focused on issues that were important to the study. Findings were connected to institutional theory helping to explain why actions, events, and structures occurred. Writing helped to effectively promote understanding and meaning. As a researcher it is important to be able to ascertain if the data is transferable to some other study in the future. In order for the research to be considered transferable it must be helpful in illuminating another context where the findings are applicable to another setting or group (Toma, 2006). With case study research the case that is being explored needs to be useful to those that are in similar situations and to researchers who have similar questions or problems of practice (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Dependability

In order to achieve dependability an audit trail and creation of a database were maintained where the raw data could be found and referenced by the researcher or reader.

Raw data included notes from interviews, focus groups, and documentation. A reflexive journal was used to record my own role in the research. This journal was used to reflect on my role as the researcher and to accommodate changes in the study and the research design of the study based on my observations and reflections. A chain of evidence (Yin, 2009) was used so that a reader can follow the derivation of any evidence from initial research questions to ultimate case study conclusions. Corroboration of findings took place through triangulation.

Ethical Considerations

"All researchers have great privilege and obligation: the privilege to pay attention and the obligation to make conclusions drawn from those choices meaningful to colleagues and clients" (Stake, 1995, p. 49). Beyond Stake's assertion of paying attention and drawn conclusions, such privilege and obligation extends to the researcher disclosing positionality and conducting the research in an ethical manner.

Prior to IRB approval, I completed the online Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research course at www.citiprogram.org, a necessary component for all researchers at Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ. Site access approval for my study was granted and an application to begin the research was submitted to the Rowan University Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects in research. Once I was approved to begin the research an informed consent form was provided to all of the study participants. Interview protocols and focus group protocols were used and study participants were able to review my notes and transcripts to ensure accuracy. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the interview and focus group process. Study

participants were reassured that their names would not be used when the data was analyzed and shared.

Using the worldview of social constructivism my intent was to seek meaning and understanding through interactions with people, objects, and the environment (Creswell, 2007). As a researcher I realize that my own background will shape my interpretation of what I see and hear and my purpose was to make sense and interpret the meaning others have about the topic studied. I have an ethical obligation as a researcher to focus on the language used by the study participants in order to accurately bring meaning to their thoughts and words. As the researcher I am aware of my biases and have conducted this research in collaboration with the study participants. I have shared my interpretations with them to ensure accuracy and to be able to present data that is real and meaningful. Recordings, transcriptions, and all notes were reviewed and assessed by all of the participants in this case study.

Due to the fact that the research will be conducted within the confines of my place of work, as the researcher it is important to bracket out suppositions and assumptions due to the pre-existing relationships that exist in this particular setting (Gearing, 2004). I also was cognizant of the need to employ multiple strategies of validity in order to create reader confidence in the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2009).

My experiential knowledge includes that of a teacher, counselor, administrator, school board member, and researcher. I have had opportunities to work with staff from levels K-12, students in middle school and high school, and parents of school-aged children. My experienced in education is varied and my learning on going. Each role and the responsibilities attached to those roles have provided meaning to my world and my

views of the world. All of these experiences have helped me to understand the complexity of views and ideas as I interpreted and constructed meaning of what was explored and discovered through the research.

Conclusion

Through the use of rigorous qualitative case study research, the purpose of this study is to understand how a school as an organization defines and embeds the term college readiness. Research study questions focused on the topics described in an effort to understand, explore, and illuminate the findings based on the methodology used. Interviews, focus groups, and documentation captured the answers and explanations interpreted through the data analysis. Using the worldview of social constructivism meaning and understanding occurred through interaction with people, objects, and the environment. Reflexivity was continuous taking into account the effect of the presence of the researcher and what was being investigated.

Chapter 4

Findings

In this chapter an overview of the findings obtained from the case study analysis will be presented focusing on the evolution of a secondary schools understanding of the term college readiness and the influence and practices used to embed college readiness into organizational rhetoric. A description of a code map constructed from emergent themes as a result of the data will also be provided. Lastly, this chapter will act as a bridge to the following manuscripts describing the rationale for the findings presented in each article and the intended audience.

Discussion of Findings

The interview transcripts served as the primary data set for this qualitative study. Interviews with the participants were semi-structured consisting of open-ended questions and included an interview protocol using a flexible emergent technique of follow up and probing questions when deemed necessary and appropriate (Seidman, 2006). Follow up questions were used to provide additional information, ask for clarification, and enhance the story telling for the participants. Through the interview process I was able to hear first hand how each participant defined the term college readiness. Discussion included adoption and implementation of college readiness, the educational environment, culture and norms, organizational change, and institutional change. The primary use of the focus group was to encourage discussion as well as the expression of different ideas and viewpoints (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Material culture was used to provide detail and corroboration as compared to other data collected (Yin, 2009).

Through the lens of institutional theory, several important findings emerged from the data analysis demonstrating how organizational rhetoric is used to produce convincing accounts, regulating impressions, and portraying images about college readiness (Alvesson, 1993) within a secondary school context. This chapter provides an abridged discussion of my findings as well as introduces the two manuscripts that follow in Chapters Five and Six.

Conformity to Practices

The secondary school organization in this study has incorporated polices and procedures into their structure that lend itself to legitimacy, conformity, and social validation. Meanings are in place through the use of organizational rhetoric that convey academic excellence, rigor, improved student achievement, and post-secondary preparedness. A college readiness program has been implemented that emphasizes writing, inquiry, collaboration, and reading, supporting high expectations and levels of achievement for all students. Participants in this study sited many of these examples when asked to define the term college readiness.

Recurring themes included skill attainment, going on to college, and organizational practices. It is also important to note that the definitions provided were the individual participants meaning of the word college readiness. The explanations provided are common words and phrases found on the school's website, noted in the vision and mission statement, and cited in the school's Program of Studies booklet that includes many of the policies and procedures associated with course offerings and curriculum. These institutional scripts found within educational organizations are the texts that guide behavior and action, lend legitimacy to school organizations, come with state and federal

regulatory systems, deeply embedded professional norms, and long standing socially approved practices (Rowan & Miskel, 1999). Words, discourse, structures, and cultural artifacts reinforce the claims of a particular competency, influence meaning, and shape action (Alvesson, 1993).

Organizational Responsiveness

Non-choice behavior was a common theme evolving around change, responsiveness to change, and the behaviors and actions that are associated with change. Student and parent needs are addressed and programs and processes put in place to show that the organization is meeting the identified needs. Rules are clearly identified for students and staff that require compliance in an attempt to secure a learning environment conducive to growth.

Many references in the data pointed to staff addressing the expectations placed upon them and the need to meet those expectations. A unified purpose was a common theme presented throughout the data. Participants cited the many practices and procedures in place, the established norms, and the behavior and actions that have become a part of the organization.

Intersection of Accountability

State and federal mandates, the school report card, the board of education, and community taxpayers were referenced by all of the participants in this study. Reference was made to the intrusion from the outside that includes the state and federal government mandating what is best, the assessments that schools must adhere to in an effort to measure student growth, and the policies and practices within the organization that

provide legitimacy and validity to the many sanctions placed on the institutional environment.

All of the participants in this study referenced their role and responsibilities within the organization. Collective responsibility was a common theme throughout the data that included responsibility to students, parents, administrators, and state and federal mandates. Structures have been put in place that validates the responsibility that the members within the organization claim to uphold. Norms have been established as a result of the structures that are in place and which take into account all of the stakeholders.

All of these findings are shown in the code map that follows displaying for the reader the emergent concepts, themes, data application, and interpretation of the data as a whole.

Table 4

Code Map for research data

Case Study Research Questions
RQ#1
How does a school as an organization define and institutionalize college readiness?
RQ#2
How are decisions concerning the adoption and implementation of college readiness embedded within an organization?

Code Map for research data

Case Study Research Questions
RQ#3 How do cultural rules from the environment shape or constrain organizational action? RQ#4 How is a school organization responsible to the demands of their institutional environment? RQ#5 How does an organization respond to organizational change and the initiation of institutional change? RQ#6 How does conformity to institutional norms enhance or diminish organizational performance?
Third Iteration: Interpretation
Social norms and institutional expectations create pressures for schools to respond to policies and initiatives that are acceptable to societal constituents. The behavior and actions of the participants in this study are a result of the mandates and initiatives that schools are required to perform.
Second Iteration: Themes/Data Application
1. Organizational Responsiveness 2. Intersection of Accountability 3. Non-Choice Behaviors 4. Collective Responsibility 5. Conformity to Practices

Code Map for research data

First Iteration: Initial Codes/Surface Content Analysis	
1A. Policies and Procedures	3D. Mandates
1B. College Readiness skills	3E. Intrusion
1C. Rigor	3F. Purpose
2A. Internal Forces	4A. Beliefs and Practices
2B. External Forces	4B. Institutional Environment
2C. Policies and Procedures	5A. Norms
2D. Common Core Standards	5B. Conformity
3A. Change	5C. Legitimacy
3B. Expectations	5D. Social Validity
3C. Culture	5E. Responsibility

Manuscripts

The format of this dissertation is that of the manuscript option. In the place of traditional Chapters Five and Six, I chose to complete manuscripts for publication. Out of the findings from this study, organizational responsiveness and intersection of accountability emerged as the most compelling and were developed into two pieces of empirical scholarship. The first manuscript, entitled "College Readiness & Organizational Responsiveness: Practice and Rhetoric in a Secondary School Context" was created to meet the specifications for publication of *The High School Journal*, a journal focused on scholarly articles of general significance to the field of secondary education. The second manuscript, entitled: " College Readiness and Accountability

within a Secondary School Organization" was developed to meet the criteria of *Educational Administrative Quarterly,* a journal focused on timely and critical leadership and policy issues of educational organizations. Dr. Ane Turner Johnson and I are listed as co-authors on each manuscript. Reference lists accompany both manuscripts. A complete reference list that includes citations from Chapters One – Four and the manuscripts, follows the second manuscript.

Chapter 5

Manuscript One

College Readiness & Organizational Responsiveness: Practice and Rhetoric in a Secondary School Context

Abstract

In this study we explored the evolution of a secondary school's understanding of the term "college readiness" and the influences and practices used to embed college readiness into organizational rhetoric. A case study was conducted of one secondary high school that included administrators and teachers who work within the context of college readiness. Through the lens of institutional theory this study illuminated how an organization's understanding and interpretation guide the activities within the organization coupled with the internal and external expectation to conform to the norms placed on them by the policy environment and the need to maintain legitimacy in light of increasing scrutiny. Findings demonstrate how institutional expectations guide the behavior and actions of this secondary school and how organizational rhetoric is used to construct the appearance of what it means to be college ready in an effort to conform to the expectation and norms of the institutional environment. These findings have implications for how secondary schools as organizations do what they do in an effort to demonstrate conformity to educational initiatives and reforms without consideration of the organizations understanding, interest, or contribution to organizational efficiency.

Key Words

Secondary education, college readiness, institutional theory, rhetoric, qualitative

In the United States, there is increasing scrutiny and pressure on secondary schools to produce students who are college ready. This is a contested concept that is often interpreted as "the degree to which high schools are successful in preparing their students to learn beyond high school" (McCormick & Johnson, 2013, p.278). Rhetorically, this is an important statement in that it places the responsibility on the secondary educational organization to create and sustain practices that cultivate students for success at the college level, measured by enrollment, retention, and graduation rates. However there are significant differences in whom employs the concept of "college readiness" and for what purposes: these differences often create problems for schools attempting to formulate strategies to address it (2013). Therefore, educational organizations, while addressing major initiatives in education, like college readiness, must also operate within a highly heterogeneous environment that requires negotiating competing values and needs.

Social norms and expectations create pressures for schools to conform to or respond to policies and initiatives in a manner that is acceptable to these constituents (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1987). Members within an organization often use rhetoric as a way to construct perceptions of conformity to policy and reforms to demonstrate expertise in carrying out those policies and reforms, and to provide meaning and legitimacy to the practices and beliefs maintained by a school organization (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). Therefore, a school can claim that it has processes and practices in place that will ensure that every student is college ready however, these changes may not necessarily be effective or may be decoupled entirely from outcomes (Rowan & Miskel, 1999; Scott, 1991). What is most important is that the

organization is perceived to be doing something about the issue in order to maintain legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). To this end, organizations often use rhetoric as a means to demonstrate conformity to policy change.

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the evolution of a secondary school's understanding of the term "college readiness" and to describe the influences and practices used to embed college readiness into organizational rhetoric. We employ institutional theory, particularly rhetorical institutionalism to uncover how the institutional environment can influence the development of formal structures within an educational organization in light of college readiness. The research took place in a growing suburban community high school located in central New Jersey. Findings demonstrate how language is used to construct the appearance of a college ready culture through the development of policies, practices, rules, and programs. The definition of what it means to be college ready varied from participant to participant, yet all spoke of the organizational practices in place to ensure that students will be college ready by the time they graduate from high school devoid of whether or not such practices accomplish what they are set up to do. In conclusion, we explore the implications of a dissonant college ready culture for educational policy, research, and practice in light of a culture of educational accountability.

College Readiness

An increasing number of high school graduates are aspiring to continue their education in some form of postsecondary education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007) yet large percentages of these students are being judged not college ready (Greene & Forster, 2003; Kirst, 2003). Many students do not have the college

readiness skills needed to attain academic success (Aldeman, 2006; Greene & Forster, 2003; Haycock, 2010) and as a result need to enroll in remedial coursework. With the number of students going on to college 30% of students attending 4-year institutions and 60% percent of students attending community colleges take one or more remedial courses (Aldeman, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). With the number of students taking remediation courses on the college level and entering underprepared for credit bearing courses, investigating college readiness has become a national issue for practitioners, researchers, and policy makers (Tierney & Sabian, 2014). While there is agreement about the importance of college readiness there is less agreement about what constitutes college readiness.

When schools implement policies and practices in an effort to ensure that students will be college ready by the time that they graduate, schools operate in institutionalized environments that are characterized by ill-defined technologies, ambiguous goals, and outputs that are difficult to measure (Rowan & Miskel, 1999). Teacher pedagogy at times consist of vaguely specified platitudes and teaching is often not judged according to agreed upon measures of performance or sanctions for deviance (Davies & Quirke, 2007). Schools are instead subject to strong pressures for legitimacy that occurs as a result of meeting the expectations placed upon them (Rowan & Miskel, 1999). Schools use persuasive and convincing language to convince internal and external constituents that they are in fact preparing all students to be college ready. The use of rhetoric helps to establish legitimacy for school organizations because its members actively construct perceptions of accountability, expertise, and reputation (Alvesson, 1993). To members of

a school organization the practices, processes, and structures in place are synonymous with students being college ready.

Student Academic Readiness

Are high schools preparing students to be college ready? High schools use varying ways to demonstrate that they are, particularly through the use of rhetoric as a way of convincing parents and postsecondary schools that students are college ready. Examples include school profiles that list the percentage of students going on to college, average SAT scores, Advanced Placement test results, and curricular offerings that list challenging core courses: despite these attempts, research continues to show that a major barrier to a postsecondary degree is the lack of academic preparedness for college level work (Aldeman, 2006; Greene & Forster, 2003; Haycock, 2010; Reid & Moore, 2008; Romer, Hyman, & Coles, 2009). The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and Southern Regional Education Board (2010) noted that nearly 60% of all first-year college students are not college ready. With the attempt to place practices, processes, and structures in place that enable secondary schools to say that students are college ready it is also important that educators understand what academic preparedness means so that all students will be college ready by the time they graduate from high school. If secondary schools believe that they are preparing all students to be college ready yet the statistics claim that this is not the case, then how does rhetoric play a role in a secondary school's understanding of the term college readiness and what practices are used to embed college readiness into organizational rhetoric?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that supports this study is derived from institutional theory. This theory helped us to look at how the institutional environment can strongly influence the development of formal structures within a secondary school organization. Rhetorical institutionalism was used in an effort to address the institutional actions within this secondary school organization and how such actions are aligned with rhetoric in institutional processes.

Institutional Theory

Institutional theory posits that organizational environments are characterized by rules and requirements to which individual organizations must conform if they are to receive any type of support and legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Scott, 1983). Educational organizations establish policies, procedures, and routines that embody the school's knowledge and beliefs about student learning and behavior (Hanson, 2001). Values and beliefs external to the organization play a significant role in determining organizational norms (Di Maggio & Powell, 1983). Organizations conform to rules and requirements to increase their legitimacy, resources, and survival capabilities (DiMaggio & Powell 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Institutional theory offers understandings into organizational environment relations and the way organizations react to institutional processes (Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). This perspective illustrates how non-choice behaviors can occur as a result of habit, convenience, or social obligation without consideration of the organizations interest or contribution to organizational efficiency. The external environment can add to the social validity and survival of an organization and how values, meanings, and myths

rather than efficiency and autonomy can determine and drive organizational behavior when considering external pressures. Meyers and Rowan (1977) asserted that organizations incorporate the practices and procedures that are defined by prevailing concepts of organizational work and institutionalized in society which reflect the myths of their institutional environments instead of the demands of an organizations work activities.

Rhetorical Institutionalism

When addressing organizational change an important consideration is the use of rhetoric in institutions and institutional processes (Green & Li, 2011). Rhetoric is the use of language to persuade audiences to make judgments and engage in social action (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). Through rhetoric, actors shape, justify, rationalize, and seek to modify perceptions of what is sensible, right, and good (Greene, 2004). Alvesson (1993) noted that stakeholders use rhetoric to build an appearance of knowledge or institutional myths as a way of demonstrating meaning and legitimacy to the practices and beliefs of an organization. This emphasis on rhetoric within institutional theory brings attention to the symbolic rather than material, subjective meaning instead of objective, and to institutional processes instead of institutional outcomes.

It is through the use of rhetoric that members of a school organization rationalize and justify what they do (Greene, 2004). They use rhetoric to build an appearance of knowledge when in fact that knowledge can be ambiguous and based on subjective and personal meanings (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). Rhetoric lends itself to processes instead of outcomes providing opportunities to use language that is persuasive and convincing (Alvesson, 1993). How does rhetoric within this secondary school

organization substantiate the claim that all students will be college ready by the time they graduate from high school?

Context of the Case Study

The research study took place in a suburban secondary school in central New Jersey. It is a growing community made up of families of all ages including several adult communities. The secondary school at the heart of this study is also rapidly growing with approximately 2000 students and 200 staff members. The school has received accreditation by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools and the New Jersey Department of Education.

Most school districts throughout the country are challenged to increase student opportunities to pursue a college degree, yet 30% to 60% of the students who get into college require remedial courses once they get there (Aldeman, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Approximately 92% of the students continue their education with 60% going on to four-year colleges and universities. What does this mean and how does this discourse influence the processes, practices, and beliefs within this secondary school?

Methods

We used a single case study method of inquiry to explore the term college readiness and how college readiness becomes institutionalized within a secondary school environment. Yin (2009) describes a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). Merriam (1998) states that qualitative case studies "can be characterized as being particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic" (p. 29). Case studies are particularistic because they focus on a

particular situation, event, or phenomenon. In this case study the focus was on organizational rhetoric within a secondary school. The case study is descriptive when it offers details and thick description (Yin, 2009) of the phenomenon under study such as what was expressed by the participants of this study who shared their perspectives on how a secondary school as an organization defines and embeds the term college readiness. Case studies are heuristic in that they contribute to new meanings of a situation or confirm what is already known. The intent of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of organizational behavior and the actions and the meaning given to such behaviors and actions as they pertain to college readiness.

Data collection was guided by the following research questions: 1. How does a school as an organization define and institutionalize college readiness? 2. How is a school organization responsible to the demands of the institutional environment? 3. How does an organization respond to organizational change and the initiation of institutional change? Below we describe the methods by which we explored these questions.

Participants

The participants in this study include administrators and teachers from the Ryanville High School, a pseudonym to protect the confidentiality of our participants. The participants represent various role and responsibilities typical of a secondary school high school. The seven study participants, three female and four male, included the high school principal, one assistant principal, a district administrator, a high school coordinator, and three teachers. As part of the school organization and the culture that exists within the organization, they interact with the processes and practices that currently exist.

In an effort to obtain information rich cases, purposeful sampling was used to illuminate the questions in the research study. Critical case sampling was used that focused on a single site that will yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge. While studying one case does not permit broad generalization to all possible cases, logical generalizations can often be made from the weight of evidence produced in studying a single case (Patton, 1990).

Qualitative inquiry focuses in depth on small samples that are selected purposefully (Patton, 1990). We used critical case sampling because the setting and the participants were deliberately selected for the important information that they can provide. Using institutional theory as the theoretical framework, the participants selected were beneficial in answering the research questions of this qualitative case study. Critical case sampling helped to understand the central importance to the purpose of this case study inquiry. Our interest in the organizational environment, institutional theory, and college readiness lend itself to working with participants who are part of a school organization and are exposed to policies, practices, and processes that can facilitate college readiness.

Data Collection

Data collection included interviews, focus groups, and material culture. The interview transcripts served as the primary data set for this qualitative study. Interviews with the participants were semi-structured consisting of open-ended questions and included an interview protocol using a flexible emergent technique of follow up and probing questions when deemed necessary and appropriate (Seidman, 2006). Follow up

questions were used to provide additional information, ask for clarification, and enhance the story telling for the participants.

Through the interview process we were able to hear first hand how each participant defined the term college readiness. Discussion included adoption and implementation of college readiness, the educational environment, culture and norms, organizational change, and institutional change. The primary use of the focus group was to encourage discussion as well as the expression of different ideas and viewpoints (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Material culture such as the school profile, program of studies, core content curriculum, district and high school policies, student and staff handbook, and documentation regarding current reforms and initiatives from high school administration was used to provide detail and corroboration as compared to other data collected (Yin, 2009). Triangulation of the data validated the actions that are embedded within this organization and the practices of individuals aimed at creating and maintaining institutions. The use of multiple sources of data helped to increase the dependability of the data and the process of how it was gathered (Creswell & Plano Clark 2010; Stake, 1995).

Data Analysis

Data analysis combined the elements of summaries, field notes, and analytic memos that were referenced throughout this research study. These procedures helped to organize the data as it was collected. A matrix of categories was created (Yin, 2009) placing the evidence within such categories. Data displays were created that included flow charts and other graphics for examining the data. The analysis of this case study

relied on theoretical propositions stemming from the research questions that looked at the how and why of the topic being studied.

In vivo coding was used as a first cycle coding method of data analysis in the natural works and phrases of the participants demonstrating common organizational rhetoric in relation to the phenomenon of interest (Saldana, 2009). Hypothesis coding was then used that included a pre-determined list of codes that worked from the theory used as part of the conceptual framework of this research study. Codes were then analyzed to find the similarities and grouped into categories and themes based on their common properties (Saldana, 2009). The categories and themes helped to find, pull out, and cluster the segments relating to the research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Through the lens of institutional theory, significant findings, which will be displayed in the form of themes in the narrative below, emerged from the data analysis demonstrating how organizational rhetoric is used to produce convincing accounts, regulating impressions, and portraying images about college readiness (Alvesson, 1993).

Findings

The institutional environment guides the behavior and actions of this secondary school organization to incorporate policies and procedures into their structure that enable them to embed the term college readiness in an effort to demonstrate legitimacy, conformity, and social validation to societal constituents. Meanings are put into place, through the use of organizational rhetoric that convey academic excellence, rigor, improved student achievement, and post-secondary preparedness. This secondary school organization is able to say that the school has embedded a college ready culture and that students are college ready because of college readiness programs such as AVID, the

addition of advanced placement courses, a career academy structure for all students, mandated PSAT testing, increased college admissions testing, and an increased number of students going on to postsecondary education, yet the importance of such programs structures, and practices varied from participant to participant. Is a student college ready because they take a college admissions test, participate in a college readiness program, partake in a career academy, or take rigorous course work? Participant narratives were demonstrative of rhetoric related to such practices in an effort to say that all students are college ready. Data will be used to illustrate how this secondary school responds to the institutional environment, embeds college readiness within its organization, and lastly how it defines the term college readiness.

Organizational Responsiveness

This secondary school is cognizant of the expectations placed upon them by the institutional environment to create a college ready culture in an effort to ensure that all students will be college ready by the time they graduate from high school. Programs, practices and structures have been put into place that are indicative of what a college ready culture should look like. For example the school website showcases the academy structure within this secondary school that provides exposure to postsecondary options. Programs such as AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) and Project Lead the Way are in place to increase the opportunity for all students to be college ready by providing access to rigorous course work aligned with college level work. The Assistant Principal referenced rigorous course work and the programs within this secondary school organization:

> There are some specific programs that assist students along the way such as the AVID program that helps prepare them for college. Offering a lot of AP courses and honor courses has also helped to prepare students to become college ready.

The building principal had this to say about rigor and programs:

> There is a lot of college readiness embedded in what we do; target programs such as AVID, programs within the academies, and Project Lead the Way. We have done a lot of work from a curriculum standpoint that helps our students to acquire a college ready skill set for success in the 21st century.

One of the teachers in this study commented on a number of programs offered within this secondary school that helps prepare students to be college ready:

> I think we do a good job of preparing kids. We have the AVID program, academies, college fairs, and outreach programs for parents and students to help prepare them for postsecondary options.

Organizational responsiveness for this secondary school organization includes revamping course curriculum so that all students have access to rigorous course work, the addition of advanced placement courses, the implementation of a college readiness program, and the creation of an academy structure that provides student exposure to post secondary options.

The building principal believes that this secondary school organization operates with the same core values, mission, and vision to create a college ready culture. "There is an established routine, established behavior, and an established environment." This is demonstrated through the routine of class schedules, course requirements, additional opportunities to select advanced level courses, and the implementation of programs and events that are provided to enhance academic success and create understanding and awareness. Polices and practices that are in place guide the behavior and actions of the

members of this organization, however behavior and actions can vary depending on the individual as noted by the high school coordinator:

> Teachers know that they have to participate on some level and depending on the activity or requirement that could be to a greater or lesser level. There are some things where you are pretty much left to yourself and some people know that they can sort of vanish or get into the woodwork. It's a matter of how many things can you do, how many balls can you juggle at one time and be efficient.

A teacher expanded on this thought by adding:

> In a school organization everybody has their specific role that they are suppose to be filling. I think it is important that we are all on the same page, but sometimes it is hard getting on the same page so people just do what they can to get by.

The assistant principal focused on the environment and how staff responds to the environment:

> I believe in this environment of so much going on people look at mandates and initiatives as just something else piled on them and that they are going to go through the motions to say that they are meeting their obligation.

Rhetoric is used to show that this organization is responding to mandates and initiatives however the mandates and initiatives are dependent on the behavior and action of its members. The focus is on the process and implementation. When a school organization does this they allow their members a degree of professional discretion and it is this discretion that allows schools to maintain a façade of legitimacy to their constituents while protecting their core operations from external inspection (Meyer, Scott, & Deal, 1981).

Unified Purpose. Many references in the data pointed to staff addressing the expectations placed upon them by the institutional environment and the need to meet those expectations. A unified purpose was a common theme presented throughout the data. This secondary school organization has worked collaboratively to create a college ready culture that includes all staff and students. Participants in this study agreed that this secondary school organization has programs and practices in place that promote a college ready culture. For example a teacher noted the mandated PSAT testing for all grade 10 and grade 11 students:

> As a school district they made it mandatory that all students take the PSAT. The staff discusses it, students and parents are made aware of testing, and staff administers it.

Participants cited the organizational practices and procedures that they are required to follow, the behavior and actions of its members to adhere to practices and procedures, and the established norms. A teacher in this study stated the following:

> I think over time things just become a habit and people kind of get into this is the way it is.

Another teacher referenced the curriculum changes and noted how staff is responsible for those changes:

> Curriculum has been updated to reflect skill sets that students need in order to be college ready. Our staff introduces those skill sets in all content areas to prepare students for college.

The intent and purpose of this organization to create a college ready culture has become part of the norms and culture of this secondary school organization. It is the norms and culture of the building that reflect features and characteristics embedded in the practices and processes that take place. In an effort to maximize success and minimize failure an

organization will enforce norms that facilitate it's survival (Cooke & Rousseau, 1988). For example the assistant principal spoke about the importance of having norms and unwritten rules in place in order to do the things that a school organization needs to do in an effort to stay in line with the expectations placed upon them by the institutional environment. "You have to have a basic sensible structure in place of discipline, of attendance, of everybody respecting everybody else, and accountability. All of the basic good pieces when they are in place provide the foundation for everything else to happen." Conformity to the norms and social expectations of the institutional environment improves an organizations survival chances significantly (Zucker, 1987). If the goal is to conform and maintain legitimacy in the eyes of all stakeholders, the norms of the organization will be adhered to which can influence the behavior and action of the members within the organization. Organizational action becomes a reflection of the perspectives that are defined by the members of the institutional environment (Scott & Meyer, 1991; Scott, 1995).

Non-choice Behavior. Non-choice behavior was a common sub-theme evolving around change and how an organization responds to organizational change and the initiation of institutional change. There have been many changes within this organization as a result of creating a college ready culture that includes raising academic achievement for all students so that they will be college ready by the time that they graduate from high school. However that change can be a welcomed change that is embraced or a change that occurs because it is mandated. All of the participants noted that there are some people within this organization that are resistant to change. The principal noted this resistance stating:

> You get incredible resistance in our culture and our organization. I try to move the school along by evolving the school not changing the school.

Evolving includes time for discussion, professional development when necessary, and making the time to meet with the staff when needed. All of this helps to create structures and practices that can become embedded into an organization, but what do you do with those structures and practices once they are in place? Do they do what they are intended to do and if there is resistance how engaged are the staff? The assistant principal stated the following:

> The staff do not put the effort in that perhaps they could because they don't' see any sense in it. Organizational change is coming primarily from central office. Find a way to get your people to do them and do the best you can with them.

A teacher had this to say about change:

> People are trying and I don't know if they are succeeding that well. We have a certain impulsiveness to make a change in order to be able to say that we have changed.

Mandates and policies of the institutional environment strongly influence the development of the structures, programs, and practices that exist within this organization. This secondary responds to institutional rules in an effort to create a college ready culture that provides opportunities for students to become college ready. They have adapted to the institutional environment by incorporating the expectations into the practices that occur within this secondary school organization. Some of these practices occur as a result of compliance versus choice. A high school teacher described teacher practices and why they occur:

> I think people are really motivated by how administration views them and wanting to do what is needed to keep their job. I think for the most part people are doing it because they're being told that they have to do it.

The high school coordinator noted, "If it's somebody with position power you may not really have a lot to say." Non-choice behaviors can occur as a result of habit, convenience, or social obligation without consideration of the organizations interest or contributions to organizational efficiency (Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). The mandates and initiatives centered on college readiness have contributed to the creation of structures, programs, and practices, however the effectiveness and efficiency of such structures, programs, and practices is not the focus. The focus is on implementation and facilitation and all of the participants agreed that much has been implemented and facilitated in an effort to create a college ready culture. The practices and structures within this organization conform to institutional norms to retain legitimacy. Institutional pressures that come from organizational choice is limited by a variety of external pressures (Scott, 1995) and need to respond to external demands and expectations in order to survive.

Embedding College Readiness

Each participant had their own definition of what it means to be college ready and each described this term by referencing the structures, programs, and practices in place that lend themselves to a college ready culture. This uniformity with which participants were able to identify these arrangements within the educational organization context demonstrates the embeddedness of college readiness. Indeed it is through such structures, programs, and practices that the term "college ready" has become defined. Our data show common words and phrases immersed in the school's documents sent out to parents, students, and staff. For example words such as rigor, challenging curriculum, preparation for post secondary options, higher education requirements, and academic excellence are used to communicate a college ready culture. The district superintendent and high school

principal's message found on the school website and in the program of studies includes discourse that references a college ready culture. Their messages states the sense of urgency regarding improving rigor and student achievement, access to a challenging competitive curriculum, preparation for postsecondary options, and preparing all students to be college and career ready so that they can succeed in a global society.

The academy structure that exists within this secondary school has helped to embed and define the term college readiness. The Program of Studies document found on the school's website references the academies and the claim to model 21st century schools that prepare all student to be college and career ready by incorporating personalized learning experiences, rigorous academic courses, and career focused elective opportunities for all students. Students within this secondary school select one academy from the three that currently exists. The STEM academy houses students interested in science, technology, engineering, and math; the BLG academy consists of students interested in business, law, and government; and the FPP academy houses students interested in fine, practical, or performing arts. The program of studies document lists and describes the academies and includes the following:

> Students can select their rigorous required course and elective to create a "mini major" or concentration of courses that will be helpful as they pursue post-secondary opportunities such as college or technical training.

Participant discussion centered on the academies and college readiness throughout this study. The principal commented on the academies stating the following:

> Teachers in all core content areas that include language arts, math, science, world language, and social studies are placed in academies sharing similar students and common planning time that provides opportunities to discuss student progress and focus on curricular content.

> There is a greater focus on student needs and academic support that will enhance student achievement.

A teacher described the academies as "very helpful in terms of the structures identifying kids in smaller groups including what their needs are and what support they might need. We are preparing them to be college ready because of the academy structure that is in place." The district supervisor discusses student needs, options, and the academies:

> Students are placed into academies, which gives them a mindset in terms of a thought of what they want. They have a chance to explore options that best suits their need and interest.

Another teacher in this study however stated "we give lip service to the academies that we're trying to present to the world. What we're doing right now is presenting a beautiful picture on the outside but if you search a little bit underneath you see that we have failed. There is no such thing as an academy." While this teacher believes that the academy concept is a good idea and noted that the school is making an effort to facilitate such a structure, more time and effort to assess and re-define the academy structure is needed so that it does what it is intended to do; improve student academic achievement. This school is able to say that there are career academies because they are in place. The study participants referenced the academies as a means to providing a college ready culture, however they did not all agree on its effectiveness. A school can claim that they have processes and practices in place that will ensure that every student is college ready yet the processes and practices that are in place may not necessarily be effective (Rowan & Miskel, 1999; Scott, 1991). Rhetoric lends itself to processes instead of outcomes providing opportunities to use language that is persuasive and convincing (Alvesson, 1993). With the academy structure in place as one way of embedding college readiness

into this secondary school organization the participants all agreed that assessment of the academies should be facilitated to measure how practices and processes help to facilitate college readiness for all students.

This secondary school has responded and adapted to the institutional environment by incorporating the expectations into the practices that occur within this organization. Structures have been put into place that validates the behavior and actions that the members within this secondary school organization claim to uphold. Organizational rhetoric is used to construct the appearance of what it means to be college ready and it is through such discourse, behavior, and action that term "college readiness" has become defined.

Discussion

The findings suggest that this secondary school is not bounded by a common definition of what it means to be college ready, however participants spoke at length in regard to their perception of college readiness, what it looks like, and what it means to be college ready. For some the emphasis was placed on acquiring the necessary skills and teacher pedagogy while for others the focus was on high school curricular offerings and getting into a good college. Participant perspective was also influenced by their role and responsibilities within this secondary school organization. Administration referenced the programs and practices in place to create a college ready culture while the teachers discussed the behavior and actions needed to make this happen.

The members within this organization respond to the expectations placed upon them by adhering to the institutional environment and creating the policies, programs, and practices that they are expected to have in place. They reference all that they do

through a variety of venues that include school documents, the school website, and scheduled programs and events. Words, discourse, structures, and cultural artifacts reinforce the claims of a particular competency, influence meaning, and shape action (Alvesson, 1993). Members of this secondary school believe that they are creating a college ready culture because of the practices and processes that are in place. While such practices and processes exist, the degree to which they are carried out and the success of expected outcomes do not appear to be the focus. The focus is on the fact that they exist and that this organization is responding to the expectations placed upon them.

In order to produce myths which are the beliefs that people adopt in an effort to show legitimacy and conformity to the norms set up as a result of the structures embedded within an organization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), members of an organization engage in rhetoric as a way of producing convincing accounts, regulating impressions, and images (Green & Li, 2011). This secondary school relies on the structures and practices embedded within the environment in an effort to proclaim a college ready culture. Members within this organization respond to what is expected because they are required to do so. The effectiveness of the behavior and actions of its members is reliant on the values and beliefs that they hold and how they operate under such values and beliefs.

Implications

This section will relate the findings to possible directions for future studies in the area of policy, practice, and research**.**

Policy

Policymakers need to pay attention to institutional context and how relationships within an organization can foster support networks that allow for continued improvement. How effective are the mandates placed upon school districts and how do we ensure that such mandates that often become policy and practice do what they are intended to do? Scheduled time within a school day to address the actions and practices that take place within a school organization need to occur in an effort to ensure growth, practice effectiveness, and promote a climate that is engaged and committed to student success. Continued efforts to bring societal constituents together to not only address policy but to construct a plan to assess policy initiatives and mandates are a consideration that needs to take place. It is also important to understand how rhetoric can either reinforce dominant institutional structures and practices, or create new definitions and understandings leading to institutional change (Green & Li, 2011). Understanding the role of rhetoric and how it informs behavior and action within an organization can assist in creating the new definitions and understandings that will lead to institutional change.

Practice

Structural support practices that focus on academics such as career academies, accelerated instructional programs, advanced placement courses, and mandated PSAT testing to provide awareness and understanding of academic skills needed for college are designed to increase college readiness for all students. Practices need to include monitoring and assessment of such practices to ensure both efficiency and effectiveness. Teachers need to be receptive to continuous assessment through reflective practice of pedagogy and student learning. Administrators need to continue to assess staff progress

in an effort to ensure that students are college ready by the time they graduate from high school. The behaviors and actions within a secondary school need to be aligned with the intentions set forth as a result of the processes and practices that are in place.

In addition to a common understanding of the term college readiness, stakeholders need to work in unison through on going collaboration, conversation, and support. Understanding the needs and expectations through professional discourse will afford an organization the ability to respond to the expectations placed upon them that are effective and meet the desired outcomes that all educators hope to achieve. We need to ensure that we are doing what we say we are doing.

Research

Further research on the relationships between societal constituents and members of a secondary school organization need to be addressed to understand how that relationship supports the educational process within a secondary school and how the behavior and actions of its members inform educational practice. What educational practices are successful and what mechanisms are in place to determine such success? Constituent groups from secondary schools and postsecondary schools need to collectively determine what college readiness means, what actually makes a student college ready, and how this determination should occur. This will help to provide broader thresholds better aligned with actual success rates.

Given the importance of organizational learning and those seeking to lead change within an organization, the understanding is that educational leaders will benefit from using an organizational lens in assessing how to plan and implement the routine improvements to policies, practices, and procedures that are the daily realities of a

secondary school (Friedman, LIpshitz, & Overmeer, 2001). However in an effort to understand institutional theory and how the environment controls processes and procedures within the school, it is recommended that further research take place to appropriately understand how institutional meaning systems are understood and interpreted within organizations. Researchers will need to conduct research at the organizational level of analysis and view organizations as interpretive mechanisms. Since institutional features of the environment are important determinants of the structure and functioning of organizations (Scott, 1987), institutional theorists need to continue to direct attention to the importance of symbolic aspects of organizations and their environments.

Conclusion

The behaviors and actions of this secondary school organization noted by the study participants respond to the policies and initiatives that schools are required to perform. The intent and purpose of this school organization is to ensure that all practices and processes are in place. They respond to mandates by placing structures in place that will create a college ready culture. Institutional scripts that include the program of studies, school profile, mission and vision statement, and core values and beliefs are referenced and made available to all stakeholders in an effort to provide information and increase stakeholders knowledge of the school's policies, practices, and processes. The organizational rhetoric used within this organization lends itself to processes providing opportunities to use language that is persuasive and convincing. Responsiveness to the mandates placed upon them is reflected in the institutional scripts and in the behavior and actions that take place within this secondary school organization.

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Chapter 6

Manuscript Two

College Readiness and Accountability within a Secondary School Organization

Abstract

Purpose: With the many reforms and initiatives regarding college readiness understanding how organizations use rhetoric to determine and define what college readiness is and what it looks like can either reinforce dominant institutional structures and practices, or create new definitions and understanding leading to institutional change. Social norms and institutional expectations create pressures for schools to conform or to respond to policies and initiatives set forth by the many stakeholders of educational institutions. This manuscript describes the evolution of a secondary school's understanding of the term "college readiness" and the influences and practices used to embed college readiness into organizational rhetoric. Through the lens of institutional theory this study illuminates how an organizations understanding and interpretation guide the activities within the organization coupled with the internal and external expectation to conform to the norms placed on them by their environment. **Methods:** This study used interviews, focus groups, and material culture to explore how an organizations understanding and interpretation guide the activities within the organization coupled with the internal and external expectation to conform to the norms placed on them by their environment. **Data Analysis**: Data analysis included In Vivo coding to ground the analysis from the participant's perspective and hypothesis coding that included a pre-determined list of codes that worked from the theory used as part of the conceptual framework of this research study. Coding helped to identify themes and triangulate across

data sources. **Findings**: Findings illuminated how a secondary school organization incorporated policies and procedures into their structure that lend itself to legitimacy, conformity, and social validation. **Implications:** The behaviors and actions within a secondary school need to be aligned with the intentions set forth as a result of the processes and practices that are in place. Stakeholders need to work in unison through on going collaboration, conversation, and support. Understanding the needs and expectations through professional discourse will afford an organization the ability to respond to the expectations placed upon them that are effective and meet the desired outcomes of all of the stakeholders.

Key Words

Mandates, college readiness, institutional theory, accountability

College readiness refers to a student's capacity to enroll at a post secondary institution, take credit bearing entry level course work, earn passing grades in courses, and continue to pursue educational goals (Barnes & Slate, 2010). Educators, policymakers, employers, and the public have become increasingly aware that a high school diploma does not signify that a student is college ready. Meeting eligibility requirements and being accepted into a college or university does not mean that a student will find success at the college level. The gap that exists between college level expectations and entering student's skills results in remedial education coursework therefore aligning student's high school transition to post secondary education is a major concern among all stakeholders (Center on Education Policy, 2011). Are high schools preparing students to be college ready? High schools seem to think that they are and use rhetoric as a way of convincing internal and external stakeholders that students are college ready.

The practices and policies adopted by schools and governing agencies reflect the rules and structures in wider society (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer & Scott, 1983). The purposeful and strategic use of rhetoric in adopting practices and policies tends to be the primary means through which organizational change is accomplished (Alvesson, 1993) providing meaning and interpretation that guide the behavior and actions within this secondary school organization. Critical texts that include state and federal government findings, recommendations, and mandated policies contribute to the creation of knowledge that normalizes a certain way of believing, speaking, and behaving with respect to the issues of concern (Rusch, 2005). These texts use rhetoric, such as adopted school policies, practices and procedures that outline programs and curricular offerings,

to persuade constituents that they are necessary, truthful, plausible, and authoritative (Brown, Ainsworth & Grant, 2012). The dynamics that exist between policymakers and the agencies that mandates such policies centers on the language that is used and deployed in an effort to be able to say that initiatives and mandates are in place to ensure that all students will be college ready. Through the context of multiple logics such as this secondary school's vision and mission statement that is the framework for the action and practices that take place, rhetoric is used to provide meaning and interpretation (Alvesson, 1993) to such action and practices. This meaning and interpretation invokes behaviors and actions that can inhibit or enhance organizational performance within this secondary school organization.

In education, goals tend to be ambiguous subject to one's own interpretation (Hanson, 2001). Organizations adopt externally defined goals and processes in an effort to establish legitimization, which is validated and accepted (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) in the eyes of society in order to attain legitimacy. Through legitimization schools protect themselves against attacks on its activities and procedures by decoupling their technical core from their institutional environment. Schools can claim that they are doing what the educational agencies such as state and federal departments of education require (Hanson, 2001) and, subsequently, educational organizations are rewarded for their conformity to correct structures, programs, and processes rather than the quality of their program (Rowan & Miskel, 1999; Scott, 1991). A school can claim that they have processes and practices in place that will ensure that every student is college ready yet the processes and practices that are in place may not necessarily be effective (Rowan & Miskel, 1999; Scott, 1991). When there is dependence between organizations and their institutional

environment organizational forms and policy practices are produced that are often loosely coupled with policy makers intentions (Spillane & Burch, 2006). The core tasks of institutional organizations are not performed as well and basic organizational objectives are often deflected (Zucker, 1987).

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the evolution of a secondary school's understanding of the term "college readiness" and to describe the influences and practices used to embed college readiness into organizational rhetoric. The theoretical framework that supports this study is derived from institutional theory to discover how the institutional environment can strongly influence the development of formal structures within an organization. Legitimacy was explored to discover its role in the adoption of new structures. External and internal forces were addressed to understand the role they play in the institutions adoption of new structures. This theory was used to understand how a school as an organization defines and embeds college readiness.

College Readiness

An increasing number of high school graduates are aspiring to continue their education in some form of postsecondary education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007) yet large percentages of these students are being judged not college ready (Greene & Forster, 2003; Kirst, 2003). Many students do not have the college readiness skills needed to attain academic success (Aldeman, 2006; Greene & Forster, 2003; Haycock, 2010) and as a result need to enroll in remedial coursework. With the number of students going on to college 30% of students attending 4-year institutions and 60% percent of students attending community colleges take one or more remedial courses (Aldeman, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). With the number of students

taking remediation courses on the college level and entering underprepared for credit bearing courses, investigating college readiness has become a national issue for practitioners, researchers, and policy makers (Tierney & Sabian, 2014). While there is agreement about the importance of college readiness there is less agreement about what constitutes college readiness.

When schools implement policies and practices in an effort to ensure that students will be college ready by the time that they graduate, schools operate in institutionalized environments that are characterized by ill-defined technologies, ambiguous goals, and outputs that are difficult to measure (Rowan & Miskel, 1999). Teacher pedagogy at times consist of vaguely specified platitudes and teaching is often not judged according to agreed upon measures of performance or sanctions for deviance (Davies & Quirke, 2007). Schools are instead subject to strong pressures for legitimacy that occurs as a result of meeting the expectations placed upon them (Rowan & Miskel, 1999). Schools use persuasive and convincing language to convince internal and external constituents that they are in fact preparing all students to be college ready. The use of rhetoric helps to establish legitimacy for school organizations because its members actively construct perceptions of accountability, expertise, and reputation (Alvesson, 1993). To members of a school organization the practices, processes, and structures in place are synonymous with students being college ready and found in institutional scripts that guide the behavior and actions of its members. The institutional scripts used within this secondary school organization are made available to all stakeholders in an effort to provide information and increase stakeholder's knowledge of the school's policies, practices, and processes related to college readiness.

Policy Rhetoric in Education

Policy discourse on improving student achievement is linked to the quality and effectiveness of the student's teacher (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). School districts across the country face challenges that include high school graduation rates, student retention, and student college and career readiness. During the last several years, states have worked with their local school districts to initiate educational reforms that support increased student learning and academic achievement (Pickeral, Evans, Hughes, & Hutchinson, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The federal government has worked to support state and local educational reform efforts that include college and career ready standards and accountability to ensure that such standards are in place. The goal is to move schools in the direction of greater cognitive challenges for students and a clearer focus on key content so that students will be college ready (Aldeman, 2006; Center on Education Policy, 2011). Educational reform efforts that help students take greater responsibility for their learning, increase rigor in core subject areas, and help students to think critically are intended to align expectations across high schools and colleges.

Policy and business leaders realize the importance that educators can make to student achievement (Anderson, 2011; Berry, Daughtrey, & Wieder, 2009). They have heard from constituents, observed trends in education, and looked at data involving student academic achievement. As a result the government bodies of each state have issued new policies and policy proposals (Anderson, 2011; Fowler, 2009). In New Jersey a number of educational reforms are in place to challenge public school systems (New Jersey Department of Education, 2012). These reforms include accountability to all

stakeholders that provide feedback on measures taken to ensure that students are college and career ready. The secondary school organization in this study uses rhetoric as a way to construct perceptions of conformity to educational reforms, initiatives, and policies to demonstrate expertise in aligning such reforms, initiatives, and policies to college readiness.

Accountability in New Jersey

New Jersey is among the states that continue to make college and career readiness a priority for all students. The development of the Common Core State State Standards and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) (National Conference of State Legislators, 2012; New Jersey Department of Education, 2012) are educational reform initiatives intended to ensure that all students are prepared and eligible for entry into college and skilled careers. The dynamics that exist between policy makers and the state department of education that mandates such policies centers around the language that is used and deployed. The meaning and interpretation from such language contributes to the behaviors and actions of a school organization that can either inhibit or enhance organizational performance.

The New Jersey Department of Education is focusing on secondary education in the hope of raising the bar by challenging every student to achieve academically so that they are college and workplace ready (New Jersey Department of Education, 2012). School boards of education are requiring policies and practices aligned with student academic achievement to ensure college readiness. This secondary school organization has incorporated policies and practices into their structure to meet the expectations and demands that are placed upon them. They demonstrate how institutional expectations

guide their behavior and actions and how organizational rhetoric is used to create a college ready culture.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that supports this study is derived from institutional theory. Concepts of legitimacy, conformity, and rhetoric were addressed to explain the practices and processes of a school organization in the adoption and implementation of the term college readiness. Rhetorical institutionalism was used to explain how rhetoric is used to construct the appearance of knowledge and institutional myths in order to provide meaning and legitimacy to the practices and beliefs that are inherent in school organizations.

Rhetorical Institutionalism

When addressing institution actions an important consideration is the use of rhetoric in institutions and institutional processes (Green & Li, 2011). Rhetoric is the use of language to persuade audiences to make judgments and engage in social action (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). Through rhetoric, actors shape, justify, rationalize, and seek to modify perceptions of what is sensible, right, and good (Greene, 2004). Alvesson (1993) noted that stakeholders use rhetoric to build an appearance of knowledge or institutional myths as a way of demonstrating meaning and legitimacy to the practices and beliefs of an organization. This emphasis on rhetoric within institutional theory brings attention to the symbolic rather than material, subjective meaning instead of objective, and to institutional processes instead of institutional outcomes.

It is through the use of rhetoric that members of a school organization rationalize and justify what they do (Greene, 2004). They use rhetoric to build an appearance of

knowledge when in fact that knowledge can be ambiguous and based on subjective and personal meanings (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). Rhetoric lends itself to processes instead of outcomes providing opportunities to use language that is persuasive and convincing (Alvesson, 1993) to internal and external constituents in an effort to proclaim legitimacy, conformity, and accountability to the institutional environment.

Methods

We used a single case study method of inquiry to explore the term college readiness and how college readiness becomes institutionalized within a secondary school environment. Yin (2009) describes a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). Merriam (1998) states that qualitative case studies "can be characterized as being particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic" (p. 29). Case studies are particularistic because they focus on a particular situation, event, or phenomenon. In this case study the focus was on organizational rhetoric within a secondary school. The case study is descriptive when it offers details and thick description (Yin, 2009) of the phenomenon under study such as what was expressed by the participants of this study who shared their perspectives on how a secondary school as an organization defines and embeds the term college readiness. Case studies are heuristic in that they contribute to new meanings of a situation or confirm what is already known. The intent of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of organizational behavior and the actions and the meaning given to such behaviors and actions as they pertain to college readiness.

Data collection was guided by the following research questions: (a). How does a school as an organization define and institutionalize college readiness? (b). How is a school organization responsive to the demands of their institutional environment? (c). How do cultural rules from the environment shape or constrain organizational action? (d). How does conformity to institutional norms enhance or diminish organizational performance? Below we describe the methods by which we explored these questions.

Context

The research study took place in a suburban secondary school in central New Jersey. It is a growing community made up of families of all ages including several adult communities. The secondary school at the heart of this study is also rapidly growing with approximately 2000 students and 200 staff members. Approximately 92% of the students continue their education with 60% going on to four-year colleges and universities. This secondary school has received accreditation by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools and the New Jersey Department of Education. The intent of this study at this secondary school was to gain a deeper understanding of organizational behavior and the actions and the meaning given to such behaviors and actions as they pertain to college readiness.

Participants

The participants in this study include administrators and teachers from the Ryanville High School, a pseudonym to protect the confidentiality of our participants. The participants represent various role and responsibilities typical of a secondary school high school. The seven study participants, three female and four male, included the high school principal, one assistant principal, a district administrator, a high school

coordinator, and three teachers. As part of the school organization and the culture that exists within the organization, they interact with the processes and practices that currently exist.

In an effort to obtain information rich cases, purposeful sampling was used to illuminate the questions in the research study. Critical case sampling was used that focused on a single site that will yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge. While studying one case does not permit broad generalization to all possible cases, logical generalizations can often be made from the weight of evidence produced in studying a single case (Patton, 1990).

Qualitative inquiry focuses in depth on small samples that are selected purposefully (Patton, 1990). We used critical case sampling because the setting and the participants were deliberately selected for the important information that they can provide. Using institutional theory as the theoretical framework, the participants selected were beneficial in answering the research questions of this qualitative case study. Critical case sampling helped to understand the central importance to the purpose of this case study inquiry. Our interest in the organizational environment, institutional theory, and college readiness lend itself to working with participants who are part of a school organization and are exposed to policies, practices, and processes that can facilitate college readiness.

Data Collection

Data collection included interviews, focus groups, and material culture. The interview transcripts served as the primary data set for this qualitative study. Interviews with the participants were semi-structured consisting of open-ended questions and

included an interview protocol using a flexible emergent technique of follow up and probing questions when deemed necessary and appropriate (Seidman, 2006). Follow up questions were used to provide additional information, ask for clarification, and enhance the story telling for the participants.

Through the interview process we were able to hear first hand how each participant defined the term college readiness. Discussion included adoption and implementation of college readiness, the educational environment, culture and norms, organizational change, and institutional change. The primary use of the focus group was to encourage discussion as well as the expression of different ideas and viewpoints (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). We were able to collect a variety of points of views and perceptions stimulated by interactions that provided direct evidence about the similarities and differences in the participant's opinions and experiences (Krueger & Casey 2009; Morgan, 1997). Participants were able to hear each other's responses and make additional comments beyond their own initial responses as they heard what the other participants had to say (Patton, 1990).

Material culture such as the school profile, program of studies, core content curriculum, district and high school policies, student and staff handbook, and documentation regarding current reforms and initiatives from high school administration was used to provide detail and corroboration as compared to other data collected (Yin, 2009). Triangulation of the data validated the actions that are embedded within this organization and the practices of individuals aimed at creating and maintaining institutions. The use of multiple sources of data helped to increase the dependability of the data and the process of how it was gathered (Stake, 1995).

Data Analysis

Data analysis combined the elements of summaries, field notes, and analytic memos that were referenced throughout this research study. These procedures helped to organize the data as it was collected. A matrix of categories was created (Yin, 2009) placing the evidence within such categories. Data displays were created that included flow charts and other graphics for examining the data. The analysis of this case study relied on theoretical propositions stemming from the research questions that looked at the how and why of the topic being studied.

In Vivo coding was used as a first cycle coding method of data analysis in the natural works and phrases of the participants demonstrating common organizational rhetoric in relation to the phenomenon of interest (Saldana, 2009). Hypothesis coding was then used that included a pre-determined list of codes that worked from the theory used as part of the conceptual framework of this research study. Codes were then analyzed to find the similarities and grouped into categories and themes based on their common properties (Saldana, 2009). The categories and themes helped to find, pull out, and cluster the segments relating to the research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Through the lens of institutional theory, significant findings, which will be displayed in the form of themes in the narrative below, emerged from the data analysis demonstrating how organizational rhetoric is used to produce convincing accounts, regulating impressions, and portraying images about college readiness (Alvesson, 1993).

Findings

The findings presented below demonstrate how secondary school staff balance multiple accountability mandates within the context of their organization in an effort to

define and embed the term college readiness. With an emphasis on rhetoric, the school organization uses language to build legitimacy, connect actions to cultural norms, and provide meaning to the practices and beliefs of the organization. The secondary school organization in this study has incorporated policies and procedures into their structure that lend itself to legitimacy, conformity, and social validation. Meanings are in place through the use of organizational rhetoric that convey academic excellence, rigor, improved student achievement, and post-secondary preparedness in an effort to meet the expectations as well as the mandates of all internal and external constituents.

Intersection of Accountability

Practices and policies adopted by this secondary school organization are in place because of state and federal mandates, social validation, legitimacy, and conformity as seen on the school report card, and as a result of the expectations from the school board of education, parents, students, and community taxpayers. Reference was made by the participants of this study to the intrusion from the outside that includes the state and federal government mandating what is best, the assessments that schools must adhere to in an effort to measure student growth and show progress as measured against their peers, and the policies and practices within the organization that provide legitimacy and validity to the many sanctions placed on the educational environment. The expectation for this secondary school is to promote student growth and academic achievement so that all students will be college ready by the time they graduate from high school. Accountability to the various stakeholders occurs as a result of the structures, practices, and norms that are in place. Expectations are aligned with college readiness and practices and beliefs are maintained that coincide with all of the internal and external stakeholders.

External stakeholders. The principal of this secondary school noted how the institutional environment is subject to interference from outside agencies, which then places requirements and mandates on the organizational environment to perform and meet the expectations placed upon them:

> Because we're all supposed to be the same and because certain districts in NJ have not met the mark we're all subject to all of the reshaping and remediation and restructuring of what schools do and how they do it.

These socially approved practices lead to homogenous schools and systems throughout the U.S. (Rusch, 2005) and include such features as program designs, curriculum, standards, student classifications, and teacher and administrative credentials. With the expectation to ensure that all students will be college ready by the time they leave high school this secondary school has re-designed their curriculum aligned with the common core standards and skills deemed necessary for college. Academy structures and programs are in place to enhance rigor, provide access to challenging courses, and to provide exposure to post secondary options. The norm is to provide a college ready culture with the expectation that all students will be prepared to meet the demands of a global society. The participants in this study aligned programs, structures, and practices with the term college readiness and aligned the behaviors and actions within this secondary school as a means of validating what college readiness is and how it is embedded within the culture of the school. The district supervisor referenced validation and stated the following:

> We provide data to the state that validates what we do and this data is used to compare us with schools that have similar demographics. It's hard to justify your school and your scores if you are below schools that are exactly the same as you. But when you have improved or you are at the

> same level its validation. The programs we have in place and the things that we are doing are making a difference.

A teacher also referenced the programs and activities that take place within this secondary school:

> We have the academies and AVID, and we do a lot of college fairs. The academies, AVID, parent programs, and college fairs helps community members recognize all of the things that we are doing for our students to ensure that they are college ready.

Being able to validate what takes place within a school is seen through state report cards with established ratings that merit the legitimacy of each school and what takes place within the school. The high school coordinator noted the state school report card stating the following:

> We are part of what every school goes through in terms of school report cards and the rankings of where your school is in the state of New Jersey and we know that certain things that kids do are going to pay off for us a as a school and part of the school's job is to look good.

Communication is a way to validate legitimacy and can take place through a variety of venues. In this case study venues included the school profile that highlights school accomplishments, courses of study, and test scores; the program of studies which includes course descriptions and requirements, graduation requirements, and policies and processes that students must adhered to throughout their high school career; and the school website that lists programs, events, awards, and the vision and mission statement. The district supervisor noted the importance of communication as a means to showcase what takes place within this secondary school:

> It is important to communicate what we do so that the community can be reminded that we have a great school system. The sign outside of the high school building alone showing our student with a perfect score of 2400 has actually gotten a lot of attention from the community.

The listing of awards, accomplishments, programs and events is communicated to all constituents as a means of validating the practices that create a college ready culture for all students within this secondary school.

Internal stakeholders. The school board of education, school administration, parents, and students have needs and expectations that have become a part of the culture of this secondary school organization because of the programs, practices, and structures that are in place. Participants noted the expectations from internal stakeholders that include ensuring that all students will be college ready. For example the number of advanced placement courses offered, the amount of students applying to post secondary schools, the type of schools that the students apply to, and the options that are provided to all students so that they will have every opportunity to achieve success is an expectation from all of the stakeholders. Participants in this study discussed how this secondary school adheres to the expectations place upon them as noted by the district supervisor when discussing parents and their expectations for their children:

> There are certain cultural subgroups of parents that have expectations for their children and we do what we can to meet those expectations. Some parents want their children to go into the medical field so we have the STEM academy. Some parents prefer other areas so we provide options that include fine, practical, and performing arts, and business, law, and government.

The assistant principal discussed how the school is accountable to parents:

> Parents play a huge role in terms of wanting an environment that can support their kids to be the best they can. They want this school to raise the bar and make it a better academic place and we have been moving in that direction over the past 10 years or so.

A teacher discussed how the school meets the needs of their students:

> We offer our students a core set of classes that is pretty much mandated by the state. Our elective courses provide many options for our students to help prepare them for what they want to do once they go on to college. We have the academies, which also help students to get into the mindset of what they want to do.

The principal talked about the accountability system that is in place so that the school can show that it is accountable to all of the stakeholders. For example reference was made to the number of students getting into four-year schools as well as the type of four-year school that they are getting into. Students are expected to go on to college and all of the participants agreed that this secondary school has programs and practices in place that allow that happen. The assistant principal commented on the current practice that exists by discussing the importance of communicating such practices:

> There are a lot of different ways that you can communicate and we do communicate what we do. We have kids presenting at board meetings what they do in our programs, inviting people in so that they can see what goes on and how valuable it is, and the number of students in recent years that are getting accepted to Ivy league schools including a greater percentage of college acceptances. This is all information that needs to be constantly presented to the public.

The participants agreed that collectively this secondary school organization adheres to many practices and communicates such practices in an effort to show that they are meeting the expectations of all constituents.

Collective Responsibility

All of the participants in this study referenced their role and responsibilities within the organization. Collective responsibility was a common theme throughout the data that included responsibility to students, parents, administrators, and state and federal mandates. Structures have been put in place that validates the responsibility that the members within the organization claim to uphold. The practices that occur within this

secondary school organization are established in an effort to ensure that all staff is accountable to all of the stakeholders. Norms have been established as a result of the structures that are in place and which take into account all of the stakeholders. The assistant principal noted the structures stating, "So you have your basic structure in place and then you try to promote all those other things that key stakeholders put in place; the parameters for which those bigger things can happen in terms of academics and development for kids in all ways." For example school policies, practices, and procedures are in place to provide opportunities for student success and are noted on the school's web page, program of studies, and staff and student handbooks.

The participants of this study referenced school image, school appearance, and the need to meet expectations of all stakeholders. One teacher commented on how the staff does what they are told to do to keep their jobs. "Everybody is watching with the expectation that we are always improving." Addressing stakeholder's expectations in return for resources was noted by the district supervisor who stated "you have your taxpayers, the school board of education, and the state department of education mandating certain expectations which we are expected to fulfill." All of the participants noted the importance of meeting expectations to ensure financial support and continued accessibility to resources.

The expectation from all stakeholders is that students will be college ready by the time that they graduate from high school and collectively the behaviors, actions, and beliefs that are embedded within this secondary school have become a part of the norms and culture. One of the teachers in this study discussed the norm within this secondary school stating the following:

> The norm is to provide a college ready culture and we do that through our curricular offerings and programs.

The building principal discussed why it is important to establish appropriate norms:

> By establishing and having good norms and a good environment it's easier to have success. Everyone knows what is expected of them providing many opportunities for our students to be successful.

Participants agreed that the norms reinforce expected behaviors and practices that are aligned with college readiness. For example writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading skills are part of the core content curriculum and outlined in unit and daily lesson plans. A teacher commented on skill sets stating the following:

> Students are exposed to 21st century skills in all of their core content areas. The academies and technology have helped to prepare students to be college and career ready.

The assistant principal also commented on norms and skill sets:

> The norm is to expose students to 21st century skills and we do that. Curriculum updates are on going creating more opportunities for students to become critical thinkers.

Participants of this study discussed the student and teacher iPad initiative and how it has increased innovative practices within this secondary school. One of the teachers in this study noted the iPad initiative stating that "it is the norm to be innovative and we have done that with our iPad initiative for all students and staff." The high school coordinator discussed the necessity of technology in today's world and the importance of ensuring that students have the tools and skills necessary to achieve academic success. Participants agreed that this initiative was an expectation required of all staff and after three years has become a part of the curriculum and instructional strategies used to increase college readiness for all students. Staff has been trained, presentations have been made to parents

and the community, and students have showcased their skills at public board of education meetings.

Meeting the needs of each group while maintaining a balance of accountability with all of the stakeholders is accomplished by displaying programs and initiatives at monthly board of education meetings, scheduled meetings attended by staff that review state and district policies and procedures, emails that keep staff aware of responsibilities and mandates, newsletters to the community that showcase school programs and accomplishments, and events and opportunities that provide resources for parents and the community. This intersection of stakeholders is intertwined in the outlay of goods and services that provide the accountability and legitimacy that this school organization seeks to maintain. This action is not a choice among endless possibilities but rather a choice among a narrowly defined set of legitimate options that schools adopt in order to conform to what is expected with the end goal of appearing legitimate (DiMaggio & Powell 1983; Meyer & Rowan 1977; Scott 1987). What legitimizes institutional organizations is the confidence of their internal participants and their external constituents with the assumption that everyone is acting with competence and good faith (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer & Scott, 1983). The participants in this study adhere to the mandates placed upon them and the organization continues to produce the programs, processes, and practices that are in compliance with the mandates. Schools use persuasive and convincing language to convince internal and external constituents that they are in fact preparing all students to be college ready. The use of rhetoric helps to establish legitimacy for school organizations because its members actively construct perceptions of accountability, expertise, and reputation (Alvesson, 1993).

Discussion

The participants in this study continue to conform to the mandates and expectations placed upon them by their constituents. In an effort to meet the expectations of all stakeholders the study participants referenced a myriad of practices that uphold the expectations placed upon them and cited many of the structures in place as a means of validation. It is a balancing act between what the state expects a school to do, what school administration expects staff to do, the expectations of the school board of education, parent expectations, and student expectations. Accountability to all of these constituents becomes entwined in the behavior and actions of the members of a school organization. Maintaining legitimacy in the eyes of all of the stakeholders along with conforming to what is expected is established through a variety of venues in an effort to ensure that expectations and mandates are being met. Policies are carried out as a result of the meaning and interpretation that members of an organization give to such mandates.

As high schools face the challenge of adequately preparing students with the necessary skills and knowledge needed to begin postsecondary education they are expected to address core content areas as outlined in the Common Core State Standards (Musoba, 2010; Common Core Standards Initiative, 2011) which include cognitive strategies to address critical thinking, inquiry, and application of knowledge to ensure that all students will be college ready by the time they graduate from high school. Structures and programs are in place that are designed to help students gain the contextual skills and educational foundation that will enhance academic achievement. This information is shared with all stakeholders through a variety of venues that include school documents, policies, and practices.

Through rhetoric members within an organization reinforce institutional structures and practices (Green & Li, 2011). Academies that focus on career and skill building, the addition of advanced placement courses, mandated PSAT testing for all grade 10 and grade 11 students, and mandated course requirements aligned with college admissions are such structures and practices found within this secondary school. Processes and practices are in place to validate how college readiness is embedded within this organization and how those practices and processes are communicated through the school profile, the school program of studies, the principal's newsletters, the school website, and at various programs and formal and informal meetings. Strategically deploying language can construct and reflect the actions within an organization (Green & Li, 2011) that focus on processes rather than outcomes. Processes are in place within this organization and have become the norm and part of the culture within this secondary school. Changes that have occurred are in place to reflect expectations and mandates. The rhetoric used to explain practices and processes provide meaning to what takes place within this school organization.

Schools are subject to strong pressures for legitimacy that occurs as a result of meeting the expectations placed upon them (Rowan & Miskel, 1999). Schools use persuasive and convincing language to convince internal and external constituents that they are in fact preparing all students to be college ready. The use of rhetoric helps to establish legitimacy for school organizations because its members actively construct perceptions of accountability, expertise, and reputation (Alvesson, 1993).

Through the lens of Institutional theory we discovered how institutional theory offers understandings into organizational environment relations and the way

organizations react to institutional processes (Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). This perspective illustrates how the external environment can add to the social validity and survival of an organization and how values, meanings, and myths rather than efficiency and autonomy can determine and drive organizational behavior when considering external pressures. Meyers and Rowan (1977) believe that organizations incorporate the practices and procedures that are defined by prevailing concepts of organizational work and institutionalized in society which reflect the myths of their institutional environments instead of the demands of an organizations work activities. This secondary school contends with the mandates placed upon them by the state department of education, and the school board of education. Parents and students have certain expectations many of which are a result of the mandates that schools are forced to adhere to in an effort to conform to what is expected from all stakeholders. As a result accountability to the stakeholders occurs on many levels and within many levels.

Implications

This section will relate the findings to possible directions for future studies in the area of policy, practice, and research**.**

Policy

The dependence between organizations and their institutional environment produces organizational forms and policy practices that often are loosely coupled with policy maker's intentions (Spillane & Burch, 2006). Organizations seek survival and legitimacy as opposed to efficiency (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). With reforms focusing on college readiness and the understanding of why such reforms are important, it is critical for schools to be able to understand what it means to be college ready and

collaboratively put structures in place that will assess the outcomes of such structures to determine both efficiency and effectiveness. Mandating policies and creating expectations need to be aligned with the outcomes of such policies and expectations and need to be understood by all of the stakeholders. It is also important to understand how rhetoric can either reinforce dominant institutional structures and practices, or create new definitions and understandings leading to institutional change (Green & Li, 2011).

Practice

Leaders throughout the country in public and private schools, postsecondary institutions, charter schools, foundations, education and policy organizations, and state and federal government have taken up the challenge to ensure that students are college ready (Callan, Finney, Kirst, Usdan, & Venezia, 2006). Information and resources need to be shared and discussed with all stakeholders in an effort to provide understanding and awareness. Because stakeholders that exist outside of the school organization may have interests that are not aligned with all of the activities within the school it is important to assess internal and external accountability systems to understand how one informs the other and what constitutes accountability as a whole.

Research

Current school reform in K-12 school districts focus on accountability (Musoba, 2010). Such reform efforts emphasize increasing school productivity and accountability (Finn, 1990). Further research is needed on how the efficiency of carrying out such reforms is effective and how such effectiveness improves student learning. State level policies that are in line with accountability need to include teacher understanding of such accountability and how that understanding effects practices and processes within a

secondary school. Are accountability school reform policies positively or negatively associated with college readiness for all students? How are all of the stakeholders involved in this process at all levels?

Given the importance of organizational learning and those seeking to lead change within an organization, the understanding is that educational leaders will benefit from using an organizational lens in assessing how to plan and implement the routine improvements to policies, practices, and procedures that are the daily realities of a secondary school (Friedman, Lipshitz, & Overmeer, 2001) and that take into account all of the stakeholders. However in an effort to understand institutional theory and how the environment controls processes and procedures within the school, it is recommended that further research take place to appropriately understand how institutional meaning systems are understood and interpreted within organizations. Researchers will need to conduct research at the organizational level of analysis and view organizations as interpretive mechanisms. Since institutional features of the environment are important determinants of the structure and functioning of organizations (Scott, 1987), institutional theorists need to continue to direct attention to the importance of symbolic aspects of organizations and their environments to ensure that accountability practices are doing what they are intended to do.

Conclusion

This secondary school's internal accountability system asserts a collective responsibility for a college readiness culture. Structures are in place preparing students for postsecondary options, pre-college testing is mandated for all grade 10 and grade 11

students, additional advanced placement course offerings have increased, and a college readiness program is in place that includes shared instructional strategies with all staff.

This secondary school's internal accountability system is aligned with the external accountability system that creates policies and mandates that schools have in place in an effort to address college readiness for all students by the time that they graduate from high school. There are practices and processes in place that reflect both internal and external accountability, however more accountable practices at the level of student learning need to take place to ensure practice effectiveness and outcomes that lend itself to student academic achievement and success. There is also a need to understand how and why schools do what they do in an effort to ensure that reform initiatives are both efficient and effective. Rhetoric reinforces the appearance of knowledge and institutional myths in order to provide meaning and legitimacy to what takes place within an organization (Alvesson, 1993), however do the behaviors and actions within an organization truly enhance student achievement just because we say that they do or is it merely to provide accountability as a means of conforming to the expectations placed upon a school organization and the need to maintain legitimacy?

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Appendix A: Site Consent Form

Michele Critelli
510 Westwood Avenue
Long Branch, NJ 07740

June 3, 2013

Superintendent of Schools
Ryanville High School
Anytown, NJ
Dear Superintendent of Schools;

I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at Rowan University and entering the dissertation phase of the program. I will be conducting a qualitative research study using a case study strategy of inquiry. The purpose of this qualitative research study will be to explore a secondary school's understanding of the term college readiness and the influences and practices used to embed college readiness into its organization. This study will illuminate how an organizations understanding and interpretation guide the activities within the organization coupled with internal and external expectations to conform to the norms placed on them by their environment and the need to maintain legitimacy.

I will be using institutional theory as my theoretical framework to discover how the institutional environment can strongly influence the development of formal structures within an organization. Institutional theory looks at organizations and the appropriateness of their structures and processes, as assessed by relevant environmental actors (Scott,

1987). Legitimacy will be explored to discover its role in the adoption of new structures External and internal forces will be addressed to understand the role they play in the institutions adoption of new structures.

The research questions that will be addressed in this study include the following:

Central Question: How does a school as an organization define and institutionalize college readiness?

RQ 1. How are decisions concerning the adoption and implementation of college readiness embedded within an organization?

RQ 2. How do cultural rules from the environment shape or constrain organizational action?

RQ 3. How is a school organization responsive to the demands of their institutional environment?

RQ 4. How does an organization respond to organizational change and initiation of institutional change?

RQ 5. How does conformity to institutional norms enhance or diminish organizational performance?

I would like to include approximately 7 staff members in this study. I plan to conduct interviews, focus groups, and collect documentation as it pertains to the research study. I will present the 7 participants with a written consent form that explains all of the processes and requirements of this study. I will share the data gathered with them and with you at the end of my study and I will ensure the participants that no names will be used. They will also be told that at any time during the study they may withdraw from participating.

As an employee of Ryanville High School I understand the ethical implications as well as the ethical integrity needed to pursue this research study. It is because of the work

that I do within the district and the meaning that this research study can provide to Ryanville High School that I am choosing to consider this school district as a setting for my research study. Working with a secondary school organization will help to address the research questions cited in this study and illuminate an increased understanding and awareness of how a school institutionalizes the term college readiness. The awareness, understanding, and meaning provided to all stakeholders will be beneficial and hopefully continue after completion of this research study. The incentive to participate in this research study will provide increased awareness and improve what it is that we do, do not do, or need to do within the district. A focus will be provided that will be maintained through on-going dialogue, continuous communication, and collaboration that will build capacity in all stakeholders ensuring meaningful work that will improve the learning for all students.

I am requesting permission from you to proceed with this study. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to ask. Your time, support, and consideration is greatly appreciated. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Michele Critelli

Yes I agree to allow you to conduct this research at Ryanville High School

Signature_____Date_____

No I do not agree to allow you to conduct this research at Ryanville High School

Signature_____Date_____

Appendix B: Participant Informed Consent Form

June 2013

Participant - (Informed Consent Form)

I agree to participate in a Qualitative case study research entitled, "How a Secondary School as an Organization Defines and Embeds the Term College Readiness", which is being conducted by Michele Critelli, Doctoral Candidate in the Educational Leadership Program at Rowan University in Glassboro NJ.

The purpose of this study is to explore the evolution of a secondary school's understanding of the term "college readiness" and to describe the influences and practices used to embed college readiness into organizational rhetoric. The data collected from this study will be submitted as partial fulfillment of Ed. D. dissertation requirements.

I understand that all of my responses and data gathered will be kept confidential. Findings will be shared to ensure that the findings are a true assessment of my experience during this study. I agree that any information obtained from this study may be used in any way thought best for publication or education provided that I am in no way identified and that my name is not used.

I understand that there are no physical or psychological risks involved in this study, and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without penalty.

This study will include interviews and focus groups. The interviews will last between 60 and 90 minutes and will be audio recorded and transcribed. The focus groups will last between 60 and 90 minutes and will also be audio recorded and transcribed. Notes will be taken during both the interview and focus group sessions.

I understand that my contact person for this study and for any questions that I may have about my involvement in this study is Michele Critelli, 510 Westwood Avenue, Long Branch, NJ 07740 and @ 732-233-8090 or her Dissertation Chair, Dr. Ane Turner Johnson, Rowan University, Glassboro, NJ 08028 and @ 856-256-4500, x3818.

_____ _____

Signature of Study Participant Date

_____ _____

Signature of Study Participant Agreement to be Audio-recorded Date

_____ _____

Signature of Researcher Date

Appendix C: Research Question and Interview Protocol Matrix

Research Questions	Interview Questions
1. How are decisions concerning the adoption and implementation of college readiness embedded within an organization?	A. How is College Readiness an important component to a secondary school? B. How does a secondary school decide to adopt college readiness? B. How does a secondary school decide to implement college readiness within their organization? C. How do internal stakeholders play a role in the adoption and implementation of college readiness? D. How do external stakeholders play a role in the adoption and implementation of college readiness?
2. How do cultural rules from the environment shape or constrain organizational action?	A. How do you define cultural rules? B. How do outside forces impact cultural rules? C. How do inside forces impact cultural rules? D. How do cultural rules determine the actions of stakeholders within a secondary

	school environment?
3. How is a school organization responsive to the demands of their institutional environment?	A. How do you describe what an institutional environment looks like? B. How is a relationship developed between a school organization and its institutional environment? C. How do the actions and behaviors of a school organization meet the needs of its institutional environment?
4. How does an organization respond to organizational change and initiation of institutional change?	A. How do you describe organizational change? B. How do you describe institutional change? C. How is institutional change implemented? C. How do members of a secondary school organization respond to change? D. How do members of a secondary school organization respond to the initiation of institutional change?
5. How does conformity to institutional norms enhance or diminish organizational	A. How are institutional norms developed within this secondary school organization?

performance?	B. How do stakeholders react to institutional norms? C. How do institutional norms impact organizational performance?

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study and affording me the opportunity to interview you. This interview should last no more than 90 minutes. The interview will be recorded and I will be taking notes while you are speaking. I will give you the opportunity to look at the transcribed interview and make any changes. Your responses will never be reported in a way that can identify you. Do you have any questions regarding the interview process? Again, thank you and let's begin!

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

(Interview questions will be asked aloud, recorded, and the interviewer will take additional notes).

1. How do you define college readiness?

   Follow up: How does the school as an organization define college readiness?

2. How does this school collaboratively adopt and implement college readiness practices?

   Follow up: Why does this take place?

   Follow up: How are practices accepted by key stakeholders?

   Probe: Internal stakeholders? External Stakeholders?

3. How do you define the institutional environment of your school organization?

   Follow up: How do cultural rules shape or constrain actions and behaviors of this institutional environment?

4. How do you describe institutional norms?

   Follow up: How do stakeholders conform to these norms?

   Probe: Internal stakeholders? External stakeholders?

Follow up: How do these norms affect performance within the organization?

5. How does your school respond to change?

   Follow up**:** Describe organizational change and the initiation of institutional change.

   Follow up: Describe why this change takes place.

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix E: Focus Group Summary Form

Date:

Time:

Location:

Topic of Discussion:

Key points of Discussion:

Observations of interactions among focus group participants:

Appendix F: Informed Consent Form - Focus Group Participant

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study entitled, How a Secondary School as an Organization Defines and Embeds the term College Readiness. This form serves as your consent to participate in a focus group session on _____.

The information below outlines the purpose of the study, a description of your involvement and your rights as a participant.

I consent to participate in a research project conducted by Michele Critelli, a doctoral candidate at Rowan University, located in Glassboro, New Jersey. I understand that this study will explore how a secondary school as an organization defines and embeds the term college readiness. I have been selected to participate in this study due to my role as an Administrator/Teacher of a secondary school.

My participation will involve a 90 minute focus group session with other staff members from Ryanville High School. I understand that notes will be taken and that the session will be recorded. I will receive a copy of the notes. I will have the opportunity to review, clarify, and correct information captured in the notes. The purpose of this study is to explore organizational performance, organizational change, and initiation of institutional change in terms of defining and institutionalizing the term college readiness. The focus group session is intended to ascertain the following information:

- How decisions are made concerning the adoption and implementation of college readiness
- How cultural rules from the environment shape or constrain organizational action
- How a school organization responds to the demands of their institutional environment

- How a school organization responds to organizational change and initiation of institutional change

Appendix G: Focus Group Discussion Topic Protocol

- Open the session by introducing the topic.
- Provide ground rules.
- Only one person speaking at a time.
- No side conversations.
- Everyone participating with no dominating.
- The goal is for the group members to generate and sustain their own discussion.
- The researcher is here to learn from the participants. Probe more deeply where necessary and follow new topics as they arise.
- Researcher as moderator will help to channel the discussion without forcing the group into a pre-determined direction.
- Researcher will maintain a balance between the researcher's focus and the group's discussion.
- Tapping into the topic from the participant's point of view – generates participant's interests.
- Topics that are mentioned in the opening discussion need to be remembered and used to segue into later topics….."I recall that some of you mentioned something a little different earlier, and I wonder how things like_____fit into the picture?" "One thing that I heard several people mention is_____. I wonder what the rest of you have to say about that?"
- If topics not brought up can ask……"One thing that no one mentioned

is_____. Does it matter or not?

- If the group runs out of things to say….."Just remember that what we are interested in is (research topic) and we want to hear as many different things as possible. If your experience is a little different from what others are saying, then that is exactly when we want to hear from you."
- Get group members to use questions to direct the flow of interaction. Can state, "If someone has not really joined in, or if you seem to be hearing from the same people all of the time, try asking a question to someone who has not spoken much.
- Provide clear indication of when the session is ending. Asking each person to give a final summary statement.
- A recording of the session will take place and a transcription will be completed.
- Focus group participants will have the opportunity to review collated notes taken during the focus group session.
- **Discussion Topics:**

  Institutional environment, organizational environment, legitimacy, and internal and external forces within an organization

Appendix H: Research Question and Focus Group Protocol Matrix

Research Questions	Discussion Questions
1. How are decisions concerning the adoption and implementation of college readiness embedded within an organization?	A. How are you involved in the adoption and implementation of college readiness within this school?
2. How do cultural rules from the environment shape or constrain organizational action?	A. How do cultural rules within this organization effect your behavior and actions?
3. How is a school organization responsive to the demands of their institutional environment?	A. How do you respond to the demands of the institutional environment?
4. How does an organization respond to organizational change and initiation of institutional change?	A. How has organizational change and the initiation of institutional change enhanced or diminished what you do?
5. How does conformity to institutional norms enhance or diminish organizational performance?	A. How does conformity play a role in organizational performance? Legitimacy?

Appendix I: Focus Group Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study and affording me the opportunity to include you in this group interview. This Focus Group should last no more than 90 minutes. The session will be recorded and I will be taking notes while everyone is speaking. I will give all of the participants the opportunity to look at the transcribed group interview and make any changes. Your responses will never be reported in a way that can identify you. Do you have any questions regarding the Focus Group process? Again, thank you and let's begin!

(Questions will be asked aloud, recorded, and the interviewer/moderator will take additional notes).

1. How are you involved in the adoption and implementation of college readiness within this school?
2. How do cultural rules within this organization effect your behavior and actions?
3. How do you respond to the demands of the institutional environment?
4. How has organizational change and the initiation of institutional change enhanced or diminished what you do?
5. How does conformity play a role in organizational performance? Legitimacy?

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix J: Research Question and Documentation Protocol Matrix

Research Questions	Material Culture
1. How are decisions concerning the adoption and implementation of college readiness embedded within an organization?	• Memorandums • Letters • Central Office Administration meeting agendas • High School Administration meeting agendas • District Supervisor meeting agendas • State and Federal Agency memorandums
2. How do cultural rules from the environment shape or constrain organizational action?	• Minutes from High School Liaison meetings with Union Representatives and High School Administration • District Vision and Mission Statement • High School Meeting agendas and minutes
3. How is a school organization responsive to the demands of their institutional environment?	• District Policies • High School Policies • Student Handbook

	• Staff Handbook • High School Staff Job Descriptions
4. How does an organization respond to organizational change and initiation of institutional change?	• Documentation regarding current reforms and initiatives including technology initiatives • High School Staff meeting agendas and minutes • High School Coordinator meeting agendas and minutes
5. How does conformity to institutional norms enhance or diminish organizational performance?	• Teacher Schedules • High School Staff Job Descriptions

Appendix K: Document Summary Form

Name or description of document:

Site:

Document:

Date:

Event or contact, if any, with which document is associated:

Significance or importance of document:

Brief summary of contents:

Appendix L: Hypothesis Coding

Descriptive label for general categories and individual codes	Codes	Identifying code to the Research Question
Institutional Environment	IE	**#1,4,2**
Organizational Environment	OE	**#2,3,6**
External Forces	EX-F	**#1,2,3**
Internal Forces	IN-F	**#1,2,3**
Organizational Conformity	ORG/CONF	**#1,2,3,5,6**
Policies and Procedures	POL/PRO	**#1,2,3,6**
Legitimacy	LEGIT	**#1,2,5**
Institutional Norms	IN/NOR	**#1&4**
Organizational Change	ORG/CH	**#1,2,3,5,6**
Institutional Change	IN/CH	**#1,4,5,6**
Collaborative Efforts	CO/EF	**#1-6**
College Readiness	CR	**#1,2,6**
Institutional beliefs and practices	IN/BP	**#1,4,5,6**
Non-choice behaviors	NC/BH	**#1,3,5,6**
Social Validity	SOC/VAL	**#3,5,6**
Use of Rhetoric in Institutions	RH/IN	**#1,3,5,6**

The research questions that will be addressed in this study include the following:

1. How does a school as an organization define and institutionalize college readiness?

2. How are decisions concerning the adoption and implementation of college readiness embedded within an organization?
3. How do cultural rules from the environment shape or constrain organizational action?
4. How is a school organization responsive to the demands of their institutional environment?
5. How does an organization respond to organizational change and initiation of institutional change?
6. How does conformity to institutional norms enhance or diminish organizational performance?