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AN ANALYSIS OF A MIDDLE SCHOOL CURRICULUM:
THROUGH THE LENS OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY, SOCIAL
RESPONSIBILITY, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

by

Kristen A. Clark

A Dissertation

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Services and Leadership
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Doctor of Education
at
Rowan University
March 24, 2016

Dissertation Chair: Maria Sudeck, Ph.D.

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Dedication

To my husband, Jerry, who began the journey with me and never left my side. His encouragement was endless. He believed in me and always has. He is the biggest blessing I have ever known and this accomplishment is just as much his as it is mine.

To my three beautiful nieces, Marlee, Macie, and Mylie, who were a constant reminder of the innocence of children and my motivation for teaching and learning with enthusiasm. They have made TT's journey all the more special as we shared conversations about school, books, and learning. They were my inspiration.

To my parents, sister, and brothers thank you for believing in my dreams.

Acknowledgements

In addition to the support of my family, Dr. Maria Sudeck, my dissertation chair walked this journey with me and encouraged me through it all. The gift of your time, expertise, patience, and care anchored my way. Dr. Foley and Dr. Coaxum jumped on board and have been an invaluable asset to my committee. You three pushed me academically and I am better because of it.

My supervisor, Dennis Morolda, excitedly approved this leg of my academic journey and created time and space for me to carry out my research.

Heartfelt thanks to Jennifer Baldwin who answered my many questions and helped ease my stress with her calm reassurance. Only we can fully understand what we have been through and, for this reason, you will always be my friend.

There were many students who I have had the opportunity to teach and will never forget. They are, after all, my reason for being here and the reason that the fight for equity, fairness, and inclusion is so important. To them, I owe you my career.

Abstract

Kristen A. Clark

AN ANALYSIS OF A MIDDLE SCHOOL CURRICULUM: THROUGH THE LENS OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY, SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

2015-2016

Maria Sudeck, Ph.D.
Doctor of Education

One of the fundamental goals of 21st century schools is for students to become independent thinkers through the use of comprehensive academic curriculum that merges academic and social skills to prepare students to compete and engage in an increasingly changing world. The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the ways in which three of Schwab's four functions, social responsibility, personal responsibility, and social justice, were embedded and measured within core academic curriculum. The study also examined how teachers perceived student behaviors as a result of a social justice mindset.

The study was conducted using a traditional qualitative methodology consisting of an in-depth review of district policy, curriculum, learning standards, and interviews with 8th grade core academic content teachers and the district curriculum specialist over a period of 8 months. The review of the data and interviews showed that there is a greater need to more purposefully embed social learning components within academic content. Changes in policy, practice, and research are necessary to achieve environments that equally prioritize academic and social learning.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Following the principle of social justice, schools are responsible not only for ensuring the social and academic development of students and preparing them to not only become critical thinkers who can actively engage democratically in their world, but also ameliorating barriers to access and equity (Furman & Shields, 2005). Each level of government has demonstrated support for the need of a balanced learning environment through the creation of state, national, and common core academic learning standards. Increasingly, districts and schools have modified their mission and vision statements to suggest a socially just environment in order to increase the students' sense of personal and social responsibility (Wentzel & Wigfield, 1998). Adequately addressing issues related to social and personal responsibility have the potential to increase academic performance, which is arguably the fundamental goal of schools, especially in a high stakes standardized testing environment (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Wallberg, 2004).

Context of the Study

The achievement ideology, which suggests that success is achieved through hard work and education, perpetuates the process of social reproduction that creates inequities in the education provided to students of different socioeconomic statuses and ability levels (Barnes, 2002; MacLeod, 1995). A limited perspective of the social factors that impact student development is detrimental to their overall academic and social success. Jonathan Kozol (1992) echoes this sentiment, regarding the narrow focus of current school practices, by stating,

they do not mean equity; what they mean, what they prescribe, is something that resembles equity but never reaches it: something close enough to equity to silence criticism by approximating justice, but far enough from equity to guarantee the benefits enjoyed by privilege (p. 175).

The author's words have caused educators and policymakers to reconsider the practices within educational institutions that promote inequitable social reproduction. In doing so, he reminds us that our espoused style of educating in public schools hasn't accurately reflected what takes place in daily discourse because there are grave disparities concerning financial resources and academic performance that persist (Labaree, 2008).

Despite the testing mandates imposed by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) of 2001 legislation, there is an ever-present need within the United States to teach the whole child in schools. In the 20th century, Alfred North Whitehead criticized the focus on traditional academic curriculum by describing this phenomenon as a "fatal disconnection of subjects, which kills the vitality of our modern curriculum" (Noddings, 2013, p. 400). Effective schools in the 21st century must provide an environment concentrated on a comprehensive approach to teaching and learning (Ravitch, 2000).

Although it has become popular for schools and districts to align their district agenda to the cutting-edge 21st century schooling model, scholars and practitioners have only proposed fragmented initiatives to enhancing students' social awareness, thereby falling short of the ultimate goal (Greenberg et al., 2003). District and school leadership are left with the challenging task of accommodating both the social-emotional and academic needs of students via academic curriculum in light of a constant strain on

resources and pressure to produce academically proficient/advanced results. A substantive amount of research focuses on urban schools and their need for social intervention while fewer studies exist to show how financially stable suburban districts are able to adequately address these ideals in a more productive way (Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003).

Local Context

This suburban, public school district is located within the Northeastern region of the country. Comprised of 95.2% White, upper middle-class and wealthy families, the historic district serves approximately 2,500 students throughout 5 schools. As one of the state's few historic preservation municipalities, the district has one middle school, one high school, and three elementary schools that span 2.8 square miles (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). The middle school serves between 500-550 students during an academic year, 31% of which are 8th grade students with a 15.73 student-teacher ratio. The middle school, which serves grades 6-8, represents approximately 22% of the district population. Schoolwide, less than 5% of students are enrolled in the free or reduced lunch program. The district has an overall estimated \$35,340,000 yearly expenditure with \$14,134 being per pupil spending. In the last year, the middle school has made efforts to shift the school climate and culture through a focus on structured social learning that addresses the perceived factors that impact student development and performance.

The need to address the social factors that impact learning was precipitated by a change in school leadership, implementation of state and national character education standards, and a growing need to address school climate and culture. New Jersey has led

the nation in providing resources for establishing social education by maintaining programs largely cut nationwide including: health and physical education, career education, and consumer, family, and life skills (NJDOE, 2004). This initiative drew attention to the need to provide a holistic education to students within all districts in order to prepare them for “real-life” beyond the traditional academic setting.

The district and school mission statement declare that the schools work collaboratively with parents and the community to provide meaningful and beneficial learning experiences for students. One of the fundamental goals is for students to become independent thinkers through the use of comprehensive academic curriculum that merges academic and life skills to prepare students to compete and engage in an increasingly changing world. Wolfe and Haveman (2001) suggests that if schools can formulate a system to balance the education debt experienced nationwide, much needed resources and can be used to invest in social programs that can potentially eradicate these challenges to school performance. Nevertheless, since property taxes largely account for the amount of funding districts receives some schools are deprived of financial support because of this inequitable model. This school’s leadership team has recently agreed to spend a small percentage of their current budget on the implementation of formal programming that supports a “broader educational agenda that involves enhancing students’ social-emotional competence” (Greenberg et al., 2003).

Conceptual Framework

The Progressive Era in education (1890-1920) ushered in critical expansion of the number of students being served within public schools nationwide. Within the frame of

public education, these years, marked by social activism and reform, were particularly significant because they challenged many of the long-standing traditions that were considered invaluable, mainly enhancing the American system of democracy (Hayes, 2006). Since learning had previously been monitored according the norms and expectations of individual localities, sharing power with citizens represented a shift from previous governance models. According to Dewey (1938), educating for social responsibility and democracy grew out of a need to create more equitable balances of power and establish experiential learning opportunities for students. One of the most notable and fundamental challenges posed by this new educational philosophy was the question of “what is the true purpose of schools?” This pervasive question continues to plague educational practitioners today, but Leland and Kasten (2002) posit that the real concern for American educators has been whether we are in the business of creating “citizens” or “subjects.” Traditional schooling models, also referred to as the “factory models,” rested on the premise that formal schools existed simply to transmit skills and knowledge that would prepare students to transition into the workforce and boost the economy (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Johnson, 2008; Leland & Kasten, 2002). The progressive movement illustrated a need to demonstrate a more concerted effort to create experiential learning opportunities for students in order to enhance problem solving and critical thinking abilities (Dewey, 1938). Therefore, the emphasis gradually evolved from streamlining students into a particular vocation to enhancing social skills and civic participation.

In the last 20 years, American education has placed an emphasis on social and emotional themes and programs to augment a strong academic focus (Hoffman, 2009). Ogundare (1991) states, “education, in its broadest sense, provides a framework that can synthesize and employ ... resources for the ultimate goal of attitude formation in children” (p. 375). Experiential learning activities not only revolutionized the former factory model of education, but also served as training for students to “become socially responsible and aware of oppression and structural inequalities” (Bell, 2007; Torres-Harding, Steele, Schulz, Taha, & Pico, 2014, p. 1).

Educating for social justice suggests that the distribution of and access to resources throughout society is equitable and available to everyone (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007). Educational inequities within education are a natural extension of the social hierarchy that exists within our country. Educational equity can be measured by academic performance, retention rates, standardized testing scores, college attrition, graduation rates, and most significantly, economic disparities, which are largely thought to be the key significant factor in educational inequality (Orfield & Lee, 2005). In reality, the causes of educational inequity reflect an interconnected and complex web deeply entrenched in history, society, and culture. Social justice is largely informed by a multidisciplinary framework, which struggles to balance the tension between interdependent and sometimes opposing perspectives (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). As a movement, education reform is at the threshold of moving from a “community of sameness” to a “community of difference” (Brown, 2004). This means

that it is critical to confront the difficult social topics that have not been addressed within schools to draw attention to practical and real-life issues.

Common among all social justice scholars is the belief that citizens should be treated as equals and protected under societal laws, institutional policies, and systems of governance. Nevertheless, one of the most significant challenges to creating schools and institutions that authentically reflect social justice values is the vast difference in how scholars and practitioners both define and justify the need for social justice. Social justice has been described as a mental construct used to explore differences (Brown, 2004), as an economic and class principle (Griffiths, 2003; Vincent, 2003), as well as both a goal and a process (Bell, 2007). North (2006) contends that although the “catchphrase” of social justice has become so popular among educators, policy makers, researchers, and leaders, very few are fully aware of its “social, cultural, economic, and political significance” (p. 507).

Conversations among practitioners, regarding the imbalanced social structures, have been limited to those that favor the disproportionate allocation of goods and resources to the privileged while ignoring the need to shift mindsets to better understand how we can serve underprivileged populations. West (2004) asserts that a reliance on politics undermines true efforts to create a more equitable economy for marginalized individuals. A more purposeful approach to clarifying social justice is essential as focusing only on the idea distributive justice does not genuinely challenge the systemic issues that maintain “unequal power relations” (Bourdieu, 1984; North, 2006).

As the efficacy of schools as social institutions is being called into question, concerns regarding the quality of school climate are also at the forefront. Educational policy tends to “construct the meaning...in narrow market-based terms” while school-based practitioners are more concerned with how to close the achievement gap between students from diverse backgrounds (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005, p. 202). The popularity of social justice language in educational settings has created both a sense of celebration and unease, as there are still grave disparities between policy and practice that have gone unaddressed. The result of such defective policy is that matters of standardization and accountability evade discussions of social factors such as race, class, gender, and sexual orientation and leave school leaders and teachers bound to rules and regulations (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Foster, 2004). Effective and revolutionary schools will have to deal with these delicate interconnected issues to be truly transformative.

As a microcosm of society, schools demonstrating a commitment to achieving a socially just climate require a collective of individuals working toward social equality (Einfeld & Collins, 2008). Socially just learning environments cannot be achieved without a fervent belief and effort from each level of school governance and leadership. Enacting purposeful change through but not limited to: building classroom communities that discuss issues of difference (Sapon-Shevin, 1999), equity pedagogy (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995), multicultural and anti-bias education (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Sleeter, 2005) is a powerful move toward creating cultures of equity and justice through learning. Carlisle, Jackson, and George (2006) assert that social justice education is the

“conscious and reflexive blend of content and process” and that a focus on social justice should occur both inside and outside of the classroom context and shouldn't be perceived as an isolated objective of institutions or districts (p. 57). Efforts to resolve the educational and social inequities that create a need for social justice education should be the goal of district decision-making and follow-up action.

In an effort to revolutionize learning environments by recognizing and addressing the inherent inequities within society, teachers and school leaders are an essential element since they most directly navigate both curriculum and instruction. The emerging discourse regarding social justice mandates grassroots practitioners to question the assumptions that hinder equitable schooling practices and policies (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Lalas, 2007). Implementing social justice in schools necessitates educators who use curriculum that integrate multiple perspectives, challenge the master narrative held by Western culture, and provide scaffolding opportunities for students to become active citizens (Agarwal, Epstein, Oppenheim, Oyler, & Sonu, 2010; Tataki, 2008). If society shapes the educational agenda, creating a more balanced hierarchy of power ensures a stronger possibility in preparing and acquiring practitioners who are committed to uproot the dominant oppressive structures such as racism, sexism, classism, and “xenophobic ideologies” (Mthethwa-Sommers, 2012, p. 220).

Recognition of these disparities does not necessarily directly translate into action. However, in 2002 the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) secured a 4-year grant from the federal government to support the further creation and implementation of character and social-based educational programs implemented in ten school districts

under the NCLB Act of 2001 partnerships (NJDOE, 2014a). This additional funding allowed for the development of training and resource manuals, state and regional workshops, district consultations with social learning experts within 45 districts, and a New Jersey Center for Character Education (NJCCE) data profile including 80 program resources statewide. The objective of acquiring this grant was to provide schools with readily available strategies and resources to increase their focus on character education through their academic curriculum.

Adequate state aid enables schools to diversify programming and offer more extensive assistance to enhance student academic and social development. New Jersey has led the nation in providing resources for establishing social education by maintaining programs largely cut nationwide, including: health and physical education, career education, and consumer, family, and life skills (NJDOE, 2004). Nevertheless, since property taxes largely account for the amount of funding districts receive, some schools are deprived of financial support because of this inequitable model. Many schools are left to modify and accommodate their existing curricular and instructional designs to align with mandated learning standards instead of acquiring more current resources.

Taking into account these challenges, schools are still able to demonstrate some measure of success. With some of the highest academic and standardized testing scores statewide, this northeast suburban district is noted for their commitment to both academics and philanthropic excellence. In 2012, the district gained local and state attention because of their relentless efforts to partner with parents/families and the community to increase student achievement in light of statewide financial setbacks. The

district mission statement reflects a commitment to creating “a challenging and diverse learning climate that promotes the development of the whole student” (HPS, 2012) and to engaging in service that “promotes the social, emotional, and intellectual” progress of students. Learning through service must be consistently integrated within academic courses and school culture in order to be genuinely effective in shifting the students’ perspective since it alters the “normative pedagogy” of teaching and learning (Clayton & Ash, 2004). Although the district is also acclaimed as being a model for districts and schools throughout the state for making students a priority, it is unclear to what extent the mission statement drives discretionary decisions to align daily instruction to a relentless effort to incorporate learning experiences in this way and how that translates into student behaviors.

The conceptual framework for this study was based on a theory of curriculum that includes an emphasis on social justice. This also includes how practitioners determine and rationalize what information students should know and the facilitation of a just and equitable school climate. The New Jersey State Board of Education has adopted revisions to the Core Curriculum Content Standards by incorporating new anchors for character education and social-emotional learning within core academic subjects (NJDOE, 2014b). Embedded within the standards are requirements for educators to establish, communicate, and facilitate a vision for and opportunities to acquire skills and knowledge that support students’ social development.

The role of schools continues to shift in light of continuous education reform efforts. These changes inevitably affect the responsibilities of not only school, but also

district leadership and teachers. According to the NJDOE, the character education components exist in addition to the academic learning goals as they relate to standardized testing and student growth percentiles (SGPs). A complete and purposeful plan to create more opportunities to align daily classroom instruction with the myriad of socialized learning standards is vital to preparing students to compete in the globalized world, enhancing positive social behaviors, and creating non-traditional opportunities for students to engage in inquiry (Gomez, 1996).

Purpose and Scope of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the ways in which three of Schwab's four functions, social responsibility, personal responsibility, and social justice were embedded and measured within core academic curriculum and to further explore how teachers perceived student behaviors as a result of these expectations. A critical dimension of social justice education requires both teachers and students to analyze "the perceived realities of social...injustices, that affect teaching, learning, and curriculum" (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007, p. 315). Successful schools teach young people to interact in socially appropriate ways while fostering a strong understanding of educational objectives in a variety of ways (Tyler, 2013). Schools that are aware of and equipped to adequately and consistently address the social needs of students through curriculum and instruction can serve as a prime example. The adoption of New Jersey's Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS) on character and social-emotional learning have created a need for all school leaders to readily prioritize a dual focus on

academic and social development in order to encourage a social justice mindset among students.

This investigation determined in what ways the topics of social and personal responsibility are embedded and assessed in language arts, science, math, and social studies academic curricula and how teachers perceive student behaviors in light of a social justice belief system in a suburban public middle school during the 2014-2015 academic school year. Language arts, science, math, and social studies subject specific content tend to create opportunities to bridge the academic and social gaps through instruction (Deasey, 2002), and therefore are the most appropriate for this study. The data that was reviewed consisted of district core academic curriculum and student assessments, material culture including school policy and teaching evaluation instruments, and formal interviews with 8th grade content teachers.

Significance of the Study

Education has become the central mechanism responsible for addressing societal ills that affect student behaviors and performance despite an increasing focus on high-stakes testing and measureable academic outcomes at each level of educational governance (Labaree, 2008). One of the limits of today's schools systems is that character education and social justice pedagogy are used to reinforce a prescribed system of norms and behavioral standards (North, 2006). Overarching objectives for student academic and social development should drive the implementation of character education in schools. For a school focused on character education based on social justice, the objective, then, is not to encourage students to preserve traditional belief systems, but

rather to provide them with the information to demonstrate both empathy and skepticism in viewing the dynamics of one's social world (Kohn, 1997).

Classroom-based social justice learning centers on how to use curriculum, policy, and practice to enhance the social-emotional skills and awareness of students (Mthethwa-Sommers, 2012). Further, character education initiatives support both the academic and social goals of schools and represent the essence of more progressive education through the following 21st century interdisciplinary themes that have become a fundamental component of teacher instruction:

- global awareness
- financial, economic, and entrepreneurial literacy
- civic literacy
- health literacy and
- environmental literacy (Partnership, 2014).

The CCR (2015) contends that character education is about the acquisition and strengthening of virtues, values, and the capacity to make informed decisions. The 21st century poses particular challenges that require a purposeful effort to support students' personal growth and development in order to operate within various communities as "global citizens." Students' abilities to perform beyond the parameters of academia are strong predictors of achievement (Farrington et al., 2012). The 21st century schooling framework aligns with Kohn's (1997) assertion that what educational practitioners deem appropriate "character" is dependent upon overarching and long and short-term goals. Although character is often using in a negative context to label behaviors that are deemed

“deviant” or outside of the norm, it really encompasses the ideas of personal agency and mindset, which enable students not to just think about what they know (academic skills) but how to effectively use that knowledge.

With the phasing out of the factory model of education, our reliance on the three Rs (reading, writing, and arithmetic) simply is not sufficient to meet the demands of today’s modern world. The four Cs of the more progressive 21st century model (creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration) are competencies that are essential for the acquisition of any knowledge (CCR, 2015). For example, critical thinking and problem solving encourages students to engage in higher order thinking, deeper thought processing, and analytical skills. Creating learning opportunities that begin with exploration/inquiry creates learning experiences where students partner with teachers to develop knowledge through the use of the aforementioned Cs. Peeking a student’s curiosity is directly tied to their intrinsic motivation, which fuels their drive to learn overall, albeit academically or socially. Within the context of this study, education begins to expand beyond the deficit approach where teachers are the sole bearer of knowledge to a system where classrooms are “laboratories” and knowledge construction is both an individual and collective journey.

Social justice represents a philosophy that challenges the systemic and structural inequities that permeate different economic, political, and social facets of society. Grounded in the ideals of equity, access, and inclusion, these issues converge in academic settings, which create the need for social based learning and social justice education. Demonstration of a social justice mindset “involves an individual actively working

toward equality for all society” (Einfeld & Collins, 2008, p. 97; Monard-Weissman, 2003). The commitment to participate in the larger global world is not narrowly focused on “self”, but rather an interest in the greater good. Uncovering the underlying causes of inequity and inclusion has a direct impact on schools and classrooms as microcosms of society. Exploring the complexities of social inequality while empowering students to become advocates of social change are two key components of both social justice based education (Einfeld & Collins, 2008).

Since the face of social movements have changed, so too, must the ways that schools, including practitioners and students, investigate the complex issues facing society. There are important social dynamics at the core of CEE. One of the fundamental goals of CEE is to put power in the hands of citizens to invoke varying degrees of change within their communities. Relying on this perspective of change must be situated in the philosophy of social justice and create spaces that hear the “voices of the underrepresented”. A critique of instructing and learning in this way has been the fallacy that creating a “deliberate democracy” is the way to establish structure in social learning (Einfeld & Collins, 2008). This premise suggests that dialogue between diverse people is the measure of success (outcome) instead of a means through which citizens can learn to collaborate to combat inequity and injustice (process). Understanding and conceptualizing issues of access and inclusion as it relates to the range of human diversity is critical in order for schools to begin to gain a comprehensive picture of what impacts student performance and behavior and how to proactively manage it.

For the purpose of this research, focusing on 8th grade curriculum was particularly important as instructors prepare students to transition to high school and possibly engage with diverse individuals. This study can also provide current and aspiring district and school-based practitioners with insight and recommendations for how to achieve both a thriving academic and social climate where the goal is to combat a system founded on inequitable deficit ideologies. This can be achieved by leveraging the available resources and curriculum material to more effectively support a comprehensive learning environment for students. The teachers in this study provided insight into student behaviors and how they are perceived to be a reflection of a social justice belief system.

Research Questions

My research questions emerged from my professional experience as an academic subject and social-emotional learning instructor, the implementation of national and state character education learning standards, and the basics of qualitative research. In this qualitative research study, I explored the following questions:

1. In what ways are the concepts of social responsibility and personal responsibility embedded within core academic curriculum?
2. How are the concepts of social responsibility and personal responsibility measured within core academic curriculum?
3. How do 8th grade teachers perceive the influence of curriculum on their students' development of personal responsibility, social responsibility, and social justice?

The research questions are significant because public schools exist in a competitive educational market and experience heightened competition from charter and private schools that can secure resources from multiple channels and maintain the flexibility to specialize in teaching for social justice. It is important for public school leaders to leverage their own available knowledge, social, and financial capital to stay relevant and meet the needs of students. Deming stated, “we have to move upstream to transform the system of management ... we have to transform the system of education” (as cited in Sparks, 2001, p. 1). Education reform has failed partially because it has been unable to adequately assess what schools need and establish a plan to overcome those challenges. Answers to the aforementioned research questions can provide school leaders and teachers with important insight that can help them to avoid the pitfalls of an incomplete school mission, vision, and follow-up implementation.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are defined in order to provide clarity on the concepts at the core of the research study. The goal in providing succinct definitions is to limit any potential ambiguity in the study.

Social Justice

Education for social justice “informs the critical analysis of social issues, the ethical evaluation of alternative courses of action,” and the catalyst to impact social, economic, and political changes (Banks, 2001; Wade, 2001)

Personal Responsibility

Personal responsibility is the idea that each individual chooses his/her own actions, creates their own life circumstances, and in turn are held liable for those actions despite the outcome.

Social Responsibility

Social responsibility is an ethical concept that means to adhere to the expectations of social roles and rules in such a way that one's peers are not adversely affected by those behaviors or actions (Wentzel, 1991).

Curriculum

Curriculum in schools is defined as the range of both directed and undirected training experiences and opportunities for and used by students to unfold abilities, skills, and dispositions according to socially prescribed systems of knowledge and meaning (Bobbitt, 1941).

Limitations of the Study

The study focused on the embedded curricular components and perceptions of middle school teachers and leadership within an upper middle class, suburban public school setting. The specific contextual factors and adjustments used to maintain the anonymity of the district and participants involved limits the generalizability of the findings beyond similar contexts and study participants. The academic calendar and time constraints were also a critical limitation to this research study.

Additional limitations within this study were a result of the qualitative research design. Qualitative studies are conducted within participants' natural environment and the

details of the research are difficult to replicate (Wiersma, 2000). Since the researcher is a key instrument in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data, his/her personal knowledge and perspective is an inherent component of the research process (Merriam, 2014) and may affect objectivity. Since my own interests and professional experiences informed the focus of this qualitative study, there was always the potential for inherent bias, which I have attempted to limit throughout the study by basing my research in the current literature and standards of rigor.

Delimitations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the ways in which the concepts of personal and social responsibility are both embedded and assessed through core content curriculum in addition to exploring how teachers perceive student behaviors as a result of social justice mindsets. Although a significant body of research exists that includes the identification of the aforementioned concepts through service learning initiatives and academic curriculum in the middle school context, my study does not intend to address how students are engaging in such social programming but rather how their mindsets are demonstrative of embodying these terms as they relate to social justice. “Corporate social responsibility,” which is often used in place of “social responsibility” is similar to the definition proposed by Wentzel (1991) but cannot be used interchangeably with the term as the context of this qualitative study is public and not private and the study participants include teachers instead of management.

There are numerous strategies that can be used to collect data within a qualitative research design (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). For this study, I relied on what Onwuegbuzie,

Leech, and Collins (2010) call traditional methods of interviewing and reviewing material culture because the more novel meta-framework approaches were not feasible considering my time and budget. The decision to interview language arts, science, math, and social studies core content teachers specifically was based in the literature that suggested these subject areas lend themselves well to social components (Deasey, 2002). Furthermore, given the broad understanding of the notion of social justice coupled with their experience and knowledge of academic curriculum, interviewing instructional staff instead of students was the most appropriate choice.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

This chapter will summarize the research on the value in experiential learning as well as social justice and social learning, specifically focusing on their emergence from a historical progressive education reform movement. For qualitative research studies, the literature review highlights the significance of a particular topic and creates an important context for meaning (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of this chapter is to provide a context for the current research study on personal responsibility, social responsibility, and social justice in a public middle school setting. In order to limit subjectivity, this study explores the extensive history of social schooling models and philosophies. Onwuegbuzie, Leech, and Collins (2012) maintain that a well-executed literature review distinguishes between what research has already been conducted and how a current study will further build from that existing body of knowledge. This literature review addresses the fundamental concepts embedded within the comprehensive research on education reform, social learning, and social justice.

The Progressive Education Movement

A need for broad and individualized learning in schools ushered in The Progressive Movement (1890-1920). Originating from disparities in access and opportunities among social classes, progressive learning techniques have persisted in different forms since the 19th century (Hayes, 2006). Progressive education challenged the long-standing traditional factory model of education by emphasizing learning by experience and “doing” through collaborative and cooperative learning activities,

integrated curriculum, and problem solving and critical thinking. The term progressive has been used to describe a focus on curriculum, classroom management, teaching philosophy, and community outreach. According to Dewey (1938), even traditionalists recognized the existence of both moral and social conduct standards, although there had been little attention given to the topic of social conduct prior to the Progressive Movement. Progressive education continues to displace more traditional models of instruction and learning that derived from ideologies that asserted that: 1) teachers are the sole instruments responsible for transmitting information and standards to students (Dewey, 1938); 2) oral recitation and memorization are indispensable in acquiring “correct” knowledge (Beck, 2009); and 3) coercive tactics and reward systems were key to achieving proper student behavior (Marshall, 2012).

Progressive school models are more inclusive, active learning environments focused on the diverse social contexts in which students engage, both inside and outside of school (Goodman, 2012; Sleeter & Stillman, 2013). These progressive schools have been characterized as (Berg, 2013; Reese, 2001) having the following core components:

- integrated curriculum,
- clear goals of education,
- community-service/experiential learning,
- de-emphasis of textbooks,
- and an emphasis on social skills and human development.

An increased focus on the idea that instructional leaders should create more purposeful opportunities for students to become independent problems solvers, critics of their social

world, and develop their own version of the “truth” (Lawson, 2001) are present within the research. These experiences are perceived as more meaningful than the manipulated, teacher-centered experiences of factory model school settings (Hayes, 2006; Leland & Kasten, 2002; Tyler, 2013; Vygotsky, 2012).

Every aspect of a student’s educational experience is a socialization process. School is an important context where students develop collective social, emotional, and academic competencies (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). There has been a push within the last few decades to suggest that standardization of academic learning is the only true measure of success (Kohn, 2000). Ironically, an overemphasis on academics and standardized testing has increased the attention spent on more progressive schooling (Marchesi & Cook, 2012). Despite this, Barone et al. (2014) contend “progressive education is widely admired and rarely implemented in schools” because social skills and real-life experiences aren’t easily measurable or universal (p. 83). The federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 represented an ambitious attempt by legislators to enact specific learning goals and measurable outcomes for student academic performance without regard for the relevant social factors that hinder social and academic development (Davidson, Reback, Rockoff, & Schwartz, 2013; Kohn, 2000; Koyama, 2012; Lee & Reeves, 2012; McDonnell, 2004; Ravitch, 2011).

Progressive education is about raising a social consciousness so that individuals are able to make deliberate choices about how and what they learn (Jacobs, 2010; Mittler, 2012; Shor, 2012; Wraga, 2001). Despite its comprehensive approach, critics of progressive education challenge that it represents no more than “a feel good platitude, a

verbal gesture” (Kaplan, 2013, p. 122). As an ideology, it has been described as simply a utopian state of education and neither reasonable nor practical in modern American schools. Conservatives question the sensibility of progressive school programs and policies and challenge that progressive education lowers expectations for learning standards (Berlak & Berlak, 2011; Benn & Downs, 2015; Hayes, 2006) while advocates maintain that progressive schooling recognizes that learning is not a fixed process and “that schooling is not just about academics” (Kohn, 2008; Norris, 2004). This inconsistency has created nothing more than another dichotomy within education where traditionalists are known as less humane than progressives (Kaplan, 2013; Morrison, 2012; Waks, 2013).

The failure to achieve student growth with traditional conventions, such as fixed seating and rote memorization (Waks, 2013), has compelled progressive practitioners to change their instructional approach in the face of a dynamic social world. Traditional educators should take into account the complex and multi-faceted components of students’ identities to be more effective (Anyon, 1980; Sleeter & Stillman, 2013). The progressive educational philosophy suggests that school is a critical part of life and not preparation for life. Therefore, learning is constructed through direct experience and social interaction (Bonstingl, 1992; Brooks & Brooks, 1999). While it is impossible to thoroughly prepare students for every situation that they will encounter throughout life, it is critical that they have the skills to maneuver and solve the complex problems that they may face using reasoning and critical thinking skills (Dewey, 1938), which are the foundation of progressive learning models.

Adolescent Development

Adolescent development is a complex process affected directly by internal and external physical, social, mental, emotional, and intellectual factors. Marked largely by transition (Buckley, Cipiti, Ewing, Venanzi, & Wisniewski, 2012; Smith, 1997), adolescent children experience changes in identity, and physiological, biological, and psychological development (Reyna, Chapman, Dougherty, & Confrey, 2012; Vygotsky, 1978). Scholars suggest that the years between ages 14 and 15 are particularly important as students progress from early to middle adolescence. The common transition from middle school to high school magnifies the effects and impact of these developmental changes (Barber & Olsen, 2004; Bellmore, 2011; Midgley, 2014). Specifically falling within this age range, eighth grade students experience a unique and often complicated existence as multiple dynamics of social and academic life are changing simultaneously. Although many of the psychological changes have occurred, issues related to communal relationships and belonging are still prominent as students become acclimated to a new version of “self” (Osterman, 2000). Also central to adolescent development are issues related to social and personal responsibility in family, community, and peer groups (Lemerise & Arsnio, 2000; Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

Adolescence is uniquely characterized as a period of growth and development influenced by positive and negative experiences (Smith, 1997). Youth within this age group often engage in risky behavior, such as substance abuse, truancy, and violence, in order to find a place in a community or friendship group. Approximately 30% of 14 to 17 year olds engage in high-risk behaviors that can hinder the likelihood for future success

(Greenberg et al., 2003; Levitt, Selman, & Richmond, 1991). For these reasons, schools need to beware of challenging developmental issues in order to promote the academic, social, and emotional well-being of the students. Social-emotional learning has been used by schools as a preventive measure against high-risk and unsafe behaviors (Adelman & Taylor, 2000; Fleming & Bay, 2004).

Social Learning

Social learning is the process in which individuals learn behaviors through observation of both the direct action and the consequences of those actions (Bandura, 1986; Wenger, 2000). Social education implies that schools, as places of instruction and learning, are essentially social institutions, complete with roles, norms, and values for organizing human activity (Turner, 1997). Learning itself represents a social process (Greenberg et al., 2003; Zins, 2004) and effective learning environments are characterized by the interactions between and among students and instructors and active engagement with the content (Cohen, 2006; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Elias, 2004; Wang & Holcombe, 2010; Zins & Elias, 2007). Bandura (1986) explains that the very act of learning cannot occur in isolation of the social context of schools, community, home, colleagues, or friends. Students learn how to engage in the world not solely through recitation and recall of facts, but also through their observations of others' behaviors, including rewards and punishment systems (NMSA, 2003; Wenger, 2000). The instructional technique of modeling, whether through a live model, verbal instructions, or symbolic interaction, is central to social learning (Bandura, 1986; Darling-Hammond, 2008; Kumpulainen & Wray, 2002). Social learning implies that

human development occurs through the reciprocity between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors (Bandura, 1986). This perspective uproots more traditional beliefs about education as it places an emphasis on development of the whole student.

Teachers' educational philosophies and approach to instruction have a powerful impact on classroom activity (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2013) and should do more than simply focus on just the academic development of students (AIR, 2014). Teaching the "whole-child" suggests a social-emotional learning approach that aligns with traditional academic practice. It is necessary for educational practitioners to reflect on the social and academic needs of students to be most the effective and have the most sustainable impact on student development and learning (Elias, 2004; Lane, Wehby, & Barton-Arwood, 2005; Noddings, 2005; Ransford, Greenberg, Domtrivich, Small, & Jacobson, 2009).

In order to overcome the belief that the teacher holds complete power and access to knowledge and treat students as competent learners, educators must make a concerted effort to genuinely get to know students' complex identities. This knowledge should then be used to set up teaching strategies that meet students' individualized and communal needs. Noddings (2005) mentions that educational pedagogy far too often concentrates on teaching strategies and policies that promote compartmentalization and not integrated learning opportunities. Our schools mirror this detrimentally narrow view of student learning by not providing learners with differentiated opportunities to perform based on their unique strengths and learning styles.

Social-Emotional Learning

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is an educational process that involves the acquisition and application of knowledge, skills, and mindsets needed to recognize and comprehend emotions, build healthy relationships, and show responsibility (Cohen, 2001; Cohen, 2006; Elias & Arnold, 2006). SEL is likely to occur when a district or school adopts Mayer and Salovey's (1993) concept of emotional intelligence, which promotes emotional and intellectual growth. Thinking about social needs as an equally important aspect of one's intellectual makeup has become common in recent years (Elias et al., 1997; Hoffman, 2009). This social-emotional framework in education is based on the belief that targeting the social needs of students will provide them with a broad base of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills including, but not limited to, managing emotions, effective communication, valuing diversity, teamwork, and problem solving/decision-making (CASEL, 2015; Elias, 2004). When students acquire strong social-emotional competencies, they are more equipped and better able to serve as self-advocates by asking for help, managing their emotions and shortcomings, and problem-solving in complex situations (Romasz, Kantor, & Elias, 2004). Social-emotional programming maintains that authentic learning happens when students are participating in cooperative activities, communicating transparently, and repeatedly and purposefully engaging with class content and classroom procedures (Elias et al., 2003).

SEL courses and programs are unique because they give students meaningful learning opportunities that are not as available within core academic courses. Utilizing SEL skills not only increases students' capacities to learn in other subjects, but also

prepares students to be active participants in their learning experiences (Durlak et al., 2011). In addition to enhancing students' abilities to demonstrate sophisticated social skills, SEL programs have proven to increase positive student attitudes and self-efficacy while decreasing incidents of emotional distress (Durlak et al., 2011; Zins et al., 2004). The most effective SEL programs infuse social skill building into academic activities (Greenberg, et al., 2003). Teachers that provide effective SEL instruction promote positive interactions with students, families, and the community (Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

Personal Responsibility

Personal responsibility, as it relates to social skills, refers to taking charge of one's own actions and accepting the rewards or consequences of those actions (Dugan et al., 2011). Developing this level of independence and maturity requires purpose, effort, and commitment. Educational practitioners must play a critical role in both modeling and explaining the impact of behaviors in a larger social context to increase the students' sense of personal responsibility (Lewis, Romi, & Roache, 2012). The goals of attaining personal responsibility are "developing independence and interdependence, self-directedness, and responsibility for learning" so students can function in a broader context (Boud, 2012, p. 8). Many reasons are cited for the "lack of civility" among youth including access to technology, the breakdown of the nuclear family unit, and lack of community norms (Lewis et al., 2012), which can translate into an apathetic attitude. Overcoming these potential deficits requires an ethic of care and a fervent reflection on

what an individual feels obligated to do to solve a problem (Furman, 2012; Noddings, 2013; Venezuela, 2013).

Social Responsibility

Social responsibility is an ethical framework that contends that an individual person has an obligation to act in the best interest of the whole society (Berman & LeFarge, 1993). Students' social responsibility is contingent upon a certain level of personal responsibility. By showing responsibility for their actions, students are inextricably linked to their school context and become active participants in ameliorating social issues plaguing their learning environments (Rawls, 1999). In a modern world where self-interest drives individual actions, acting in a socially responsible insures that the learning environment is not only inclusive, but safe as well (Berman & LeFarge, 1993; Wentzel, 1991). Although critics contend that social responsibility is the antithesis of competition, it actually creates specific purpose for each student, especially those who are traditionally marginalized (Gomez, 1996; Noddings, 2005). Scholars note that everyone is connected to one another to varying degrees (Noddings, 2005) and for that reason, hold a significant level of responsibility in ensuring the maintenance of the greater good.

Globalization

In order for American schools to prepare students to compete globally, a universal framework is necessary. Achieve, Inc. (2005) asserts, "school is now the frontline in America's battle to remain competitive on the...international economic stage" (as cited in Spring, 2008, p. 331). The concept of globalization involves the convergence of

economic, cultural, technological, and political processes on an international scale (Bloom, 2004; Brooks & Normore, 2010; Singh, 2004).

Globalization of education is not meant to imply that societies and communities must mandate common systems of learning where all schools are the same (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). From this perspective, schools become laboratories that thrive off of the differences within the world community and create critical opportunities for students' to develop new knowledge. Globalization is a driving force in the world's economy because it recognizes knowledge and information as a key resource (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002; Phillips & Ochs, 2010). The globalization of knowledge allows for the free exchange of information and resources globally to benefit different cultures and communities in different ways. Globalization does not encourage an intense push toward "cultural homogeneity" throughout education (Dale, 2000), but rather acknowledges the value in the diversity within public schools.

The changing cultural trends in 21st century schools require an examination of systemic global, local, and academic issues. Brooks and Normore (2010) coined the term "glocalization" as a way to bridge the broad perspective of a global agenda with a more narrow view on local issues, including education. Glocalization, formed from the terms globalization and localization, can help educational practitioners in developing their practice and pedagogy from local, national, and global standpoints. Knowledge and information typically shaped by both national and local institutions are key to a functioning global economy, which in turn shapes our schools and educational opportunities (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002). It is essential for schools, as complex social

institutions, to understand how people from different communities create meaning, learn, and develop differently within various contexts (Rogoff, 2003).

Intelligence and Learning

Learning has a significant impact on both formal and informal educational structures. The topic of learning has been understood and explained in different ways according to various fields of study, cultural norms, and social expectations. Educators have learned to adapt to a system that disregards the complexities of students' identities concerning socioeconomic status, race, religion, gender, ability, and language. Regardless of these differences, each student deserves an adequate and meaningful individualized educational experience (Tomlinson, 2001) that addresses different needs and learning styles. Adler (2013) maintains, that "giving all of our children the *same* education, especially when that 'sameness' is defined in a model of intellectual sameness, cannot equalize the quality of education" (p. 190). In order to maximize impact, learning should be aligned to students' intelligences, which will require educators to redefine learning (Christensen, Horn, & Johnson, 2008).

The process of learning involves repetition, experience, and exposure. Dewey (1938) states, that learning is the development of skills and knowledge through repeated experience. One's ability to learn is dependent not only upon the frequency of exposure to an activity or event, but also the clarity of instruction (or example) and consistency of study (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). Lombardi (2007) states that authentic learning "focuses on real-world, complex problems and their solutions" (p. 2). It represents a deep-rooted alteration of an individual's emotional and cognitive capacity to

manage diverse situations (Lombardi, 2007; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Bandura (1986) believes that authentic learning is also dependent upon attention, retention, and reproduction, which are all affected to a large extent by the personal characteristics of the participant observer. Learning equips individuals to be independent critical thinkers and engage in inquiry and exploration.

Common school practice of instruction and methods of assessment reflect a fixed mindset by focusing on academic outcomes and not processes. Bransford et al. (2000) maintains that “new ideas about ways to facilitate learning—and about who is most capable of learning—can powerfully affect the quality of people’s lives” (p. 5). Being a successful learner is not always about simply being smart. Learning reflects a process of observations and reproduction and occurs through observing both behaviors and consequences of behaviors, extracting information from each situation, and a reenactment of the learned behavior to reinforce the learning (Bandura, 1986; Dewey, 1938; Vygotsky, 1978). In facilitating learning in the classroom, each phase of the process should involve a progression of making abstract concepts and information incrementally more concrete (Bransford & Donovan, 2004; Bransford et al., 2000; Kliebard, 1982), which is associated with a growth mindset. Student learners are not passive recipients of information. They are connected to the environments and behaviors, which influence their knowledge making. Bandura (1986) coined this concept as “reciprocal determinism” (Williams & Williams, 2010, p. 453)

Many of the instructional strategies and programs used in schools have very narrow parameters about what knowledge is the most valuable and are not conducive to

assessing multiple intelligences (Jacobs, 2010; Rogoff, 2003). The definitions of intelligence are founded in the concepts of cognitive capacity, application, functionality, environmental context, and reasoning (Sternberg et al., 2001). What qualities are desirable differ according to communities and cultural traditions. Successful acquisition of intelligence hinges on one's socio-cultural environment and personal perception (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2004; Rogoff, 2003). For example, Siegler and Alibali (2005) found that among four different cultures, schooling and instruction were conducted in four different ways. The skills and competencies students were expected to demonstrate were reflective of their cultural and tribal norms. In order for schooling and instruction to be effective and authentic, educational practitioners should embody a more cultural relativist approach to managing planning and instruction (Hoffman, 2009; Durlak et al., 2011; Gurung, 2009).

21st Century Schools

The need to be innovative within the 21st century thematic parameters and comply with federal and state legislation creates tension among instructional leadership, teachers, and students (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008). Popular among education reform movements is the call for change concerning revising teaching methods and curriculum to meet the diverse needs of an information-age society (Schlechy, 2001; Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008). The 21st century school movement is an effort by practitioners to provide students with the essential skills to exist and thrive in a rapidly changing world (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Jackson & Davis, 2000). Breaking down the barriers of access and information among nations and socio-cultural communities is central to 21st century educational

ideology. It is incumbent on educational practitioners to prepare diverse student populations to achieve success in today's world around specific skills, including life and career skills, learning and innovation skills, information, media, and technology skills (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). According to the 21st century framework, integrating these anticipated proficiencies within learning standards and assessments, curriculum and instruction, instructor training modules, and the learning environment, adds a depth of rigor and practical application to student learning (Jackson & Davis, 2000; Partnership, 2014).

Critics of this model “believe that a curriculum that stresses depth over breadth of knowledge will result in students who do not possess essential knowledge” of fundamental academic skills (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008, p. 187). Proponents of 21st century themes argue that when students become the drivers of their own instruction it actually enhances their capacity to contextualize and internalize content because of their participation and engagement with the material (Jean-Marie, Brooks, & Normore, 2009; Sharan & Tan, 2008). Instructional designs created around a progressive 21st century focus are largely constructivist in nature and encourage students’ to use their minds as tools (Kafai, 2006).

Experiential Learning

Creating opportunities for exploration and experiential learning in schools enhances the practitioners’ capacity to understand the social dynamics that impact education and learning (Dewey, 1938; Cohen, 2006). Butin (2007) states that the “humbling irony” (p. 177) is that while many of today’s socioeconomic conditions call

for greater equity, schools are moving away from tackling these fundamental issues. An emphasis on the “here-and-now concrete experiences” allows students an opportunity to immediately confirm and test abstractions (Kolb, 2014, p. xxii). Just as action research engages participants in problem solving and follow-up activism (Furman, 2012; Stringer, 2007), experiential learning creates similar opportunities for student engagement in problem solving and activism (Dewey, 1938). Scholars Kolb, Boyatzis, and Mainemelis (2001) state, “each dimension of the learning process presents us with a choice” (p. 4) of how we best resolve challenges based on past experiences, preferences, and our present environments. Experiential learning models are founded on the premise that effective learning reflects a constant situational and interactive approach to solving individual and complex problems within their own world.

Service Learning

Since there is no service learning policy to serve as a guide for school staff, a sizable number of schools still experience issues in bridging the gap between community and school-based social issues (Wilczenski & Coomey, 2007; Schutz, 2006). Service-learning is one strategy schools can use to overcome such a challenge. Scholars continue to disagree on a definition of service-learning because its components differ depending upon the context (i.e., P-8 schools, 9-12 schools, and higher education) (Conrad & Hedin, 1991; Veltri, 2008). In general, Cipolle (2004) maintains that service-learning is the thoughtful and active engagement in service that “is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum” (p. 12). In terms of structure, service-learning has been variously described as a model, a program, a pedagogy, and a curriculum (Billing, 2000) and is

often confused with the act of community service (Whitehead & Kitzrow, 2010). Professional literature does show three key factors that are necessary in order to implement service learning in K-12 contexts: teacher cultural competence, purposeful social goals and academic aims, and clear integration of academic content with service (Cipolle, 2010; Veltri, 2008; Billing, 2000; Gomez, 1996). However, the definitional ambiguities have obstructed adequate implementation in P-12 schools amidst depleting resources and attention given to high-stakes testing as mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

In order for schools to achieve the goal of cultivating civically responsible citizens, educational institutions must first consciously give students experiential learning opportunities to build those critical skills and knowledge base (Dewey, 1938). Engagement in service-learning has shown to have a positive impact on student academic performance and social development while adequately preparing them to become actively engaged citizens (Gomez, 1996) in their schools, residential communities, and broader social world.

Democracy and Citizenship

Public education remains one of the central drivers of an effective democratic society (Greig, Taylor, & MacKay, 2012). If practitioners are to prepare students to embark on what Counts (2013) calls, “a new social order,” (p. 45), it must center on the principles of democracy, justice, and citizenship. Ideally, the process for achieving socially just environments should be democratic, since political values are inextricably linked to educational and social activity (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005). Matters of

citizenship, empowerment, and broader social action represent the focal points and long-term goals of social programming and progressive learning in schools (Birdwell, Scott, & Horley, 2013; Jarrett & Stenhouse, 2011). How we shape and mold the next generation of active citizens for our social world is in large part the work of schools (Elias et al., 1997). Kiwan (2007) states, that

“we aim at no less than a change in the political culture of this country ... for people to think of themselves as active citizens, willing, able and equipped to have an influence in public life ... and to extend radically to young people the best in existing traditions of community involvement and public service, and to make them individually confident in finding new forms of involvement and action among themselves (p. 224).

In general, citizenship embodies the relationship between the concepts of rights and responsibilities (Lawson, 2001) and remains a questionable topic because it implies an underlying assumption of shared values and a common good (Young, 2003).

Establishing a generic concept of citizenship is difficult because it varies according to the political context. Democracy represents one end of the political continuum and can only be maintained if people are capable of actively participating through elections (Kiwan, 2007). Democratic citizenship requires the capacity to critically engage in the analysis of complex issues in an informed way (Westheimer & Kahne, 2000). Cohen (2006) states, “...when ... social, emotional, and ethical education is integrated ..., educators can hone the essential academic and social skills, understanding, and dispositions that support

effective participation in a democracy” to suggest that academia and social learning are equally important in reinforcing skills that promote citizenship (p. 202).

Social Justice Education

Social justice is the notion that each citizen is entitled to social, economic, and political rights through the fair and equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges within a society (Dantley & Tillman, 2010; Rawls, 1999). Every student is entitled to equal basic liberties and rights (Vincent, 2003). How we perceive social justice and its importance within our daily lives is impacted by our moral and political views and how we understand issues related to advantaged and marginalized citizens within society (Brown, 2004; Shields, 2004). In order to focus on creating educational environments committed to socially just practice, practitioners must stop and concentrate on that very objective (Bell, 2007) and on the forms of oppression that inundate institutions of learning (Burke, 2011). Starratt (1994) proposed that the basis of social justice education should be understood within an ethical framework that challenges the status quo of unethical behavior that has negatively affected how our students perceive and experience education (as cited in Dantley and Tillman, 2010).

Equal opportunity refers to each student’s right to an equal education. The concept of ‘equitable opportunities’ is ambiguous within academic institutions as there is no distinct strategy to achieve this outcome (Furman & Shields, 2005; Theoharis, 2007). In terms of the daily functions of schools, the universally discussed ideas of ‘equity’ and ‘equality’ should drive school philosophy and institutional climate (Shields, 2004). It is important to note Gutierrez and Jaramillo’s (2006) feeling that “change as a measure of

incremental social progress is insufficient in gauging transformation in the nation's...social fabric...vis-à-vis the legacy of racial, social, and economic inequities and hierarchies" (p. 177). Breaking down barriers to learning, increasing access to information, and rebuilding social consciousness is key to shifting the perspectives and practices of academic institutions.

Democratic institutions based on social justice principles encourage students to advocate for themselves and their peers (Kumashiro, 2004). Educating for social justice is purposeful and contributes to a high quality learning environment. Teachers and students work collaboratively to overcome the challenges of a marginalizing school dynamic through both academic curriculum and structured social programs, such as the Origins Developmental Designs Program (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007; Hough, 2011; Shields, 2004; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). Operating within a social justice mindset means considering issues related to privilege, power, and appreciating diversity. The efficacy of a socially just environment can be determined by the extent to which practitioners focus systemic differences as opposed to individual differences in race, class, gender, religion, or ethnicity. (Banks, 2004; Bell, 2007). The goal of thinking about social justice on a macro level is to overcome limitations of a deficit thinking model and challenge the inequities of social systems. (Bogotch, 2002; MacLeod, 1995).

Students' social justice belief systems should also translate through their performance and behaviors. Demonstrating a social justice mindset through a connection between school and their lived experiences is the indicator of student mastery (Dewey, 1938). Moller and Vedoy (2013) claim that there are challenges to getting students to

fully understand social justice, especially the socioeconomically privileged. School leaders for social justice have to create an environment where socially just concepts and frameworks are naturally a part of dialogue, integrated into the curriculum, and modeled by behavior from staff and students (Furman, 2012). Students can learn to show a social justice mindset through a cycle of action and reflection, mature personal and interpersonal skills, critical thinking and analytical problem solving capabilities, and a commitment to some facet of social change either internally or externally of the school context (Dolby, 2012).

Academic Standardization

Within the last two decades, K-12 education in the United States has placed an intense focus on measurable performance outcomes mandated by federal and state legislation in the form of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) (Lee & Reeves, 2012; NJDOE, 2015b). A demand for the standardization of learning seems to be a step back to more traditional schooling and back-to-basics instruction (Kohn, 2000). Although advocates fight for increased levels of accountability and measurable outcomes in public schools (Kohn, 2000; Phelps, 2003), society's reliance on standardized testing and core academic content can't easily assess creativity, resiliency, effort, or morality (McNeil, 2002). Nevertheless, these skills are central to adolescent development. However, if we can get beyond the idea that one way of educating is necessarily best "we can consider possibilities of other ways" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 17). Practitioners should challenge the ways different "subjects receive and

respond to the call for common standards and standardized tests” because this creates a hierarchy for what knowledge is perceived as more valuable (Siskin, 2013, p. 270).

Curriculum and Learning Standards

Standards-based evaluations and assessments have become a pressing concern. Goodwin (2010) states, that “curriculum embodies society’s implicit consensus around what is worth knowing” (p. 311). Disparities between how student success is measured in tested versus non-tested subjects are a point of contention for practitioners (Phelps, 2003). Siskin (2013) asserts, “we need to examine the ways in which different subjects receive and respond to the call for common standards and standardized tests” (p. 270). Academic goals and outcomes should align to standards-based instruction, but without standardizing the process (Jacobs, 2010). Accessing a broad range of disciplines encourages higher and more frequent levels of critical thinking and open-mindedness. By balancing instruction of specially designed curriculum, such as Physics or Calculus, with progressive instructional content we can begin to focus on learning concepts such as collaborative problem solving, real world situational analysis, and exploration of global issues rather than just prioritizing academic over social learning (Jacobs, 2010; Tyler, 2013). “Contemporary life is so complex and because life is continually changing,” it is important to focus educational efforts equally on the practical academic and social aspects of real life (Tyler, 2013, p. 62).

The issues around curriculum development and implementation are varied and multi-dimensional. One of the most significant challenges of curriculum and instruction is determining *what* knowledge is worth knowing and *who* makes that determination

(Eisner, 2013). Despite the recent implementation of the Common Core, traditional education has relied on somewhat archaic notions of acceptable academic standards as learning is largely linear and based on academic deliverables (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lee & Reeves, 2012). Jacobs (2010) contends that the effects of the late 19th century Committee of Ten, which encouraged educational standardization in the 1800s, is still prevalent today. Progressive approaches to education, such as 21st century schools and Niguidula's (2010) notion of sustainable education, contest the strict adherence to traditional subjects like Calculus and Classic Literature with hopes of better preparing students to "deal effectively with the critical problems of contemporary life" (Tyler, 2013, p. 60). In order to keep pace with growing educational trends, practitioners should provide meaningful and productive learning environments through a social justice lens (Anyon, 1980; Prieto, 2009; Sternberg, 1995; Sternberg & Spear-Swerling, 1996).

The increasingly globalized world has prompted local, state, and federal governments to incorporate learning standards that address the social and academic needs of students. Tyler (2013) and Eisner (2013) assert that a large amount of failed school reform deals with schools not having clearly defined goals and/or objectives aligned to a mission. All schools claim to have a priority of providing an equal education. However, much of what is experienced in practice counters this very assertion to the detriment of student learning (Nodding, 2013). Jacobs (2010) mentions that an inherent challenge in developing any school curriculum is keeping pace with the growing individualistic needs of our students and families. As varying needs emerge, educators must be able to modify their own perspectives to keep pace. Goodwin (2010) and Thorton (2013) urge

practitioners to incorporate different points of view into current curriculum to offer students a more inclusive learning environment. Curriculum should incorporate components that challenge students' ways of thinking and experiencing academia while fostering an appreciation and value of the broader social context that influences content knowledge and skills (Jacobs, 2010; Tyler, 2013; Young, 2003). Curriculum reform demands attention to details that have the potential to enhance meaningful educational experience for students. Curriculum is not a fixed *thing*; it is a process. A well-designed and implemented curriculum is likely to increase student achievement.

Embedded Curriculum

Embedded curriculum refers to the integration of interdisciplinary skills and information within a structured curricular design (Rakow, 2008). A multidisciplinary curriculum regularly merges knowledge, skills, and dispositions into core content themes (Jacobs, 2010). Fusion among subject areas can range from the inclusion of basic skills, such as attitude and work ethic, to a more complex focus on inquiry that streams core academic material with more novel instructional approaches (Wineburg & Grossman, 2000). Embedding the curriculum begins with broad questions and topics integrating core content concepts from multiple disciplines and can take the form of thematic units, project-based learning, learning centers, or service learning (Drake & Burns, 2004; Rakow, 2008).

Wiggins & McTighe (2005) suggest that the most effective integrated curriculum is developed through backward planning or beginning with the end in mind. This design scheme is critical in differentiating instruction and embedding supplementary

components within core academic curriculum. Districts, schools, or instructors make decisions about how to purposefully integrate information to enhance the learning experiences of students (Wineburg & Grossman, 2000). Embedded curriculum, as an instructional instrument in the form of teachers' guides, textbooks, novels, and assessments, is the result of an interconnected vision of how core subjects are related and contextualized within a broader scope. An authentic and sustainable method of curriculum development is a collaborative effort between instructors and students and serves the interests and learning needs of both parties (McIntyre, Rosebery, & Gonzalez, 2001).

National Core Curriculum Content Standards

With much debate regarding the uniformity of standards throughout the nation, state and federal policy makers, in addition to district personnel, have suggested an answer to this dilemma—Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS), known as the Common Core, and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). The United States Department of Education (USDOE) states that the standards themselves are based on rigorous content and the applicability of higher order thinking skills (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). The CCCS are a set of mathematics and literacy-based learning guidelines intended to prepare students for college and career readiness. Prior to the adoption of the uniform CCCS, each state developed and implemented their own academic objectives and plans (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2012; Wohlstetter, Houston, & Buck, 2015). Implementation of the standards has proven to be a challenge despite the development of CCCS as a means of

addressing teachers' requests for greater consistency. Financial limitations and an already tight fiscal budget in most states and districts, have created stressful situations for school leadership (Murphy, Regenstein, McNamara, 2012).

New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS)

Establishing state-based core curriculum content standards has been a strategy to standardize learning, creating a more equitable system based on quantitative measurements. Adopted in 1996, New Jersey's CCCS are a set of learning standards that detail the critical competencies and skills students should embody organized by grades (NJDOE, 2015b). The framework used to create the subject standards was developed in the spirit of the 1875 New Jersey Constitution when the state promised to provide a "thorough and efficient" education to all students (NJDOE, 2015b). In order to create comprehensive learning goals reflective of diverse perspectives, a panel of teachers, administrators, parents, students, higher education representatives, business, and community members collectively informed the process.

Literacy. Competitive international trends inform how institutions, such as schools, respond to emergent changes. The goal for reading and literacy instruction and comprehension is to expand beyond basic understanding of texts to better encompass students' prior knowledge and lived experiences, with the expectation of new understanding (Hock, Brasseur-Hock, & Deshler, 2015). NJCCCS illustrate the same sentiment through the belief that language experiences should show support for students' intellectual, social, and emotional growth (NJDOE, 2015b). According to this set of standards, literacy includes five connected, but complementary, strands that guide the

development of effective classroom instruction: critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, joy, and self-illumination (NJDOE, 2015b). Individualized literacy programs and instruction that are contextualized and based on students' environments and experiences increase student retention (Hock, Brasseur-Hock, & Deshler, 2015). By adopting this philosophy, practitioners learn to create space and meaning for each student.

New Jersey's CCCS is based on four philosophies that combine the social and academic components of effective instruction and learning, and include:

- literacy as an active process for constructing meaning
- literacy develops a social context
- language ability increases the complexity of ways language can be used to communicate
- literacy is only useful if being used and explored (NJDOE, 2014b).

Student abilities are measured through the performance of the following skills: thinking logically, expressing ideas, formulating and answering questions, and the ability to search for, organize, evaluate, and apply information (NJDOE, 2015b). In our changing world, literacy is more than just reading and writing, but is also a means of preparing students for college and career readiness while teaching students about complex social dynamics (Blackledge, 2000; Hull & Schultz, 2001).

Social studies. Since students' lives are heavily affected by the availability of technology in the Digital Age, there is a pressing need for schools and leadership to respond to their greater understanding of a global world through knowledge of social

studies and history (Beetham & Sharpe, 2013; Jacobs, 2010; NJDOE, 2015b). NJCCCS incorporates expectations for learning social studies skills within the literacy classification. The specific social studies components build on literacy proficiency while focusing on drawing a connection between past, present, and future people, places, and events. Social studies courses give students a look into the history and transformation of our nation in a social context. Successful social studies instruction means that students embody the following competencies: civic mindedness, global awareness, social responsibility, informed decision making, value diversity, promote cultural understanding, and recognize implications for our global economy (NJDOE, 2015b). Each learning strand is guided by an essential question and focused on individuals, groups and societies, regional/social contexts, values, norms and perspectives, and history/culture (NJDOE, 2015b). Opportunities to engage in “intellectually rich” work in social studies classrooms enhances students’ thoughtful participation in a democracy and ability to take ownership and responsibility for their actions (Conklin, 2014, p. 475).

Math. The changing needs of the world have prompted an overhaul of the once restrictive view on mathematics education that focused on math for school and not math for real life (Cogan, Schmidt, & Wiley, 2001; NJDOE, 2015a). Math education in the United States has become more coherent and specialized in order to compete globally and enhance students’ mathematical performance in schools nationwide (English & Kirshner, 2010; NJDOE, 2015a). With an emphasis on “clarity and specificity” rather than breadth of information, the objectives for math education have been established with a broad vision in mind and not individual Anchor Standards like other subjects (NJDOE, 2015a,

para. 3). NJCCCS states that the ultimate goals for math instruction are to develop critical reasoning, describe numerical relationships, and analyze concepts (NJDOE, 2015b, para. 1). According to Schmidt, Houang, and Cogan (2002), high-quality math standards have drawn from international models and best practices, the State Department of Education, professional organizations, and the general public, to design instruction that highlights conceptual understanding and basic arithmetic number sense. Unlike ELA/literacy standards, the math learning expectations are based in research that addresses how students learn math and in what ways the content will prepare them for their future in college, professional career, or real-life (Burns, 2013; Phillips & Wong, 2010).

Science. Science and technology are an integral part of modern living. In a heavily standardized testing academic environment, subjects such as science and technology are often taught superficially simply to cover the material. However, the process of science involves in depth critical thinking and analysis of real world and manufactured scientific phenomena (NGSS, 2013; Schraw, Crippen, & Hartley, 2006). Similar to math, there is a growing concern regarding the disparities between American student performance on science assessments in comparison to other nations (Mullis, Martin, Gonzalez, & Chrostowski, 2004). Science is embedded within the Literacy Common Core Standards and addresses technical knowledge and expectations for the construction of formal reports based on claims, evidence, and reasoning. In 2013, a new set of national learning standards, called the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), was created and implemented as a means to engage students with the fundamental science questions and equip them with the tools to explore and answer them (National

Research Council, 2012). Developed by a team of 26 state representatives, NGSS reflect a shift toward conceptual science education through the incorporation of engineering and technology and 21st century college and career readiness (NGSS, 2013). Current trends in science education based on the NGSS build coherently between grades K-12 and are explicitly described as “student performance expectations not—curriculum” (NGSS, 2013, p. 2).

District Curriculum Maps

National and state learning standards are a set of learning expectations that districts can use to develop local curriculum maps. Curriculum maps are a tool used by many district personnel to guide teaching and learning at the school level. Curriculum mapping is a process used to create continuity of learning between different grade levels based on a set of learning standards. The purpose is to ensure that there are no gaps or redundancies in student learning. Similar to the curriculum process, mapping is not a spectator sport. Jacobs (2010) stresses the need for districts to synthesize various learning models and create a framework for having clear systems of prerequisites for prior learning, best practices for planning and instruction, and expectations for student knowledge. Curriculum maps are a living instructional tool. Mapping demands teachers’ ongoing preparation and active participation” (Hale, 2008, p. xv). Creative input on this instrument generates conversations between teachers, students, and administrators about knowledge acquisition and assessment (Hale, 2008; Jacobs, 2010; Jacobs & Johnson, 2009; Udelofen, 2005).

Theoretical Foundations

A wealth of scholarly literature has been written about curriculum and social justice. Although there are a variety of curriculum theories, Kliebard's (1982) curriculum theory provides a unique perspective in understanding the real life application of academic knowledge.

Kliebard's (1982) Curriculum Theory

Curriculum is a broadly defined term described as the total experiences that impact students' learning as well as a set of learning goals (Reys, Reys, Lapan, Holliday, & Wasman, 2003), planned or unplanned learning opportunities, and a set of skills that reflect specific attitudes about acquiring knowledge (Kelly, 2009). One consistency throughout research studies is that curriculum outlines what is expected in terms of student outcomes and academic competencies. Kliebard's (1982) theoretical premise is the idea that curriculum, as a theory, is specific to a field of study and continues to evolve according to a larger educational agenda. Central to this premise is the question of "what should we teach" and how should it be taught (p. 12)?

The deeply entrenched tradition of the right way of teaching and the existence of a universal truth, as proposed by the Education Association's Committee of Ten in 1893, limits creativity and the application of knowledge and skills. Despite a focus on academics and core content material, it is inevitable that students will identify more self-guided pathways to success given their personal strengths or interests. To address this concern, Kliebard (1982) proposes the use of differentiated curriculum to meet the unique

learning and experiential needs of students embarking on diverse educational and/or professional pathways.

Student learning is not confined to the classroom and schools. In 1982, psychologist W. C. Schutz stated, “it is through symbols that we give meaning to an originally intransparent reality” (as cited by Grey & Antonacopoulou, 2004, p. 344). Learners attach individualized meaning to abstractions based on their lived experiences and prior knowledge. Sharing this sentiment, Kliebard’s (1982) curriculum theory claims that the process of learning is the transference of metaphorical meaning from that which is abstract to what is more familiar and should be based on an individual’s prior knowledge. Metaphors, as a linguistic tool, emphasize a journey between the known and the unknown and “represent a fundamental way that human beings have evolved to express and organize their world” (Kliebard, 1982, p. 13). This curriculum theory states that knowledge-making emerges from a constant interplay between what we know to be real and the less familiar creating levels of meaning for our own symbols. Essentially, Kliebard (1982) encourages practitioners to treat the educational experience as a journey through which students create their own knowledge instead of memorizing and repeating information offered by instructors based on society’s view of what knowledge is valuable.

In isolation, Kliebard’s (1982) curriculum theory provides a basis and rationale for determining what students should know. What the theory does not clarify is how this type of learning can be accomplished or why. For that, this study relied on Rawls’ (1999) version of the social justice theory and Bandura’s (1986) social-cognitive theory. Rawls’

(1999) theory, referred to as the justice of fairness, suggests that “in a just society the liberties of equal citizenship are taken as settled; 3 the rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests (p. 4). There is also a focus on ensuring the care of the least advantaged populations within society. This theory establishes the rationale for why it is important to consider the diverse needs of all students when planning and carrying out instruction.

Bandura’s (1986) social-cognitive theory contends that people do not inherently learn an activity through success or failure, or pass/fail in the academic world, but by how frequently and in what ways they interact with others (Bandura, 1986). Providing learners with frequent, varied, and personalized opportunities to engage with academic content is one strategy practitioners can use to achieve a high quality school social climate. Although Bandura’s latter theories do not necessarily align with the goals of this research, the social cognitive theory coupled with Rawls’ (1999) theory of social justice provide a meaningful context for how students learn and mimic social behavior and their responsibility for contributing their knowledge for the greater good of their schools, communities, and social world.

Rawls’ (1999) Social Justice Theory

Issues of equity and access are deeply entrenched within our system of education. Rury and Saatcioglu (2011) mention that in a society where great socioeconomic disparities exist, suburban schools have essentially “hoarded” the advantages of access to educational resources (p. 308). The true concern is not whether or not suburban schools are entitled to any advantages, since each student is guaranteed the right to a free and

adequate public school education. The question is, what responsibilities do students within these districts have to serve and demonstrate social responsibility?

The first principle of Rawls' (1999) theory of social justice, the liberty principle, states that ensuring basic rights and liberties to all people is an essential goal for each citizen. The second principle, the equality principle, charges individuals who are advantaged to act in the best interest of those who are not. This could range in impact from providing a pencil to a classmate who does not have one to volunteering in a soup kitchen to serve the homeless. It is how we use our social skills to ensure the advancement of everyone that is central to this theory. According to Rawls' (1999), students are responsible for showing responsibility for themselves and their actions and contributing responsibly to their social contexts.

Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognition refers to the ways that people observe and learn behaviors. Observing a model can either prompt us to engage in a certain behavior in the future or refrain from action based on the perceived consequences (Bandura, 1986). In schools, students are provided with experiences that require them to demonstrate knowledge on a pass/fail system, such as tests, quizzes, and classroom exit slips. Bandura (1986) contends that there is value in learning, academically and socially, through activities beyond the aforementioned scope. For example, through rote memorization students learn how to produce, but not how to interact and actively participate or engage. Although curriculum is a loosely defined term that guides the course of instruction within schools, it is the

hidden curriculum that also teaches students what is deemed more appropriate and less appropriate in terms of mindsets and ideologies (Anyon, 1980).

Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory provides a way of understanding how students learn the behaviors suggested by Rawls (1999). According to Bandura's (1986) theory, students learn through observation of and interactions with their social contexts. Rawls' (1999) theory suggests that students who experience some level of privilege are responsible for considering the needs of the greater good and using their advantage to benefit others. Bandura's (1986) claim explains how students are expected to obtain the skills to carry out this level of personal and social responsibility. As such, the academic curriculum is just one aspect of the myriad of factors that influence student development. Bandura (1986) highlights the importance of considering that students acquire the social skills necessary to demonstrate personal responsibility, social responsibility, and the ability to operate within a social justice mindset from their belonging to and participation in a variety of social contexts.

Limitations in the Literature

Although the literature provides an extensive overview of the necessity and importance of social justice, a number of limitations are present in the existing body of research.

Suburban Context

The first of these limitations lies in the failure to acknowledge the unique experiences and issues related to social justice in wealthier, suburban contexts. Due to profound and complex deficiency beliefs, the variables and factors that both affect and

are affected by engaging in social learning may be trivialized and overlooked within these districts. The studies by Gomez (1996), Moore and Sandholtz (1999), and Veltri (2008) use urban school districts as their framework, but the transferability of concepts and ideas to this study is limited because of the clear contextual differences. Current literature is based on an assumption that poorer districts and marginalized students benefit more from instruction, including topics of justice and responsibility. The lack of availability of research situated in contexts that were similar to this study was a limitation. However, the general core concepts and recommendations for practice that are present within the current body of literature were used to inform this study's literature review.

Methodology

The research design of previous studies is also a limitation of the literature. Many of the cited studies on progressive education, social learning, and social justice education do not include teacher voice within their studies. Kirk and MacDonald (2001) contend that teacher voice is important, especially on matters related to curriculum and implementation. Although these projects provide valuable information, the perspectives of teachers would add a critical and arguably necessary dimension in gaining a holistic view of the phenomena. The validity of certain claims may be compromised given the specific role and perspective of researchers. Despite this void, the research provided useful information about students' academic development, social development, and social justice education and their implications for practice.

Summary

Despite the small number of research studies focusing on issues related to social justice in suburban schools districts, it is generally accepted that a more globalized nation demands new, differentiated, and individualized approach to curriculum design and instruction, including a focus on the social, emotional, and intellectual needs of students (Bloom, 2004; Singh, 2004). As a philosophy, social learning offers students a learning experience that highlights the importance of social and personal responsibility as a member of a society. By reviewing the research on curriculum, social learning, and social justice, this chapter provided a detailed context to understand this qualitative research study.

Chapter 3

Methodology

In this chapter, the rationale for selecting the qualitative research methodology for my study is described. The process of qualitative research is an appropriate design for my examination of how the concepts of personal responsibility, social responsibility, and social justice are embedded and measured within academic curriculum. The study includes an investigation of teachers' perceptions of the influence of socially embedded curriculum on students' development. Understanding the integration of social concepts in academic curriculum and how a focus on educating the whole child influences students' mindsets can enhance the dual focus of academic and social learning as an instructional pedagogy. For teachers and school administrators, this in-depth knowledge of the importance of educating for social justice can aid in the creation and maintenance of a well-balanced school climate.

First, I detail the qualitative research methods used to gather data. Each component of the research is based on a specific qualitative research design. Beginning with a review of the research method and design, this chapter also includes a description of the methods and procedures used to collect and analyze data for this study. In this chapter, I also identify the sample population and methods used to determine the sample, as well as the process used for coding the data in relationship to the research questions and literature review. Issues related to trustworthiness of the instrumentation and design along with ethical considerations will conclude this chapter.

Qualitative Research

Research designs are a plan for the procedures that guide a study from broad assumptions and topics to more specific data collection methods and analyses (Creswell, 2013). The strength of the design guides the direction of the research study. A good design “promotes efficient and successful functioning while a flawed design leads to poor operation” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 2). The selection of an appropriate research design is based on the problem central to the study or social phenomena, intended audience, and both the perspective and experiences of the researcher (Creswell, 2013). How the research design addresses the relationships between concepts or variables also determines the amount of money, material resources, and time that will be needed to successfully carry out the objectives of the study (Miller & Salkind, 2002). Relying on minimal resources, I conducted a traditional descriptive qualitative research design rooted in empiricism, which is the development of knowledge through direct experience in the field (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Qualitative research takes readers on a journey into participants’ worlds by studying diverse social phenomenon and the intricacies of the social world.

For this study, a quantitative research design would limit a reader’s understanding of the concepts of social responsibility, personal responsibility, and social justice. In this study, I utilized a qualitative methodology that seeks to explore and make sense of the creation of meaning in social contexts to avoid this potential barrier (Merriam, 2014). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), this methodology draws from diverse perspectives, including sociology, anthropology, politics, linguistics, and philosophy.

There is no singularly accepted methodology for carrying out qualitative research (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). The uncertainty of qualitative research continues because new approaches, conceptual frameworks, and models are constantly emerging (Savin-Baden & Major, 2010). Yet, this approach to research is a powerful, interactive tool used in gaining in-depth insight on social phenomena, as it gleans meaning directly from participants in their natural setting (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

I selected a general qualitative approach for this research study because more specific approaches such as, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography, did not align with the purpose and sample of the research study. Unlike quantitative research, which attempts to measure and predict, the purpose of qualitative research is to describe and interpret data in an effort to shape the way people think, which is why it is the most relevant for this study. If carried out effectively, qualitative research should illustrate the complexity and ambiguity of “real life” (Rubin & Rubin, 2011), through the use of rich and descriptive language. Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, and Ormston (2013) state that the use of qualitative research addresses issues related to social policies. The implications of social research can “be relevant to national, local, or institutional concerns” across the field of education (p. 25). The goal of this research study was to uncover the possible hidden curriculum used for instruction and add a depth of understanding to the phenomenon of social learning and social justice in public schools. Since, educational public policy guides teaching and instruction, the benefits of utilizing a qualitative research methodology can have a direct impact on practice and learning in the school context.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the ways in which the concepts of personal responsibility and social responsibility are embedded in math, language arts, science, and social studies curriculum and learning standards. An additional goal was to explore 8th grade educators' perceptions of how socially embedded academic curriculum influences students' development of personal responsibility, social responsibility, and social justice at a New Jersey public middle school.

Research Questions

My research explored issues of embedded curriculum and middle school teachers' perceptions of student behavior. Specifically, I investigated how those behaviors are a result of a social justice mindset through the following research questions:

1. In what ways are the concepts of social responsibility and personal responsibility embedded within core academic curriculum?
2. How are the concepts of social responsibility and personal responsibility measured within core academic curriculum?
3. How do 8th grade teachers perceive the influence of curriculum on their students' development of personal responsibility, social responsibility, and social justice?

To examine these questions, I utilized a general qualitative approach, which allowed me to create meaning through different types of qualitative data. The goal of this approach was to focus on "presenting people's views, interactions, and values" in addition uncovering the value in the hidden curriculum (Atkins & Wallace, 2012, p. 22).

Research questions emerged from my experience as a math and social-emotional learning instructor, the implementation of state character education standards, and fundamentals of qualitative research. The research questions are significant because of the increasing competition in the educational market from charter and private schools. Specialized schools and programs have access to resources that are not as readily available to public institutions that are financed solely through public capital. School leaders have to creatively use resources in order to provide students with a cutting-edge and meaningful learning experience.

Education reform has proven largely unsuccessful because it has been unable to adequately assess the social-emotional challenges of students and develop an informed action plan to meet those needs within the current parameters of academic expectations. Answers to these research questions will provide school leaders and teachers with insight that can help them to cultivate high quality social and academic school climates.

Sampling

The discussion of sampling and sample sizes within qualitative research has remained relatively limited among even widely used academic databases (e.g. ERIC) (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). There are a variety of sampling strategies available to qualitative researchers. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), one of the most significant challenges facing qualitative researchers is their capacity to adequately capture the rich details of the lived experience of study participants. The scholars coined this phenomenon the “crisis of representation” in order to highlight the ambiguity and flexibility of strategies available to qualitative researchers.

Qualitative research is more concerned with depth than breadth. A common misconception regarding qualitative research is that numbers are unimportant to ensure an adequate sample population because the goal is to select individuals, groups, and settings that are meaningful for the research and not necessarily statistical generalizations (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Depending on the purpose and anticipated outcomes of a particular study, it may be advantageous for a researcher to use a non-random sampling (non-probability sampling) strategy, such as expert sampling or quota sampling, to identify a specific population as participants for a research study (Donnelly & Trochim, 2001). Researchers use purposeful sampling to identify a finite sample population when the proposed sample of interest can “purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem” (Creswell, 2012, p. 156). In other instances, a study may better benefit from the acquisition of a study sample with vast and diverse perspectives and experiences (Patton, 2002) through a random sampling (probability sampling) strategy, such as simple or stratified random sampling (Donnelly & Trochim, 2004). In order to directly address the research questions, this study used a criterion sampling method to identify those individuals who held rich information from direct instructional experiences with 8th grade students or curriculum development.

Sampling Strategy

The sample was selected utilizing a non-probability purposive sampling strategy within a criterion sample framework (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2007). Criterion sampling involves “selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (Patton, 2002, p. 238). There were three criteria for this study.

Each educator must: 1) be employed as a full-time instructor/staff member, 2) teach 8th grade students or have experience selecting 8th grade core course/curriculum material, and 3) have been teaching or working within the middle school or district for more than one full academic year. Based on the recent literature, it is important to gain the perspective of educators who have experience in working directly with curriculum and the instruction to determine how that translates into student behavior (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). The results of this study are expected to aid in the improvement of the use of academic curriculum to teach social skills such as personal responsibility, social responsibility, and social justice. Just as a textbook guides instruction, this study attempts to offer insight to school leaders and instructors to establish a dual focus on supporting both the academic and social needs of students.

Participants. The participants within this study were the 8th grade math, science, language arts, and social studies teachers, special education teacher, and a district curriculum supervisor. These six staff members were purposefully selected because of their specialization in their academic content area and were identified based on the focus of the study. The teachers and district administrator were contacted directly to secure their voluntary participation in the interview phase of this qualitative study. Each participant identified as being highly qualified in their content area and has been employed with the district for more than one year.

Setting. The study was conducted within a suburban, public school located in the New Jersey. This 6-8 institution is the only middle school situated within the one of the state's few historic preservation districts. The school serves between 500-550 students

during an academic year, 31% of which are 8th grade students. The student teacher ratio is 18:1. Middle school (grades 6-8) makes up approximately 22% of the total district population. Less than 5% of students are enrolled in the free or reduced lunch program school-wide. The entire district has an estimated \$35,340,000 in yearly overheads with a \$14,134 per pupil expenditure. This school does not have an established social-emotional learning program, but is in the process of implementing grade level homeroom community meetings based on the Developmental Designs model to better align with state and national character education standards and a demonstrated need.

Data Collection

This qualitative research study relied on a general descriptive approach to research and data collection. I collected several types of qualitative data to ensure a greater sense of reliability through triangulation. Data collection took place over the course of 7-9 months in three different phases including: a review of documents material culture, a curriculum scan, and face-to-face interviews. To align my research and data collection with the chosen design, I used a specific procedure to gather the data. The steps to this procedure are listed below.

1. Scan core academic curriculum, district curriculum maps, district vision/mission statement, and district curriculum policy
2. Review course syllabi, teacher assessments, text-based student assessments, and evaluation tools (assignment rubrics)
3. Engage participants in one-on-one face-to-face interviews for approximately 25-40 minutes in a predetermined meeting place

4. Digitally record all interviews
5. Transcribe the one-on-one interviews independently
6. Begin the coding process using the prescribed-coding method
7. Conduct open and axial coding cycles

Review of Documents and Material Culture

According to O'Toole and Were (2008), material culture refers to the tangible objects that are constructed by humans in a specific context including physical space, tools, and various instruments. For this qualitative study, I reviewed documents as the main form of "material." One of the most significant benefits of material culture is that unlike spoken data and text, these documents endure through time and space (Hodder, 2000). Similarly, scanning organizational and district documents can highlight what Argyris and Schön (1978) call the theories-in-use concerning values, attitudes, and assumptions. These attributes can differ from educational leaders' espoused theories and add an important dynamic to the exploration of social justice and socially embedded curriculum. For this study, I reviewed the math, science, language arts, and social studies academic curriculum and learning standards, in addition to, the district mission/vision statement, district curriculum maps, student assessments, evaluation tools, district curriculum policy and correspondence as forms of material culture.

Local, state, and national learning standards. Each state has their own learning standards that are based on emerging national learning trends. The Common Core Learning Standards are national guidelines for core academic subject instruction and dictate what competencies students should possess at the completion of each grade

level. The standards are organized according to college and career readiness, but shouldn't serve as the only factor in determining student knowledge (Porter et al., 2011). These broad learning objectives create a set of common expectations for educators in developing state and local standards at the macro level and units and instruction lessons on a micro level (Philips & Wong, 2010). I used the federal, state, and district level learning standards as a guide for exploring the embedded concepts of personal responsibility, social responsibility, and social justice and the convergence of academic and social learning.

Academic curriculum. Drake and Burns (2004) state within the last 20 years, three main versions of integrated curriculum have emerged: multidisciplinary curriculum, interdisciplinary curriculum, and transdisciplinary curriculum. Scanning academic curriculum was essential to create a more contextual baseline for the interviews conducted with the participants. In order to address the existence of social responsibility, personal responsibility, and social justice within the 8th grade curriculum, I reviewed the academic curriculum, including: curriculum maps, textbooks, unit assessments, course syllabi, and key supplemental materials provided by each instructor.

From the curriculum and corresponding documents, I identified key terms, phrases, and timelines that address the concepts that are central to the study to accurately identify embedded components within each text. Each of these aforementioned pieces of information was documented in an Excel spreadsheet along with the document source and/or page number as needed. Additionally, I maintained detailed notes and memos of the information to be used in the later analysis phase of the study (See Appendix C for

interview memos). The information gleaned from this phase of data collection was used to inform the interview protocol for primarily the classroom instructors as they have the most direct interaction with the curriculum and students.

District Policy and Correspondence Review

Document scanning is a major qualitative data collection method (Chenail, 2011; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Seidman, 2006) because it allows a researcher to gain information that will add depth to understanding the overarching phenomenon.

Reviewing the correspondence within the district helped to illuminate “hidden” messages about institutional philosophies, goals, and values. In order to objectively analyze written text, Hodden (2000) suggests that, “different types of text have to be understood in the contexts of their conditions of production” (p. 111). In this phase, I collected 2014-2015 board meeting minutes, district policy and procedures, and relevant district-based correspondence and looked for themes that aligned with the topics central to the study. The district correspondence included key language that was explored through the data analysis. Both the information gathered from the review of academic curriculum, learning standards, and scan of the district policy and correspondence were used to inform the development of the interview protocol instrument.

Interviews

The review of material culture helped to provide a “hidden” account of the district values. Interviews were necessary to investigate how concepts of social and personal responsibility were not only inextricably linked to instruction but how that translates into student behaviors. Rossman and Rallis (2012) characterize qualitative research as

“quintessentially interactive.” Interviewing, as a method of data collection exemplifies the scholar’s assertion because of the reciprocity between participants and researchers. They are conversations with a distinct purpose (Burgess, 1988). Although the formalities of interviewing are consistent with the overall research design, the researchers and study participants become partners in uncovering new meaning (Patton, 2002).

Semi-structured interviews. In qualitative research, interviewing is often the preferred data collection method, since it allows researchers to build those meaningful relationships with participants and gather rich, detailed information on the content matter (Patton, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). For this research study, each instructor, depending upon his/her content area, has a different perspective of student behaviors and experiences. For this reason, I operated within a general interview guide approach, which included structured questioning that varied slightly according to the participant to get a unique point of view. In this particular interview format, “the researcher remains in the driver’s seat...but flexibility takes precedence on perceived prompts from the participants” (Turner, 2010, p. 755). The aim was to identify how students demonstrate social justice mindsets as a result of curriculum developed from socially embedded components, specifically personal and social responsibility.

Instrumentation. Pre-configuration of the research instrument varies according to the goals of the research, anticipated outcomes, and conceptual/theoretical framework that guide the study (Creswell, 2013). I conducted semi-structured responsive interviews using both open-ended and closed-ended style questioning. In these types of interviews, both the researcher and participant agree that the goal is to generate data (Hatch, 2002),

which creates new knowledge. The closed-style questions were used to collect demographic information for each participant and the open-ended questions allowed for participants to respond freely and uniquely in an effort to create individualized meaning (Creswell, 2013). Although a fixed question instrument was used in the study, I did provide time and an opportunity for follow-up and probing questions to encourage interviewees to expound upon relevant and important concepts and ideas (see Appendix A for the interview protocol). Building this level of flexibility within a formal interview is what differentiates it from standardized interviews (Hatch, 2002).

The interviews were set up as a follow-up to the document review and were used to establish a connection between policy and practice. At the discretion of the teacher, the interviews were scheduled during preparation periods and after school hours. Each interview was approximately 25-40 minutes long. The place of the interview was either the instructor's classroom or school conference room and was determined by the interviewer. One reason to interview teachers was to clarify trends in policy and procedure that arose from the review of the material culture as it directly related to instructional practices. Another reason to interview teachers was because they have the most consistent and direct contact with students. As such, their beliefs and perceptions of the classroom context are significant (Kagan, 1992). The interviews were used to better understand the convergence of embedded academic curriculum, student behaviors, and social justice.

In addition to the teacher interviews, a district curriculum specialist was also interviewed. The district official operates in the central office and is responsible for

making district decisions on curriculum usage, alignment, and standards-based assessments. The district specialist was able to give insight into how curriculum is selected to align with learning objectives and performance goals, in addition to expectations for overall student performance outcomes. The interview took place at the school, which was the administrator's decision. Allowing the participant to select their environment is encouraged by the qualitative research design (Hatch, 2002) as it creates a more comfortable atmosphere for discussion.

Data Interpretation: Coding and Analysis

The purpose of qualitative data analysis is to examine, categorize, and reevaluate the themes in the data. Transferring the raw data into information is essential for providing explanations regarding the central phenomenon of this research study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative data analysis is largely inductive because it implies a “creative synthesis” of the findings (Patton, 2002) in participant's own words and continuously emerges based on the data. This qualitative analysis included what Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2003) call “data reduction.” Reducing data means to strip down the data to the necessary components for a study to be able to analyze trends and patterns in order to tie statements together to get a more comprehensive understanding of the social phenomena (Saldaña, 2012).

Coding

Data must be coded in order to be able to organize and create reasonable meaning of the information gleaned through data collection. Saldaña (2012) describes coding as a “word or phrase that symbolically assigns a summative...essence-capturing...attribute for

a portion of language” (p. 3). During a study, multiple phases of coding may be necessary, depending on the types of data collected, to fully capture the underlying significance of the text. “The mechanics of coding vary” according to the research study and what works for the data that has been collected (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). I carried out a preliminary open coding cycle. Subsequently, I conducted an axial thematic coding sequence to draw attention to the relationships within and between study factors and disaggregate core themes within the qualitative data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I used this coding strategy as a means to reduce the data so that it is more manageable. From there, I was able to explore any consistencies or inconsistencies between the qualitative data. This method of coding typically results into “chunks” of data, which can be longer passages that capture the essence of each participant’s response and text within the analysis of the material culture and documents (Saldaña, 2012).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was a critical component within this qualitative research study. Lincoln and Guba (2000) contend that trustworthiness reflects the worth of a particular body of research. Quantitative research traditions prioritize reliability, generalizability, and validity because of the research goals. Qualitative research is concerned with exploring the depth of experiences and the construction of knowledge and meaning in a particular context (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research also creates opportunities to examine multiple perspectives and avoids defining an absolute truth. According to Shank (2006), rigorous qualitative research designs are based in trustworthiness.

According to Lincoln and Guba (2000), techniques for ensuring trustworthiness are intended to “guide the field activities and to impose checks to be certain that the proposed procedures are in fact being followed” (p. 330). Aligned with the constructivist paradigm, trustworthiness is a combination of dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability that provides opportunities for participants and readers to construct their own meaning based on the data and findings. Dependability is, “the ability to know where data in a given study come from, how it was collected, and how it is used” (Shank, 2006, p. 114). “Credibility is established by producing consistent and cohesive data through genuine and honest interactions with participants” (Robinder, 2012, pg. 65). Transferability offers a detailed description to provide readers with sufficient background information in order to be able to transfer the research study to a different context. Confirmability is accomplished when the participants or readers can corroborate the results and findings of a research study. Moravcsik (2014) states that scholars have an obligation to transparently report the data, theory, and methods that are a part of social science research in order to enhance trustworthiness.

Transferability specifically refers to how useful the research is to readers and other researchers and their ability to use it in other contexts (Creswell, 2013). Authentic qualitative research takes places in participants’ natural setting, which differs from the controlled settings used in quantitative research designs. Fully describing the context is essential so that future research can determine in what ways the study can be transferred to a different environment or among a different population. The local and broader educational contexts in addition to the participant population were described in detail. A

discussion regarding the contextual factors that impacted the overall study was also included in order to ensure the transferability of the study. Although the context of this research study was an upper-class/wealthy suburban public school district, other dynamics were mentioned that create a connection between this district and those of different types.

Dependability is determined by clearly and thoughtfully explaining the procedures used in a research study to collect and use data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The specific steps used to collect and analyze data were included within the methodology section. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, (2014) suggest that researchers should transparently address any contextual changes that occurred throughout the study so as to not undermine the dependability of the research. Based on the findings, there were contextual factors that altered the focus and organization of the research study. These changes were discussed as it relates to the conceptual framework of the qualitative research study. The methodology used to conduct the open and axial coding sequence (Saldaña, 2012) was detailed and also contributes to the dependability of the research study.

Since qualitative research is based on individualized construction of meaning, each researcher, participant, and reader brings a unique perspective to the study. Trochim (2006) contends that if others can confirm or corroborate the findings of the research study then a research has greater confirmability. Each research participant was provided an opportunity to review their results in an effort to make sure that the true essence and meaning of participants' responses was accurately captured through the data collection

process. Research participants were asked to address topics that emerged from the review of the literature in order to ensure the coherence of the themes throughout the study.

Issues of credibility in qualitative research are prominent considering the active and integral role of the researcher (Patton, 2002). Credibility, as defined by Creswell and Miller (2000), refers to the accurate depiction of participant accounts that reflect their experiences and narratives. I used two qualitative strategies to enhance the credibility of the study (Golafshani, 2003), including triangulation and positioning the study within a constructivist paradigm.

Triangulation. I followed a series of triangulated phases for my research study. Triangulation is a validity procedure where researchers use multiple sources and data collection methods in a study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Data within the study was collected through:

- 1) a review of core academic course curriculum (language arts, social studies, science, and math), district course curriculum maps, district vision/mission statement, and district curriculum policy,
- 2) a scan of course assessments, syllabi, and learning standards, and
- 3) participant interviews.

I engaged in three strategies to confirm the research findings and overcome the limitations of a single method of data collection, including what Denzin (1970) notes as: data triangulation (collection of multiple forms of data), investigator triangulation (asking a colleague to review the study findings for accuracy and generating greater depth of understanding), and theoretical triangulation (interpreting the study findings through

multiple theoretical lenses) (as cited in Bryman, 2003). Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, and Sechrest (1966) contend, that once a proposition is confirmed through two or more processes lessens the degree of uncertainty within the research findings decreases.

Constructivist Paradigm

One of the most significant paradigms present in educational research is constructivism (Simpson, 2002). Constructivism is the belief that people create their own meaning and “truth” (Kafai, 2006). At the core of social constructivism is the idea that individuals build their own meaning and knowledge of a situation based on their own experiences and contexts and interactions within those contexts (Vygotsky, 1978). Building off of the work of Piaget and Inhelder (1969), scholars has deduced that learning is a continual cyclical process of knowledge construction where people connect prior knowledge and experiences to new learning and information (Kafai, 2006). So, learning becomes both academic and social phenomena.

One of the fallacies of learning and instructional curriculum has been that it is an accurate depiction of everyone’s history and experience. Kafai (2006) mentions, “a key aspect in knowledge construction is appropriation – how learners make knowledge their own and begin to identify with it” (p. 39). It is unlikely that students can and will build a connection to learning and actively engaging and participating in the construction of their own knowledge if it can’t be tied to some larger context where one sees “self” as playing a critical role. To address this issue, I have situated this study in the constructivist paradigm. How students model a social justice mindset is reflective of their interaction and retention of the academic material coupled with their lived experiences. Since there is

no singular “truth” in the absolute sense (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), using this paradigm expands the boundaries of qualitative research and creates opportunities for developing more knowledge concerning socially embedded academic curriculum and issues of social justice.

Ethical Considerations for the Protection of Human Subjects

Ethics highlights the morality of academic research. A researcher’s goal is to gather rich information without causing harm to voluntary participants. Ethical concerns in this project, included: maintaining anonymity throughout the study, the confidentiality of human participants, ensuring clarity of the informed consent from, and storing data acquired through the individual semi-structured interviews in a secured place.

All participants involved within the study were treated in accordance to both the National Institute of Health (NIH) ethical standards and the University IRB standards for ethical research although minimal risk was identified. It was vital to establish trust with participants, protect them from unnecessary risk factors, and continue to promote the integrity of my research in order to avoid negative impacts on the individual participants and the institution that employs them (Creswell, 2013).

In order to ensure the confidentiality of each participant, each subject was given a pseudonym that only I had access to. All recordings, coding materials, and memos were stored in a secure location and communicated regularly and sincerely to participants to ease any anxiety regarding participants. Every measure was taken to ensure that instructional staff were able to engage in physically, mentally, and emotionally safe spaces throughout the duration of the study. All participants were provided with a copy of

the interview protocol prior to the scheduled meeting time to give them a chance to reflect on their voluntary participation in the study and ensure their commitment. The protocol included not only the line of questioning, but also the purpose of the study, informed consent, plan for ensuring confidentiality, anonymity, and benefits of each participant, and how the information will be used to further inform issues related to education in the field (Christians, 2005). Each participant was also provided with my most current contact information and emergent details of the study as they arose.

Role of the Researcher

There has been debate regarding matters of bias and objectivity among scholars about qualitative researchers (Silverman, 2010). As a human instrument, qualitative researchers play an integral role in the research process and serve as a significant threat to the trustworthiness of a qualitative study (Poggenpoel & Myburg, 2003). This study, as it relates to social learning and embedded curriculum within this suburban district, reflects my interests and personal work as an educational practitioner. Hence, bias was inevitable because of my personal values and beliefs (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Constant reflection and transparency of the ways in which my own perspective was linked with the details gathered from the interviews and scans of material culture was vital to overcoming this significant challenge. I used reflective journaling and research memos to hold myself accountable for maintaining an objective perspective (Anderson, 2003; Diamond, 1992). Russell and Kelly (2002) state, “experts contend that through reflection researchers may become aware of what allows them to see, as well as what may inhibit their seeing” (as cited in Watt, 2007, p. 82). Brown (1996) suggests that engaging in a journey of self-

exploration allows researchers to uncover their bias, blind spots, and other potential limits to one's perspective. It is critical to recognize our bias and transparently communicate the potential limitations in order to not undermine the validity of one's research (Merriam, 2014).

Summary

Qualitative research methodology encourages the in-depth exploration of social issues (Creswell, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2011) and influences the development and improvement of social policy including, educational public policy (Ritchie et al., 2013). As society becomes modernized, implementing national and state level education policies that accommodate the growing social needs of students is critical. The available literature on progressive learning suggests that the factory model of education is not the most effective in enhancing students' academic and social development. Dewey (1938) suggests that schools must create opportunities for students to engage in the learning process and interact with diverse people in order to "become socially responsible and aware of oppression and structural inequities" (Bell, 2007, Torres-Harding et al., 2014, p. 1).

Based on the contextual factors identified within this study, open discussion regarding issues related to social inequities was relatively minimal. The socioeconomic and racial homogeneity of the school and local community limited the extent to which practitioners perceived they had opportunities to address topics related to personal responsibility, social responsibility, and social justice. Brown (2004) mentions that overall schools are actually changing from "communities of sameness" to "communities

of difference”. However, due to a school culture deeply rooted in traditional schooling ideologies and practice in addition to a history of constant adjustments to middle school leadership, not much social change has occurred.

Qualitative research methodology is an emergent design (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). This chapter offered a detailed description and plan of the methodology used to carry out this qualitative research study. It included a discussion of the traditional qualitative design, sampling strategy, participant population, and ethical considerations. Since the researcher plays such an integral role in carrying out qualitative research, there is the potential for unintentional bias. As such, I explained how I was able to situate the study in previous literature, triangulate the data collection process, and highlight issues related to objectivity, specifically addressing the role of the researcher to limit threats to the trustworthiness of the study. A plan for data analysis was provided and guides the next phases of the research study. Contextual factors developed throughout this research that impacted the course of the study were also mentioned.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the ways in which three of Schwab's four functions social responsibility, personal responsibility, and social justice were embedded and measured within core academic curriculum. I also sought to explore how teachers perceived student behaviors as a result of a social justice mindset. This chapter will consist of an overview of the findings from an in-depth document review and descriptive accounts from interview with faculty participants. Each of the three research questions will be addressed individually and in detail. A brief summary will conclude the chapter and note general trends in the research data.

Overview

In this research study, I investigated the convergence of social and academic curriculum and learning through a thorough document scan and review. Rossman and Rallis (2012) indicate that this type of qualitative study is an important interactive tool for collecting rich information, and should accurately illustrate the complexities and ambiguity of our social world if conducted correctly. This study used an analysis of academic curriculum, learning standards, supplemental course assessments, evaluation tools, district board meeting minutes, district curriculum policy, and staff interviews. The data gleaned from Research Questions one and two informed the interview protocol for Question 3. A part of the interview phase of the study, participants had an opportunity to explore and discuss their experiences through their own personal voice and lens on the

purpose of schools, role of social justice in learning, and the existence of social and personal responsibility within the learning environment as it relates to students' mindsets.

I conducted an analysis utilizing a general qualitative approach that incorporated a methodology introduced by Merriam (2014), Denzin and Lincoln (2005), and Creswell and Plano Clark (2011). Each data source was analyzed independently using an axial coding sequence. Other information that helped guide and influence the study include interview memos, member checks, and secondary interviews with individuals familiar with certain aspects of the research study. Six educational practitioners chose to participate in the study to learn more about social learning as a means of augmenting strict adherence to specialized academic subjects and standardized testing. All of the participants discussed their perceptions of students' socially and personally responsible behavior as a result of a social justice mindset within the school and classroom contexts. As this is a qualitative study, the data was consolidated, reduced, and interpreted to make sense of the findings.

Research Questions

This study reviewed and analyzed course curriculum, district policy, district curriculum maps, state learning standards, national learning standards, classroom assessments, and evaluation tools to explore the following research questions:

1. In what ways are the concepts of social responsibility and personal responsibility embedded within core academic curriculum?
2. How are the concepts of social responsibility and personal responsibility measured within core academic curriculum?

3. How do 8th grade teachers perceive the influence of curriculum on their students' development of personal responsibility, social responsibility, and social justice?

Participant Summary

The participants for this study were chosen from the district's middle school because of their time in the field of education, experience within the district, and role in the development and/of instruction of 8th grade academic curriculum. Each participant had at least one full year of experience within the district. The years ranged from two years to 16 years. All faculty members that met the predetermined criteria were emailed regarding their voluntary participation within the research study. After each participant was given information about the study and I addressed any concerns, the staff members were asked for voluntary participation (see Appendix B for informed consent form). Table 1 illustrates the specialization and education level of each participant. Seven total participants originally responded to participate in the study, and six actually completed it. The original group consisted of an administrator, two special education teachers, and four 8th grade core academic content teachers. One special education teacher could not participate due to scheduling conflicts due to professional commitments.

Table 1

Participant Overview

Participant	Content Area	Grade Taught	Experience	Highest Degree
AE	Math	8 th	5 years	M.S.
AZ	Social Studies	8 th	16 years	M.S
RG	Administration	K-8	2 years	M.Ed.
AU	Science	8 th	16 years	M.A.
IA	Special Education	8 th	11 years	M.Ed.
OU	Reading/LA	6 th -8 th	13 years	M.Ed.

Research Question One

In what ways are the concepts of social responsibility and personal responsibility embedded within core academic curriculum? This question looks at how aspects of social learning and academic learning converge within the general education curriculum. To address this research question, the following documents were reviewed: core academic course curriculum (language arts, social studies, science, and math), district course curriculum maps, district vision/mission statement, and district curriculum policy. Table 2 shows the concepts that from the data collection how it corresponds to each course.

Table 2

Academic Curriculum Based Social Learning Concepts Organized by Subject

Topics	Math	Language Arts	Science	Social Studies
Identity		X		X
Self Reflection		X		X
Self Awareness		X		X
Belonging		X		X
Social Pressure		X		X
Overcoming Difference		X		
Civil Rights		X		X
Diversity	X	X	X	X
Real Life Situations	X	X	X	X
Technology			X	X
Power		X		X
Equality		X		X

Social responsibility. The language arts and social studies curriculum heavily embed issues related to social responsibility. The language arts course included texts that are socially relevant and reinforced the concepts noted in the table such as *The Street* by Richard Wright, *The Outsiders* by S. E. Hinton, and *And Justice for All* by Mary F. Berry. The texts were both fiction and non-fiction and reflected a variety of challenges and obstacles associated with both past and current social life. Each text used to guide the

course covered social issues such as racism, poverty, community belonging, and justice. Beamon (2001) maintains that effective education takes into consideration the complexities of adolescent development and challenges of engaging in a social world. The texts also spanned genres and times periods but focused specifically on those issues that are an integral part of social responsibility including, opportunities to analyze group conflict, infusing democratic principles and dialogue, and addressing controversial topics.

Similarly, the social studies curriculum was based on the text entitled, *Call to Freedom*, which centered on the concepts of roles, responsibilities, and power as a citizen in a democratic nation. The text is organized starting with the origins of The United States of America as free territory to a search for order amidst the Vietnam War. With a specific focus on the construction of a structured and formal government, each unit provides an in-depth analysis of critical events that impacted the country at different points in time (i.e. slavery, Civil War, The Great Depression, and World War II). Overall, the course textbook takes students on a journey through the maturation and identity of our nation from 1865 to the present.

Both the curriculum map and the course curriculum addressed these ideas and provided students opportunities to engage in investigation of the essential question: “what does it mean to be a citizen in a democracy?” and “how does power influence how individuals or groups react?” The social studies curriculum covers how individuals’ roles have changed throughout history from 1865 to present times. The curriculum provides students opportunities to explore the historical and social implications of governmental development through chapter activities and frequent checks for understanding. Both the

language arts and social studies curriculums included segments focused on belonging and challenges associated with participating as a member of a group/community.

Overall, there were several instances where the curriculum illustrated an interdisciplinary approach to academic learning through the connection of core subjects. For example, students were asked to analyze quantitative data within social studies in a “Using Mathematical Skills” section and the language arts curriculum is heavily embedded with historically relevant events including the Holocaust and The Civil Rights Movement. There were many connections and overlap of each academic subject, especially math and science. In science, the curriculum asks students to analyze statistical distributions and calculate the probability of scientific phenomenon within units on Physical Science, Earth Science and Earth and Space. The math and science curricula did not clearly concentrate on social responsibility in its traditional sense. The inclusion of issues related to social responsibility was secondary to an academic focus in these two subject areas. According to Nagda, Gurin, Sorenson, and Zúñiga (2009), social responsibility is best learned through three components: structured interactions, active and engaged learning, and facilitated learning environments, which the math and science lessons have in common. Each math lesson did contain an activity that required students to work with partners to complete a task, while the science chapters sporadically included a “Getting Involved” section that instructs students to explore and investigate science course concepts at home as a member of their family and community. For example, “In your community scan your local newspaper for the names of the elements. Read the articles or advertisements in which an element is mentioned. Are any elements of special

concern in your community? If so, explain why” (p. 109). There weren’t explicit instructions regarding roles, individual expectations, and/or critical analysis of content in these community and home based extension activities.

The district policies on Curriculum Content and Resource Materials and district vision/mission statement echoed the sentiment of community engagement with a focus on community awareness, family, and what the district terms community civics, which refers to how individuals should navigate their belonging to a school-based community. The vision/mission statement maintains that the district is committed to,

working in partnership with families and community, to develop the unique potential of each individual and prepare all students to meet the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards by creating a challenging and diverse learning climate that promotes the development of the whole student, and prepares its students with the knowledge skills and integrity to meet life's challenges and enrich their community.

The district policies for students’ differences and suggest that diversity should be used to enhance learning and instruction.

Social justice. Although the language arts and social studies courses included references to aspects of social and personal responsibility, topics related to social justice were also present in each course. Each of the four subjects mentioned aspects of race, difference, and equality in some way.

Social studies. The social studies curriculum details at length the macro-level impact of the aforementioned concepts on social life and governmental discourse.

Adams, Bell, & Griffin (2007) suggest, “the process of a goal of social justice...should be democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency” and work with a “power with” and not “power over” perspective (p. 2). Throughout multiple chapters, the social studies text addresses issues concerning regulating power, checks and balances, and personal autonomy. The course text maintains, “citizens have an obligation to respect people in authority and respect the rights of people” (p. 74). The textbook also notes that there are structures of power and assigned power, roles, and responsibilities of each individual. How to create an inclusive government that is participatory, based on equality, and respectful of agency and differences is the essence of the course and echoed by the essential question that guides the course: “what does it mean to be a citizen in American democracy?”

Language Arts. Embedded throughout the language arts curriculum are topics and issues that address difference and equality. Each individual course unit covers extensive amounts of information concerning the socio-political movements of the 1930’s and 1940s, such as the Holocaust and the Great Depression, to the social movements of the 1960’s, such as the Civil Rights and Anti-War Movements. Stories that are on the required reading list as a part of the curriculum aligned with social justice include, but are not limited to:

- “Flowers of Algernon” by D. Keyes (mistreatment of mental illness),
- “I Have a Dream” by Martin Luther King, Jr. (equality, racism, and peaceful protest),
- “Crystal Night” by Lyn Lifshin (broken families and communities), and

- *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by M. Angelou (racism and segregation).

The course texts demonstrated a direct connection between the concept of social responsibility and governmental procedures and hierarchies that were discussed in the social studies curriculum. Topics such as oppression, governmental power, immigrant displacement, and marginalization are embedded throughout the short stories, American heritage, and non-fiction segments of the class.

Math. According to Sleeter and Grant (2011), a challenge for educators is to consider how students will understand the social groups they belong to and connect with the academic material if they don't see themselves in the textbooks they use whether in pictures or written text. Each chapter of the math textbook visually illustrated content-specific examples using diverse people, cultural names, and data representing different nations where possible. Every section of every math chapter includes a “Real-Life Application” example problem based on the section’s target skill. However, there was no narrative text that explicitly discussed the diversity illustrated in the pictures.

Science. Integrated within the science curriculum are topics on globalized currents events and issues concerning diverse people and regions throughout the world. There were approximately 20 examples of young adults from different races, nationalities, and gender that were used to model the experiments and end of unit reflections all through the text. Four chapters included language arts connections that point out different languages that are used to explain scientific elements. For instance, “you are learning science in the English language. But in other centuries, the language of

science was Greek or Latin or even Arabic. This is why the names and chemicals of many elements don't match modern names" (p. 82). Considerations of different cultures were limited to how it related to the science text, which was published in 2000. The science curriculum doesn't connect these issues of diversity to equity or access but just to the academic content knowledge.

Personal responsibility. Personal responsibility takes the focus off of systemic issues and places an emphasis on self. The language arts and social studies curricula indicated a purposeful focus on self-awareness, identity, and personal autonomy.

Language arts. Personal responsibility is the idea that each individual chooses his/her own actions, creates their own life circumstances, and in turn are held accountable for those actions despite the outcome. The language arts curriculum included many examples of concepts related to personal responsibility. Topics of identity and self are a significant component of the course curriculum. The essential questions and themes of the curriculum are:

- Who am I? What factors shape our identity?
- How Do I fit in? How can we connect the characters to our own lives to better understand who we are and how we fit in?

The course explores the complex dynamics of self, identity development, and choices through short stories, such as *The Tell-Tale Heart* by Edgar Allen Poe, that highlight the conflict between self versus alter ego and a poem by Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken", which focuses on self-reflection and choices. Frost (1920) states,

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all of the difference (16-20).

Students are given chances to analyze and examine their own thoughts and feelings using course texts as a guidebook. The complete course curriculum takes students through a journey of self-exploration and situates each phase of the investigation in different social times periods and problems.

Social studies. Just as the language arts curriculum addresses the concept of personal responsibility through the course texts, both the social studies curriculum map and course curriculum address matters of student identity and awareness, choice, and autonomy. The concept of citizenship is connected to responsibility throughout the curriculum. The textbook details that each citizen's point of view dictates how he or she engages in political and social processes. Real life historical examples are used to give students opportunities to reflect on their own connections to movements throughout periods of time. In chapter 9, there is a "Citizenship and You" component that asks students to explore how governmental reform has impacted their lives. The social studies curriculum is heavily embedded with academic content, but the style of questioning pulls students into the text by integrating activities and prompts that get them to think about themselves and their role within the government and social world.

The district board meeting minutes included no mention of the socially embedded concepts that are the focus on this study. There was also no mention of curriculum decisions as it relates to social learning as well.

Research Question Two

How are the concepts of personal and social responsibility measured within core academic curriculum? The data analyzed and reviewed included course syllabi, teacher assessments, text-based student assessments, and evaluation tools (assignment rubrics). Hodder (2000) mentions, that the review of material culture is significant in qualitative research as it transcends time and is able to highlight themes and concepts that are limited through spoken data and text. The data analyzed from the documents highlighted four themes that were organized into two categories: category 1 (skill sets) and category 2 (educational ideologies). Table 3 illustrates a summary of each document analyzed during this phase of data collection, its coded name, and category. Each data set varied in the extent it addressed the aforementioned themes. While the overall data does not specifically address the issues of personal and social responsibility, the emergent themes aligned with the available research in 21st century schooling.

Table 3

Document Summary

Data Type	Name	Category	Concept/Skill
Science Assessment	D1		
Science Assessment	D2		
Language Arts Assignment	D3		
Language Arts Rubric	D4/D5		
Language Arts Assessment	D6	C1	Analysis
Language Arts Syllabus	D7/D8	C2	Real World Problems; Diverse Perspectives
Math Syllabus	D9		
Math Assessment	D10	C1	Evaluation
		C2	Real World Problems
Math Assessment	D11	C2	Real World Problems
Social Studies Syllabus	D12	C2	Real World Problems
Social Studies Assessment	D13	C2	Real World Problems
Social Studies Assessment	D14/D15	C2	Diverse Perspectives; Real World Problems
Language Arts	D16	C1	Analysis; Evaluation
		C2	Technology
Math CCCS	D17	C1	Analysis

Table 3 (continued)

Data Type	Name	Category	Concept/Skill
		C2	Real World Problems
Science CCCS	D18	C1	Analysis
NGSS	D19/D20	C1	Analysis
		C2	Technology; Real World Problems
Social Studies	D21/D22	C1	Analysis
		C2	Real World Problems
Board Meeting Minutes	D23		

Category 1: School level responsibilities. Based on a review of the documents, there are tasks that the school is responsible for carrying out. Those tasks are directly associated with classroom instruction and student outcomes.

Skill sets. Social learning theory is a challenging psychological theory that suggests learning occurs in any social context both through observation and direct instruction (Bandura, 1986). Learning in this way encompasses more varied and non-traditional features than traditional academic content, learning, and instruction and is generally more progressive in nature. Barone et al. (2014) maintains that social learning is not as easily measureable or universal. One of the reoccurring concepts throughout the document review was the idea of skill sets. Skill sets can be thought of as the action steps

students use to acquire knowledge in a specific context or situation. The skill sets embedded within successful social-based learning programs include critical thinking, demonstrating responsibility, effective communication, problem-solving/decision making, and managing conflict and challenges (Elias, 2004). Through the review of the documents, I found two skill sets that align with the goals of ensuring students are aware of and equipped to manage complex situations. The skills of analysis and evaluation were used most frequently and align to the overall goals of the study. Each of the skills was used to demonstrate what students should be able to do to show mastery of a learning concept. The notations of the skills were primarily within the learning standards and individual course assessments. Although, it was not clear how students should be measured in terms of actual question stems and tasks.

Analysis. Analysis is a higher order thinking skill that requires students to thinking critically about subject matter by making connections to their own lives, developing reasoning based on textual evidence, and drawing conclusions. Across each document students were required to analyze qualitative and quantitative data. Westheimer & Kahne (2000) claim that analysis of complex social world issues is critical to learning. According to the document review, the concept of analyzing text and information is used primarily as a means to measure academic course content. The language arts learning standards requires students to analyze qualitative data were the learning standards for math ask students to explore quantitative relationships between numbers and mathematical functions.

D6:

Analysis: What does the quote mean? Explore the information.

D16:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.3 Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

D17:

CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.8.EE.C.8 Analyze and solve pairs of simultaneous linear equations

D18:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.6-8.5 Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to an understanding of the topic.

D21:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.9 Analyze the relationships between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.

None of the learning standards or assessments made clear how students should understand the meaning of analysis. Although each document from different subject areas used the term analysis similarly, the content varied greatly.

D19/D20:

These performance expectations expect students to demonstrate proficiency in ...analyzing and interpreting data...and to use this practice to demonstrate understanding of the core ideas in PS3.

Unlike the use of analysis a method of engaging in inquiry, which is standard in social learning, the term is used to ensure student engagement with text and academic material. One unique situation was the use of analysis as a skill in the language arts learning standards that was connected to real world religious application as noted in the following statement:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.9 Analyze how modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events,...or religious works such as the Bible...

This usage of the skill in D16 drew upon student experiences in a way it did not in the majority of the documents. The learning standards do not reflect the analysis of other religious texts. The course assessments and syllabi for each subject did not illustrate this particular area were not evaluated within the course material. Based on the review of the documents, there were few consistencies in terms of the use of skills between academic learning standards and the teacher created and text-based classroom evaluations and assessments.

Science and social studies are embedded components of the state level literacy standards and read very similarly to the literacy learning expectations regarding the use of analysis as a skill. The following science standard is focused solely on the structure of text and not specialized content.

D18:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.6-8.5 Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to an understanding of the topic.

The national science standards include an Analyzing and Interpreting Data band within several units. D19/D20 section MS.Chemical Reactions states, “analyzing data in 6-8 builds on K-5 and progresses to extending quantitative analysis to investigations, distinguishing between correlation and causation, and basic statistical techniques of data to determine similarities.” The subheading also notes that students should be able to “analyze and interpret data to determine similarities and differences in findings (MS-PS1-2)”.

Throughout each of the subject areas, the skill of analysis was used within the learning standards to provide an opportunity for students to explore a variety of texts. Critical thinking and analysis are complex skills that generally require evaluation and critique information. How you analyze information is often dependent upon the context and complete vision of a specific subject area. According to the document review, students were expected to be able to analyze very specialized areas of academic material without reference to the broader context.

Evaluation. Evaluation is the process of determining a subject’s worth or significance based on criteria or evidence. The math, language arts, and science state and national learning standards asked students to evaluate varying aspects of the course content and materials. The use of evaluation in math was strictly in reference to academic

content knowledge as seen in D17, which notes that students should be able to “evaluate and compare functions.” Evaluating medium is also included in the language arts curriculum as seen below.

D16:

Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using different mediums (e.g. print or digital text, video, multimedia) to present a particular topic or idea.

The national science standards include an Obtaining, Evaluating, and Communicating Information section in several units. The D19/D20 section PS1 MS.Waves and Electromagnetic Radiation, MS.Structure, Function, and Information Processing, and MS.Growth, Development, and Reproduction of Organisms states, “obtaining, evaluating, and communicating information in 6-8 builds on K-5 experiences and processes to evaluating the merit and validity of ideas and methods (MS-LS4-5).” Within the science standards, students are expected to evaluate technological designs, competition between species, and theory. A band of evaluation of various aspects of the science standards has been incorporated in some way within each unit and drives the objective and vision of exploration and inquiry.

Specific skills, such as decision-making, analysis, and evaluation, are an integral part of instruction and learning. These skills are the most closely aligned with the goals of social learning. However, a review of the documents also revealed that the skill of understanding occurred more frequently than those previously discussed. With regard to the national and state level learning standards, students were expected to be able to understand a variety of broad and specialized course content across all subjects. What

students were expected to understand depended on the content itself but was not connected to any specific actionable skill.

Overall, there seems to be a heavy emphasis on evaluation and mastery of academic course content and skills as opposed to the concepts of social and personal responsibility. The skills indicated here are helpful in achieving an environment where students are able to become critical thinkers of their world, independent problem solvers, and active citizens within their community and social world. Nonetheless, the standards and assessments do not clearly indicate that the ultimate goal is to measure these social goals through these particular documents.

Category 2: Educational ideologies. The mindsets that drive the development of instructional material and curriculum are equally important as the content itself. The document review also indicated that there are broader themes that determine what information is used to measure student performance. An inclusion of real world problems, technology, and diverse perspectives demonstrates a connection between students personal and school lives.

Real world problems. Connecting learning to real world situations and/or problems is at the core of social learning. Each core academic subject document showed an effort to connect what students are learning in the classroom to what they experience in their real world. Both the state and national learning standards, in addition to classroom assessments and syllabi, focused on ensuring that students' experiences as learners aligned with their experiences as adolescents and individuals.

One common example in the math assessment highlighted the concept of cost and profit in individual word problems. The teacher also used her assessments as an opportunity to situate her classroom practice with real life scenarios using people that the students are familiar with.

D10:

[Teacher name] sells make-up and makes a base salary of \$25,000. However, she earns 7% commission on all of her sales. If she sells \$125,000 worth of make-up, what will her final salary be?

D11:

Uber charges a \$4.25 service fee and \$1.50 for each mile.

[School principal] tells you that this graph represents a function.

The math learning standards also focused on providing students real world word problems based in the grade level math content. D17 mentions that students are expected to solve real-world and mathematical problems involving volume of cylinders, cones, and spheres.

It was clear that the social studies standards and course documents were used to expand student knowledge outside of classroom instruction. The learning standards show that students are measured on their perceptions of the content within a bigger social context. On the course syllabi, the social studies teacher points out that one of the goals for students was to be able to connect what they were learning within the class to broader national and global social issues.

D12:

This course will also explore the current political and social events facing the country today.

In the D22 learning standards, the goal indicated that students should be able to be civic minded, globally aware, and socially responsible.

The corresponding classroom assessment and grading rubric did not align with this particular goal. Students were assessed on their ability to demonstrate ideas grammatically, use creative medium to develop their project, and how well their thoughts were organized. This method of evaluation was more closely aligned with the goals of the language arts course learning standards and not the objectives laid out in the social studies learning standards or course syllabus.

Based on the information in the documents, it wasn't apparent what were considered students' real-world problems or what experiences the problems were based on. The documents also did not clearly indicate how students' experiences should be connected to real world content and whether the teacher or the learning standards should determine it. The following notation in document D17 illustrates this ambiguity.

D17:

CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.8.EE.C.8.C Solve real-world mathematical problems leading to two linear equations in two variables. *For example, given coordinates for two pairs of points, determine whether the line through the first pair of points intersects the line through the second pair.*

It is unclear based on the example provided in the learning standard how the skill directly relates to a real-world mathematical problem or students' contexts.

The language arts syllabus for the course very clearly shows topic areas that would connect student learning to developmentally appropriate real life issues. The course is organized around the following themes according to document D7/D8:

- Who am I? (identity),
- accepting differences,
- overcoming challenges, and
- fairness.

None of the course assessments indicate that students are assessed in these areas.

Documents D3, D4, and D6 show an evaluation of information as it relates directly to the textual readings not the thematic areas mentioned in document D7/D8.

Similarly, science documents including the learning standards, syllabus, and course assessment seem to encourage the use of science skills within science context with very little reference to their use in students' real world situations. The goals detailed in the science learning standards do indicate an emphasis on connecting science learning to overarching societal issue with no mention of the developmental level or demographic of students. For this reason, it was unclear as to whether or not the science standards would be connected directly to students' experiences at this 8th grade level.

The science learning standards and course assessments did embed other academic learning areas, mainly math and literacy, but relatively no mention of social skills or skills that are relevant to social based learning.

Technology. While the science documents did not mention much connection to real world problems and situations, it did significantly highlight the use of technology and the integration of technology, engineering, and society more than the math, language arts, and social studies courses. One of the key shifts in the NGSS science standards has to do with making sure the students understand the use of technology in all fields of science. According to D19/D20, each band of the science learning standards includes an emphasis on the Influence of Science, Engineering, and Technology on Society and the Natural World.

D19/D20:

The uses of technologies and any limitations on their use are driven by individual or societal needs, desires, and values; by the findings of scientific research; and by differences in such factors such as climate, natural resources, and economic conditions. Thus, technology use varies from region to region over time.

In this particular area, the document draws connections between technology usages, the 21st century world, and students' real world experiences. The documents clearly indicate that advances in technology enable the existence of services and other aspects of real world.

D19/D20:

Engineering advances have led to important discoveries in virtually every field of science, and scientific discoveries have led to the development of entire industries and engineered ecosystems (MS-PS1-3).

The perception of technology is not limited toward any specific device, but rather the understanding that the constant development of technology enables individuals to access to knowledge and other areas.

D19/D20:

Technologies extend the measurement, exploration, modeling, and computational capacity of scientific investigations (MS-PS4-3).

The class assessments and course syllabus did not directly demonstrate how or if students' competencies are measured in this area. The NGSS learning standards used the band of Influence of Science, Engineering, and Technology on Society as background information to inform classroom instruction but didn't mention how that should translate into student learning.

The science learning standards in D22 illustrate a global approach by stating that it is important for students to use technologies to communicate and collaborate on career and personal matters with citizens of other world regions.

There was relatively no mention of technology or the use of technology within the language arts, math, and social studies course documents. The state science learning standards that are embed in the language arts and literacy common core standards does detail the expectation that students should be able to:

D18:

compare and contrast the information gained from experiments, simulations, video, or multimedia sources with that gained from reading a text on the same topic.

Diverse perspectives. Cook-Sather (2002) states, that the call to consider diverse perspectives in educational settings “is a call to count students among those who have the knowledge and the position to shape what counts as education, to reconfigure power dynamics and discourse practices” and to create spaces where students recognize their own voice and can speak on their own behalf (p. 3). The documents varied greatly in the way that diverse perspectives were addressed and measured within the courses. The language arts and social studies documents included language that discusses the consideration of globally, culturally, and regionally diverse perspectives. The social studies standards (D22) called for students to consider multiple perspectives, value diversity, and promote cultural understanding by mentioning that the expectation is that each student “recognizes the implications of an interconnected global economy; appreciates the global dynamics between people, places, and resources.” The course also focused on the globalized impact of diverse people and perspective. The language indicates that students are expected to have an appreciation and acceptance of diverse people from a variety of context.

The language arts learning standards focus on the diversity of medium and course materials. As schools are adapting to reflect the reality of a changing world, the ways in which students access and receive information from curriculum must also (Tomlinson et al., 2003). Document D16 notes that students should be able to demonstrate an appreciation of diverse media and formats.

D16:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.2 Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g. visually, quantitatively, or orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g. social, commercial, political) behind its presentation.

The learning standard also embeds one of the critical skills that encourage students' ability to think critically, analyze, and evaluate.

Research Question Three

How do 8th grade teachers perceive the influence of curriculum on their students' development of personal responsibility, social responsibility, and social justice? The purpose of this phase of the study was to investigate staff perspectives' on student behaviors as a reflection of a social justice mindset. Throughout the interview process, several themes began to emerge. The themes were consistent with the majority of the research participants during the interviews. The emergent themes from the interviews are as follows:

1. Social Contexts and Development: Students' behaviors are largely a reflection of their participation in different social contexts, primarily home and school.
2. Relationships and Collaborative Partnerships: Students rely heavily on their peer and adult relationships to navigate the complexities of academic and social life.
3. Culture of Technology: Technology drives students' social connection with one another.
4. Identity and Belonging: Student behaviors reflect the challenges of developing identity and refining a sense of identity based on existing social groups.

5. Social Justice and Diversity: Students are unaware of issues related to social justice including social responsibility and equity because of the homogenous student and community populations.
6. Role and Structure of School: Students' social and academic exploration and autonomy are limited due to the strict parameters of schooling.
7. Curriculum and Instruction: Students do not learn how to be either socially or personally responsible through the actual academic curriculum.

Further exploration into the participants' perspectives of these findings reveal common threads concerning the existence of personal responsibility, social responsibility, and social justice with curriculum and instruction.

Social contexts and development. Students' behaviors are largely a reflection of their participation in different social contexts, primarily home and school. Each participant shared a belief that, to varying degrees, schools are responsible for the social development of students. Specifically, each research participant mentioned that social development is the priority in middle school in comparison to academic learning as it is largely driven by students' needs. According to AU, there is a general belief that:

Schools are not all responsible for just academics.

IA:

The goals of schools are becoming broader. It [social development] is not as clear-cut as the academic piece to learning but that's where we are going.

AE:

I definitely think that schools have that responsibility. I think that it is our job, as teachers, to mix that in with the academics especially at this 8th grade level you know.

OU:

Here, in [district], I want to say it is 50/50. I don't know why, but I think it is 50/50. I know here students get quite a bit of socialization from their families and schools.

RG:

I believe that you have skill and content based and then social. And, I think that it's very important for 8th grade to acquire social skills [...].

One teacher explained that she believes that schools have an equally unique and challenging opportunity to address the diverse needs of students given the homogeneity of the instructional environment. Although she agreed that schools do have the important role of socially developing students, it is not a role that is always taken advantage of in practice. AZ states,

Socially, I think that schools have an important role to play in social development also. It is a unique social phenomenon that doesn't happen in any other aspect of society, that you are grouped together in people of the same age group and interacting with them on a daily basis for like 8 hours a day. I think schools have an important role. I don't think that they utilize that role enough.

The interviews with several participants highlighted clear challenges regarding students' experiences being a part of the co-existent and sometimes competing social environments of school and family. According to AU:

You can't send them one message here and another when they get home and expect it to work.

OU:

You know when they step into school, it's like they have a chance to put all of that stuff into practice. We always hear parents say, "my kid doesn't do that stuff at home." You know it's like, here, they are on their own and we get to see what they are really made of. They make their own decisions.

AZ:

It seems like parents are in the class. They might as well be in the school. The students are not learning how to solve these social problems on their own.

The faculty realizes the importance of social development in learning in schools to augment the strict academic focus. What differed are that some participants discussed that students receive different messaging in different social contexts and that has an influence on the work that can be accomplished in schools and how students behave. The realization of this fact seemed to be a point of contention for some participants. They believed that there was a general perception among students and families that the goals of schools were not as important as familial goals. OU describes that even the schools don't seem to have a logical method for determining their own school climate by stating,

“People that speak up the most or make the most noise--we lean toward their wants and don’t define our own culture of how we do things around here.”

None of the participants explicitly discussed the benefits of creating a cohesive vision between home and school to enhance student social experiences. There were distinct views regarding what schools should be doing in terms of social development and how family intervention does not always align to this vision.

Relationships and collaborative partnerships. Students rely heavily on their peer and adult relationships to navigate the complexities of academic and social life. The faculty members all recognized that students understand their own social roles through their relationships and not necessarily according to a specific context. The importance of and reliance on peer relationships appeared to be a consistent message that each participant shared as a major factor in students’ experiences and the development of a sense of ‘self’ and mindset.

AZ:

Their friends and how they fit in socially within their peer groups affects how they are in the classroom and how they interact with each other.

AE:

Their friends are everything right now.

AU:

You see it where kids are changing their faces every period with whoever they hang with. It’s tiresome. Sometimes they don’t recognize who they are until later in life and they miss all of that time. This is where good friendships are important.

In addition, participants also discussed how their own relationships with students are important in determining how they behave within the academic environment.

AZ:

How they interact with me is important to them too.

AE:

I do little things with and for my students that they are going to thank me for one day. Why not teach them things that, you know, adults notice.

It was unclear from the interviews whether or not if students were able to recognize the necessity of those student-teacher relationships and to what degree they are mutually beneficial. One participant did mention that the prolonged relationships with former students continue to offer her perspective on how students feel about teachers and the issues that they struggle with that have a role in their development, which she found to be enlightening to her practice as an educational practitioner.

The participants discussed that they encourage students to rely on each other in order to develop collaborative partnerships and build academic relationships with one another. They see it as a way to leverage the unique developmental phase students are in and build classroom community. Participant, LR, mentioned that she generally provides students opportunities to work together to complete general class work but not in a structured format. The remaining teacher respondents discussed how they use their physical classroom space to give students opportunities to work together cooperatively on a regular basis.

AU:

I do sit them in quads. This way, I encourage them to communicate and share materials. They have to listen to others' ideas and critique without criticizing. I wouldn't say the curriculum itself creates space for that, but I make sure I do.

AZ:

They sit collaboratively in class. I think working together is important. I think talking to each other is important. It is a confidence booster. I try to build a sense of community within each class. The kids appreciate the safe space. It makes it easier for them to share with each other, which they do.

Participant, AE, makes it clear, that using the spacing in class doesn't always create the sense of community she envisioned or enhances collaboration.

I just changed seats the other day and I put two boys and two girls in each group. And, one in front of the whole class said, "[teacher] I propose a trade--an NFL trade." He said this because he didn't like who I put him at a table with. I don't think he understood what he was saying, but everyone noticed.

She noted in her interview that she doesn't think students are able to think about and make sense of how their behaviors and comments affect their peers.

Culture of technology. Technology drives students' social connection with one another. The existence of a culture of technology was a theme that emerged in each individual interview both positively and negatively. Most interviewees discussed how students use technology as a social instrument to create exclusion among groups, define their own identity, and avoid real world interactions.

AE:

Social media--I think that's' what truly impacts students is what pictures you put up and who did you hang with. And, "oh, you Snapchatted a picture of you and Joe and that must mean you are together and didn't invite me." It becomes a vicious cycle.

OU:

You know it's like all the time you see them in the hall showing each other YouTubes and other videos. All the time showing people what they've learned. I think they are really very influenced by what they see in their media--whatever they choose to be.

AZ:

I blame a lot of it on technology. I feel that it has hurt personal and social responsibility. I think kids 10 years ago...I mean even myself at that age...I think kids did not have cell phones in the school. Cell phones in this school have forced social responsibility out of the window. They are taking pictures when they shouldn't be. They are in each other's business all of the time. They have this way of always being connected to one another and their parents. I mean ten years ago if they had an issue with a peer, they had no choice but to deal with it. I don't know if technology is all to blame, but I think there is a greater connectivity between 8th grade students then there has ever been.

RG:

And, today I think that students may not have or attain many social skills primarily because of our culture of technology. Technology can isolate individuals or students because they don't socialize.

One participant recognized the use of technology as a positive tool that can be used to enhance communication between students in a growing technological world. According to IA,

I think that with the availability of technology and social media, there are various ways that students learn to communicate.

Each interview participant readily discussed technology within their individual interviews as it relates to students. What was different was few teachers talked about how they use technology in their classroom and provide opportunities for students to engage with these social media outlets and rely on technology as a collaborative tool and not a leisure toy.

Identity and belonging. Student behaviors reflect the challenges of developing identity and refining a sense of identity based on the emergent social groups and community goals. According to the research participants, student belonging and identity development is a critical aspect of their 8th grade lives. Students are constantly trying to figure out who they are both academically and socially. The classroom teachers discussed that informal but widely accepted social groups provide students with a sense of belonging and, therefore, dictate their responses to situations. Collectively, the participants shared that the following social groups are the most prevalent throughout 8th grade at the school: the jocks (or athletes), artists (creative and performing arts), mean

girls, scholars (advanced level learners), regular students (on-grade level or special education students) and outcasts.

AZ:

Here, there are a lot of 8th grade students that have talked about the cliques and groups and exclusion. Like who determines who's worthy and not worthy to fit in within a group. I think those things have a particular impact.

AU:

There are the jocks. There are the popular kids, which are a lot of times jocks but not always. Especially girl-wise, they are not quite as "jockey." You have special ed. students and scholars.

AE:

There are the jocks. I notice that because they all wear their football jerseys...There is, and this is in tutorial and I know this is a victim of them doing their homework together; advanced kids versus regular kids seem to really cling together. Like I said it also might be like let's sit next to each other because we are doing the same homework. I think that there is a group of outcasts. I actually love it. The group that doesn't care what they wear. When they are done with a math problem, they take out a book because they see me busy helping someone...There is a group of mean girls. Really mean girls.

There was also a consensus that students struggle intensely in this area of their lives, but that being socially accepted by a group, preferably the jocks, is so important that students would forgo their own needs in order to find a sense of belonging.

AZ:

I definitely have seen students struggle. I mean they don't know that this what they struggle with at the time.

IA:

I think they are constantly trying to figure out who they are considering some of the defined roles at this age and in this school. I think that this is where some of the conflicts come in as well, with self and others. There is a kid now in a situation where he plays sports and has trouble fitting into the group because of his learning challenges. He struggles. Now, the kids know how much support he needs and some of them aren't as accepting of that. He'd rather not get any support so that he is socially accepted.

Throughout the interviews, it was expressed that while teachers have a strong desire for students to be able to find a sense of independence and own themselves and their actions, fitting into a certain social group was the main priority. OU shares the following experience to address her belief that students don't always have control over their belonging to a social group,

I have heard kids say my parents say I can't hang out with him. There was a point of time when we used to put them report card scores—honor roll, principal's list, etc. in the newspaper. There were some parents who were cutting that out and telling their children that these are the only students their kid could hang out with. It is bizarre.

IA was the only participant that attributed the internal conflict and struggle to students' inability to find balance between their value systems and sense of identity.

Social justice and diversity. Students are unaware of issues related to social justice including social responsibility and equity because of the homogenous student and community populations. Throughout the interviews, participants were unable to clearly define what social justice meant within this environment. Several participants explained the concept as a way to understand student's role as a part of a social system with consequences where the remaining participants were able to talk about it in the context of equity, fairness, and justice. One participant, OU, actually pointed out that the idea of social justice is based on an individual's perspective and the specific context of reference. Another participant spoke directly to students' developmental level and their beliefs in equity and fairness, but addressed that students generally don't understand social justice as it relates to their own life.

AZ:

There are also at an age that is very black and white. 13-year-olds are very justice oriented. They are concerned with what is fair and what is right. Independently, they couldn't see it though.

In each interview, there was a consistent perception that the district lacked diversity, and therefore students weren't exposed to primarily racial or socioeconomic differences. The phenomenon was even discussed as segregation because of the racial and economic composition of the student population. One teacher discussed how two Asian students have developed the ability to cope with being a minority in her class.

AE:

I would say that this district has no diversity. Well very little. The students sort of make jokes about it. I heard my only two Asian kids get on the bus yesterday for the field trip. They were like “oh, you know this bus had the highest ratio of Asian students because there is two of us.” And, so they laugh about it. It almost makes it a funny thing, but not an offensive thing.

Another participant mentioned the fragmented understanding students have about communities of difference.

OU:

I think that the when we talk about culture and different things that are happening...I think the kids come in with stereotypes. They will see one group treat another this way and think that it is ok. They don't always get the volatility of what they are doing has an impact. They don't know because they aren't exposed to it.

In terms of socioeconomic privilege, the majority of participants felt that privilege is a very adult concept that students couldn't conceptualize.

OU:

Students can't understand privilege. I think that they are still pretty concrete and still look at it as just stuff. And so, they sometimes think things aren't fair but don't know why. Actually, they all kind of dress the same. No one really comes in looking different.

AZ:

People are not the same and people in places of privilege need to recognize that they are in places of privilege and help people that aren't in those places. I don't know that students can understand that without my guidance. If I lead them to it, they can see it. But, if I don't lead them to it, they can't see it. I don't think they see it as privilege. I think they think that this is where my family comes from. I think a lot of them feel privileged economically. They don't always recognize areas of privilege are really placing them at an advantage.

When asked to frame their responses as it relates to social responsibility and use individual assets to benefit the larger community, teachers felt that there was relatively no sense of social responsibility among students at this age. There are high levels of competition and students operate with fixed mindsets, which has made it difficult to get them to operate with an acceptance of difference perspective.

AU:

8th graders are already set in their ways.

IA:

They would allow another child to sit by themselves instead of invite them over to sit with them. They say things like "why do you want to make me be his friend? I don't want to be his friend." Students don't want to change. They go through the motions.

Most of the participants had some comment on the negative climate of the 8th grade community as being blatantly mean and purposefully exclusionary. Due to the length of

the study and the sensitive nature of the district, adult participants only described student behaviors. However, it was noted by several participants that students themselves have mentioned wanting to change the culture but are cautious not to become targeted by others.

The participants also noted that they have witnessed some students doing small things like picking up a pencil for a classmate, helping a student who was absent get caught up on work, or having a conversation with a student who they aren't as familiar with but with no regularity. Teachers then use these opportunities as a way to be able to open up the conversation about how students should be part of a community and treat each other as such. It was clear in several of the interviews that teachers felt that students' ability to demonstrate social responsibility is superficial and only done when teacher led. Classroom teachers mentioned that they were unable to see any long-term effects of having these conversations about social responsibility within the classroom context. Specifically, AU stated that she doesn't think that students know how to be socially responsible at this developmental level.

Role and structure of school. Students' social and academic exploration and autonomy are limited due to the strict parameters of schooling. It was clear among participants that they wanted students to be able to explore their experiences and lives both as learners and social beings. One of the primary goals for students was to be able to become critical thinkers and examiners of their social world as it relates to what they're learning in the classroom. Each participant felt that it was important for students to learn to develop an ability to question resources, find supplementary resources and evidence to

support a claim, and learn to justify and reason based on their own values and beliefs.

They agreed that this would be a challenge because students are used to existing within their comfort zones and seemingly unmotivated to do so.

AU:

I would love to see all of them give everything they had instead of taking the easy way out to justify the basic minimum. I would love to see them put in a little more effort and challenge themselves so that they can see what they could be but everyone here is so comfortable. No one really wants to be pushed. So, I would love to push some kids outside of their comfort zone so that they could be comfortable with who they are despite whatever it is. At least then they can say they tried it. No one wants to try anything new. Everyone stays in his or her comfort zone.

AZ:

I had to have a class conversation where I express to them that they are going to have to do things in an uncomfortable situation. I have never had to justify a classroom activity. Even if students wear on comfortable in the past, they did what they had to do and moved on from it. These kids are having meltdown and anxiety over everything that is uncomfortable. I don't know how they could show any responsibility if they can't hold it together.

Three of the six respondents all mentioned that students' inability to manage discomfort was due to excessive adult interference from either teachers or parents.

OU:

Sometimes we don't let kids play things out enough. I think we intervene or rescue them. You know if something goes awry and you're going to learn a lesson from it, you have to sort of learn to work through it.

IA:

They only participate because we are watching. Would they participate if we weren't watching? Probably not. You still have to guide them because they are not old enough to do it on their own. However it is about making it safe. A safe environment for students to feel comfortable sharing their own opinion is important.

IU:

There are some parents who want to get their kids out of anything. They don't let them take ownership or responsibility for anything because these parents would rather get them out of it. And the kids will say to you, "my parents will just get me out of this anyway." It's uncomfortable for them. Instead of getting the message to suck it up and deal with it because sometimes you have to, we create spaces where the student is comfortable but not accountable.

Among all the interviews, each participant mentioned to some extent that the actual structure of the school day and social programming used to enhance students socially and personally responsible behavior, specifically the Circle of Power and Respect (CPR). The majority of participants believed that it is a worthwhile supplement to the school day.

However, two teachers believed that the mandated formal program created strict structure for students and a forced environment for them to get along especially at this level.

AU:

Don't take it seriously. They're all like "hey what's up?" I don't really see them saying things like "hey would you like to come sit with me or come hang out with me?" I don't see that. I just don't. They have already formed their opinion about each other and their cliques by 8th grade. It's too late.

One respondent, RG, mentioned that it is important for educational practitioners to not confuse social learning as simply a program. He pointed out that social learning in schools should be more of a mindset then related to some type of structure within the day and should be embedded within everything that happens daily in practice.

When asked about students' ability to make change to these structures and effect grade wide climate, respondents mentioned that they don't feel that students are empowered to make change because they haven't thus far. According to the participants, students may have ideas about how to change the environment but very rarely speak or act on those ideas. There were mixed ideas about whether or not students were capable of making change. In response to this question, teachers said that if change is going to happen it needs to be guided by adults. Among all participants, there was a consensus that change is both positive and needed at this level.

AU:

If we are giving a free reign for the change to happen, I think it can happen and it's probably for the best. Change is good a lot of people don't want the change

especially the parents and of course the kids because they're comfortable. I think that teachers are stifled to be able to support student change. Give us a month without restrictions and parameters and things could happen.

OU:

I wouldn't say in middle school when students talk about changing things it's never quite where it needs to be. They are often pushing in one direction where we should say no as teachers. It's my job to create boundaries. It's hard because they need some guidance to get to where they need to be.

Curriculum and instruction. Students do not learn how to be either socially or personally responsible through the actual academic curriculum. Each interview participant believes that the academic curriculum should be used as a resource to support student learning. The majority of respondents recognized that their respective curriculum does not adequately address or model real life skills for students. When asked if you see your curriculum as a good resource to be able to teach students about social concepts, the participants responded in the following ways:

AU:

I don't think that the textbook or any of the activities do. The curriculum itself does not do it.

AE:

Unfortunately, not too much in my advanced or regular level classes. I mean superficially, they use examples using things like trucks. So, I guess that connects to their real world.

Two participants recognized the limitations of their curriculum and make efforts to be able to connect learning materials to students' real lives in an effort to have a more meaningful and sustainable impact.

OU:

I kind of do what I do. I mean I do what I think kids need. So there are times where I will just stop and teach things about what's going on in school that they will need to be aware of. If something is going on at the high school I talk to them openly about it. I always find things to pull that connect learning to their real world.

AZ:

I actually worked with a committee to review the old curriculum and rewrite it to be able to teach social concepts. We look at issues of women's suffrage, the civil rights, women's rights, and the rights of African Americans. Minimally, do we look at issues of slavery. Mainly justicey type things that they can relate to their real life. Like school segregation and talking about those types of issues. Also talking about immigration, who fits in our country. Who belongs and who doesn't belong? And how we look at that over time? Who belongs and who doesn't belong now and how we determine that?

RG iterated the importance of students, staff, and administrators collaborating to develop and implement curriculum and learning materials that reflects the identities and experiences of students by stating,

I would certainly think that at that level teachers are asking students...you know how they view the curriculum or if they feel it is beneficial to them as individuals and their goals. It gives them an active voice in some way to inform teachers as they write and use curriculum.

Summary

The findings from the analysis of the course documents and participant interviews show that academic learning takes precedence to social learning in formal documents. The document reviewed also indicated that there were instances of social learning embedded within the curriculum through class activities, interdisciplinary examples, and usage of specific course texts and resources. Although each subject included some mention of social responsibility, personal responsibility, and social justice, the language arts and social studies curriculum included a clear connection between social contexts and students' academic learning. A focus on sociopolitical and political movements provided students an opportunity to engage in social experiences through a variety of times and genres to create an additional dimension where they can situate their own experiences.

However, students were not evaluated on the social aspects that showed up in the embedded curriculum. There were two categories of information that emerged from the analysis of documents for research question 2: skill sets and educational philosophies. The course assessments, syllabi, and learning standards were heavily skill based with little explicit connection to the social issues that were prevalent throughout the text. The

educational ideologies reflected broad ideas that guided learning, including: real world problems, technology, and diverse perspectives.

Face to face interviews with participants illustrated similar ideas with the discussion of real world connections, a culture of technology, and issues related to diversity among students. Overall, respondents generally addressed the trends that materialized in the document review. One of the most significant ideas is that students aren't learning personally responsibility or socially responsibly behaviors because there is no clarity of what social justice is or opportunities to see it play out in context. The study participants shared that peer relationships with one another and social belonging are a priority for students, which means that they are learning their behaviors from one another and not necessarily from the embedded social learning curricular components.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Implications

This chapter provides a summary of the study, draws conclusions from the findings, and discusses the implications and recommendations for policy makers, educational practitioners and future researchers. The summary will review the research problem, purpose and significance of the study. It will also include the methods and procedures used in completing the study. The conclusion section will review each research question and draw conclusions for each question based on the findings and the review of the literature. Recommendations for policy, practitioners and researchers will be made based on the conclusions as a conclusion to the study.

The goal of this study was to determine the ways in which three of Schwab's four functions, social responsibility, personal responsibility, and social justice were embedded within core academic curriculum. An additional goal was to identify the ways in which these concepts were measured by teacher and text-based assessments. The study also explored how teachers perceive student behaviors as a result of a social justice mindset. The following research questions guided the study:

1. In what ways are the concepts of social responsibility and personal responsibility embedded within core academic curriculum?
2. How are the concepts of social responsibility and personal responsibility measured within core academic curriculum?

3. How do 8th grade teachers perceive the influence of curriculum on their students' development of personal responsibility, social responsibility, and social justice?

It specifically studied how schools create opportunities for students to acquire personal, social responsibility, and social justice mindsets by integrating social learning and academic learning in the middle school context. Finally, the study compared the findings from the embedded curriculum with the data collected from the face-to-face interviews to examine possible consistencies or trends within the data.

The need for the study arose from increasing demands on schools to address the social needs of students as well as their academic needs. According to Labaree (2000), education has become responsible for dealing with these social needs in spite of a heavy focus on high-stakes testing and measureable outcomes. 21st century schooling trends suggest that teachers should rely more on progressive best practices that connect students' lived experiences to what they are learning academically. This study essentially investigated the “competing goals and pressures educators face in addressing social, emotional, and academic needs” of students (Marchant & Womack, 2010, p. 6). A review of the literature illustrated the importance of social-emotional intelligence, as well as the importance and effectiveness of developmentally appropriate instruction and curriculum.

The review of theories of curriculum, social cognitive, and social justice suggest that students learn best from repetition and exposure to real life events and situations that draw a connection between students' personal lives and experiences as learners. The review of the literature also demonstrated that there is tension between competing social

and academic goals in the classroom context (Noddings, 2005), because there is heavy emphasis within schools to maintain high standards of academic excellence without regard for the individualized needs of students and families (Siskin, 2013). This study works to understand how academic curriculum creates opportunities for students to learn skills related to social and personal responsibility and whether or not a focus on these skills enhances students' social justice mindsets.

In this study, social justice is defined as education that “informs the critical analysis of social issues, the ethical evaluation of alternative courses of action,” and the catalyst to impact social, economic, and political changes (Banks, 2001; Wade, 2001). Students that embody a social justice mindset demonstrate behaviors that are both personally and socially responsible. According to Wilson and Davidson (2013), “social justice involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others and the society as a whole” (p. 196).

The study was limited to a document review and face-to-face interviews with 8th grade teachers and an administrator in a New Jersey middle school. A document review of various documents, including: learning standards, curriculum, course syllabi, assessments, district policy, board meeting minutes, and evaluation tools was conducted to collect the data needed to answer the research questions. The document review identified key areas and activities where issues of social and personal responsibility could be embedded as a component of social learning. For each course, significant themes and trends were identified that aligned with the goals of the research study. The courses varied in the strategies and degrees to which they addressed the issues that were the

central focus of this research study. Courses such as, language arts and social studies, seemed to more clearly and consistently provide learning opportunities for students to connect with the text personally and socially. This information was used to inform the face-to-face interview protocol to determine if there was an association between teaching about personal responsibility, social responsibility, and social justice and students' behaviors.

Discussion

The conclusions were drawn from the findings of this study and the literature. The goal of the study was to determine the ways in which the concepts of personal and social responsibility are embedded and measured within academic curriculum and how that led to students' mindsets. A general conclusion was that there were few opportunities for students to learn social skills directly from the academic curriculum. The review of the literature suggested that this might be due in part to an education system heavily based on standards-based accountability and high-stakes testing (Davidson et al., 2013; Lee & Reeves, 2012; Embse & Hasson, 2012). The *A Nation at Risk* (1983) report called for the reform of schools as they were failing to help students succeed, which ultimately led to more recent state and national character education initiatives requiring practitioners to make connections between academic content and social skills (Smith, 2006). The following are the conclusions that were reached for each of the three research questions.

Research Question One

In what ways are the concepts of social responsibility and personal responsibility embedded within core academic curriculum? The academic curriculum review

highlighted some of the key aspects proposed in the literature review of my research. Goodwin (2010) and Thorton (2013) have challenged practitioners to consider different perspectives to be able to differentiate the use curriculum. From the analysis of the documents, it was clear that the language arts and social studies curriculum purposefully embedded social issues as a way to connect what students were learning academically to the broader social world. The connections between the academic curriculum and social world were broad and far-reaching, but situated academic content within real world events and contexts. The social studies curriculum was based on governmental concepts, while the language arts curriculum discussed issues related to macro-level social problems, like poverty and racism. Dewey (1938) contends, that learning social skills is contingent upon students' actual lived experiences being situated within academic content, which the social studies and language arts curriculum does not actually do. As students begin to question the world around them and critique previously accepted forms of knowledge, they become more articulate and conscious in their approach to managing their social world (Westheimer & Kahne, 2000). In-depth discussions regarding democratic principles and controversial topics does play a role in enhancing students critical thinking and problem solving skills, but does not necessarily suggest that this is sustainable without a true and individualized connection to the material.

Waks (2013) states, that changes in our social world have compelled educators to make adjustments to how students are educated. Although science and math are a part of modern living, the central focus of curriculum is academic and does not reflect an effort to teach students for life or embed issues related to social responsibility or personal

responsibility. Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) learning is largely based on formal real world experiences and problem-solving. Research suggests that STEM goals reflect a transdisciplinary approach and are closely aligned to objectives of community engagement, internship placement, and real life learning (Bell, Blair, Crawford, Lederman, 2003; Billing, 2000). The math and science curriculum reviewed for this study aids students in learning about the academic content but not how to engage in it. This curriculum is highly specialized but does leave room for student exploration of diversity with the inclusion of pictures of diverse people, globalized current events, and mention of foreign languages as it connects to the chapter topics. Exposure to unfamiliar situations sparks an inquisitive passion for knowledge and analysis of new situations. By integrating these concepts in this way, the curriculum challenges Brooks and Normore's (2010) belief that one of the limitations of schools is the focus on limited, local issues and not a globalized context.

Research Question Two

How are the concepts of social responsibility and personal responsibility measured within core academic curriculum? The concepts of personal responsibility and social responsibility are not explicitly measured in the core academic curriculum. Similar to Jennings and Sohn (2014) assertion, that "schools focus on skills to increase high stakes test scores," the data shows that much of what is referred to concerning students' academic performance has to do with mastery of academic skills and content (p. 126).

The data reviewed for research question two indicated a strong emphasis on skills that can be enhanced through social learning but, in this case, are directly linked with

academic learning. The centralized focus on skills, such as analysis and evaluation, supports Kohn's (2000) assertion that there is a disproportionate focus on academic learning as the priority in schools. These predominately reoccurring skills were used to measure proficiency in core academic content and connected very superficially to the ideas that are central to this study. Student experiences are limited to those that involve academic instruction. As such, they are limited by what Tyler (2013) calls overly specialized subject matter that inhibits social awareness and engagement. Instead of using analysis and evaluation to cultivate critical thinking and problem solving, the learning standards measure these skills only as it relates to academic content.

Throughout the data, the standardization of learning is clear based on the New Jersey Common Core Content Standards integration of the science and history/social studies within the literacy learning standards. McNeil (2002) maintains, that a reliance on academic standardization can't access non-traditional competencies like creativity, effort, and morality. Students don't have many opportunities to gain experience in demonstrating personal or social responsibility as the stream of information is reiterating the same sentiment with an emphasis on text-based learning. There was minimal reference to a broader social context, which parallels the point suggested by Jacobs (2010) that schools are still basing their education off of the 19th century Committee of Ten. This method of instruction actually calls for the standardization of learning. According to Tyler (2013), this level of sameness does not prepare students to deal with the complexities of contemporary life.

Shifting the lens through which practitioners approach to their instruction is dependent upon critical mindsets. The data showed evidence that the ways that education is being thought about reflect social learning pedagogy, but somehow gets lost in the translation of actual learning standards and assessments.

21st century schooling models are largely informed by the changing demographic and technological trends in an increasingly global world. Student learning is driven by a culture of technology that connects them to a diverse world outside of their local community. Beetham and Sharpe (2013) and Jacobs (2010) mention that students' lives are affected by the availability of technology in a Digital Age. The data showed that a focus on technology largely drove science instruction in light of new NGSS. Marzano (2007) states, "there have been many discussions regarding the need for students to process new information in ways that make personal sense" (p. 30). The connections between science, engineering, and technology and its impact on society is targeted at teaching students how to actually use science and analyze it as a member of society. The uses of sciences not only connect student learning throughout various scientific disciplines but to other subjects and real world concepts.

As students have opportunities to engage with technological devices, they can research problems and situations that connect to their real world. The course documents (learning standards and syllabi), assessments, and evaluation tools did not assess real world problems to the same degree if at all. "The basic generalization has been that learners must be actively engaged in the processing of information and that the teaching and learning process involves an interaction among...the students and the content"

(Marzano, 2007, p. 31). It could be a challenge for students to make connections to the academic content if it was not explicit or consistent. As discussed in Research Question one, the language arts and social studies curricula were heavily situated in socio-political movements. That does not translate into student assessments and evaluations. The assessments strictly evaluated the academic content without connection to students' experiences and offer very little mention of the social context of the text and literature central to the course as it relates to personal responsibility, social responsibility, and social justice.

Research Question Three

How do 8th grade teachers perceive the influence of curriculum on their students' development of personal responsibility, social responsibility, and social justice? Teachers play an important role in the development and adjustment of middle school students. Despite this, Redy, Rhodes, and Mulhall (2003) contend, that "middle schools are often structured in ways that impede the formation of close ties" between teachers and students (p. 119). In the context of this study, the teacher participants described two relationships as having the most significant impact of student behavior: peer relationships and parent relationships.

The perception was that students believe their peer relationships are the most significant during this developmental period. Staff respondents indicated that students learn most of their life's lesson and develop their sense of "self" based on peers' standards of what is acceptable within this age group. Those students that share value systems often identify similarly and belong to the same social groups. Osterman (2000)

suggests that students experience issues related to communal relationships and belonging. Participants also discussed how students have been known to sacrifice their own needs to fit in to these communities, because they feel a sense of belonging. These obstacles and challenges impact students academically and socially. According to the faculty participants, this focus on social belonging inhibits students' ability to demonstrate a sense of independence and self-awareness.

Lemerise and Arsenio (2000) and Steinberg and Morris (2001) say that issues related to personal and social responsibility, as a part of peer groups or family is central to adolescent development. Another critical relationship that teachers perceived affected students' behavior was that of parents. Participants suggested the relationship between teachers, students, and parents was contentious. Teacher respondents discussed that students are unable to demonstrate any personal responsibility because parents hinder independence and often impede on their capacity to self-advocate. Acquiring social-emotional competencies enhances students' ability to become more self-aware and proactive in serving as a self-advocate. However, due to academic limits and parental interference respondents weren't certain that students were even capable.

Operating with a sense of social responsibility is dependent upon a keen awareness of self and ownership over one's autonomy. Rose and Gallup (2000) contend, that Americans' single most significant belief about public schools is that they meet the needs of students and prepare them to be responsible citizens. The interview respondents, however, discussed that students don't understand or demonstrate any sense of social responsibility because they cannot see themselves as a part of a community, as there is an

unwavering need to fit in. As such, students struggle with developing a sense of values and are unable to make decisions based on what is morally right, which challenges Rose and Gallup's (2000) contention.

Social responsibility suggests an appreciation for individual diversity, strengths, and weaknesses. Although, several interview participants mentioned differences in academic ability, the true measure of belonging to a social group was mentioned as athletic ability. Students place value on each other depending on their social group belonging. In light of this, there isn't space for everyone to fit in, which undermines the essential goal of being socially responsibility.

The integration of technology within the academic curriculum and learning standards broadens students' mindsets and potentially diversifies their experiences as learners. Brown et al. (2008) maintain, "the most profound impact of the Internet, an impact that has yet to be fully realized, is its ability to support and expand various aspects of social learning" (p. 18). The study respondents shared a perception that the reliance on and excessive usage of technology was a major factor in inhibiting students' sense of personal and social responsibility. According to respondents, students use technology and social media to ostracize and torment one another; it creates an outlet for bullying. The culture of technology perceivably undermined any efforts to encourage personally and socially responsible behaviors among students at this developmental level. Nevertheless, there was very little discussion as to how teachers make use of technology and technological devices to enhance students learning and provide them opportunities to cultivate and demonstrate responsible behaviors.

Implications

The literature review along with the conclusions based on the findings highlight significant implications for policy, practice, and future research.

Policy

One contribution from this study is its representation that the implementation of effective social learning is dependent upon a myriad of interconnected factors. National and state level policy and learning standards impact the instruction that occurs in schools at the district level. There were three ideas that stand out that should inform the development of public policy that guides instruction and learning in the middle school context. The following topics emerged from the study:

- comprehension and cohesive state and national vision for social learning in schools
- capacity of teachers to teach using progressive models of teaching in the 21st century
- adjusting the standardized testing parameters to support the new priorities of schools

Both the state and national Department of Education have demonstrated a belief that educating for character and citizenship is equally important to a focus on academics. The New Jersey Schools of Character Program (NJSOC) was implemented to usher in the expansion of a vision that supports the social and academic development of students (NJDOE, 2014a). Along with The Center for Social and Character Development at Rutgers University, teaching for character, building school culture, and focusing on kids

who care has become a priority on the educational agenda at the state level. Similarly, The United States Department of Education backed Congress' adoption of the Partners in Character Education Program in 1994 (USDOE, 2005). The NCLB legislation of 2001 absolved this program and clearly pushed a focus on measurable outcomes, standards based accountability, and high-stakes testing. The inconsistency between what schools and practitioners are responsible for versus what policies are implemented creates tension for educators. The research indicates that educators succumb to very strict and inflexible parameters of teaching because of the standardized test results. Establishing and supporting state and national policy that does indeed encourage schools to adapt their focus on strictly core academic content may not only provide a guide for schools to implement social learning programs and standards, but also aid in building critical relationships between national, state, and district level educational agencies and institutions.

Another implication for public policy has to deal with the capacity of incoming teachers to address and manage the challenges associated with balancing the social and academic needs of students. Teacher quality is a significant factor in student performance outcomes. The federal government clearly defines a highly qualified teacher (HQT) as one that has: 1) a bachelor's degree, 2) appropriate certification, and 3) demonstrated subject and grade level competencies. In middle and high schools, teachers are expected to have acquired a specific number of subject specific college credits, an advanced certification, or master's degree in their subject area. A new high, objective, uniform state standard of evaluation (HOUSSE) amendment offers some flexibility in how teachers are

able to demonstrate content knowledge (USDOE, 2004). There is no mention of a teacher's knowledge of student demographics and/or developmental social needs. HQT status has to extend beyond mere academic strengths. Effective teachers are able to anticipate the different needs of students (OU, personal communication, 2016). Without experience in different types of schools in different neighborhoods with diverse students, are we truly preparing new teachers to be successful in the field?

As a system, we may better define what a HQT is if we adjusted the parameters within which we measure educator success. Preparing students to be both academically and socially responsible is an insurmountable challenge in light of a strict focus on standardized testing, which creates problems in practice (Cohen, 2006; Kohn, 2000; Koyama, 2012). This research study illustrates that teachers in the field perceive that much of the issue of students' inability to demonstrate personally and socially responsible behavior is because of the strict parameters both teachers and students have to operate within. The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 signed into law by the Obama Administration will replace NCLB (2001) in August 2016, but still places an emphasis on academics with no specific mention of social goals. Policy should be explicit in its goals so that teachers feel empowered enough to make decisions based on the students they teach and their respective needs, challenges, and hopes for the future and not a perceived student archetype.

Practice

The available literature on social learning and 21st century schools suggest that educating for social justice is imperative in light of our increasingly global society.

George (2010) states, that “infusing freedom, democracy, empowerment, equity, optimism, teamwork, shared decision making, parental involvement, local control, celebration of diversity, management of complexity and ambiguity, tolerance, and humane and reasonable assessment strategies” (as cited in Manning & Butcher, 2012, p. xv) is key to achieving thriving academic learning environments. These shifts reflect a need for more creative and inclusive environments and spaces for all students, open dialogue between stakeholders to inform school and district discourse, and provide opportunities for teachers to adapt to new education trends through professional development.

Inclusive learning environments make room for students of all races, nationalities, religions, sexual orientation, gender, and ability levels. With the changing demographics of schools, the consideration of the varied needs, capabilities, and mindsets of students is essential in order to ensure success. The New Jersey Department of Education (2005) has provided leadership to schools to establish and maintain programs and support services to ensure the safety and positive learning environment for students. Within the school context, students should be comfortable taking risks in the exploration of self and personal identity. Safe zone schools learn to treat each student with respect and dignity. It is not just about being compassionate, but also about empowering students to be active change agents and give them a voice in their educational experiences (Birdwell et al., 2013).

Partnerships between school and home are an essential component of any school reform (Cohen, 2006; Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding, & Walberg, 2005). The greatest

improvements in schools result from a collaboration between administrators, teachers, students, parents, and the local community. Partnerships between stakeholders build trust and enhance student learning. According to Valencia, Valenzuela, Sloan, and Foley (2001) state, “reform efforts are undermined by educators’ deficit views and by their beliefs about the children who become the targets of reform” (p. 151). Both formal and informal structures of collaboration create opportunities to exchange insight and provide feedback on the various dynamics impacting school discourse. Although schools are responsible for serving students and families, the current structure of school leadership can be marginalizing, as the relationship between home and school is often tense.

If teachers are expected to change their style and philosophy of teaching, it is important that they are equipped with the information to do so. Establishing a cohesive vision for the organization can be a challenge for practitioners that have been used to the traditional style of teaching. Fullan (2014) mention that teacher development is one of the most important factors in determining the success of shifting school culture and widespread reform. The author goes on the state, that “teacher development should be innovation-related, continuous during the course of implementation, and involve a variety of formal (e.g. workshops) and informal (teacher exchange components)” in order to be successful (p. 2). Development should be designed around the goals and vision of the school or district in order to effectively provide teachers will concrete skills and opportunities to enhance their practice.

Research

Revising curriculum development to reflect a focus on the diverse needs of students in the Information Age (Schlechy, 2001; Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008), has the potential to revolutionize movement towards social learning. The process used to develop curriculum determines in large part how it is used. Traditional educational practice is based on a belief that practitioners are the sole bearers of knowledge and the development of curriculum has been largely informed by teachers and district leadership. There is little collaboration or reliance of partnerships. The research by McIntyre et al. (2001) suggests that efforts to collaborate between students, families, and educators generally benefit all of those involved. Engaging in a collaborative process involving students and practitioners can better inform the curriculum process, which in turn impacts instruction. One of the interview participants suggested that curriculum could only work if students have a say in the process of what they learn. Recognizing and appreciating the knowledge capital that students can offer is critical to changing this process. Research should investigate how collaborative curriculum design works in order to create a model that schools and districts can adapt to meet their unique needs and challenges.

Social justice is becoming an increasingly popular concept within educational research. The implications for this research study should indicate that focusing on creating a learning environment where academic and social learning are not mutually exclusive is critical to positive and civic-minded student outcomes. Teaching with this philosophy has yet to become the norm in public schools, because as Barone et al. (2004) contends, social skills and real-life experiences aren't easily measurable or universal.

Practitioners still grapple with how to reconcile the demands of a high-stakes testing environment and the shift to a more socially based instructional model. Shifting parameters and priorities is important to creating this type of school environment. The present study based on the literature suggests that academic and social learning can coexist. The findings from the participant interviews imply that teacher mindsets largely influence the extent to which social justice education occurs within the classroom context and the ways that academic curriculum is used to enhance students' personal responsibility and social responsibility. The study further argued that the tools to achieve this outcome are available and accessible. Uprooting the sense of normalcy is imperative to better align with the goals of 21st century schools and progressive learning that reflect our changing social world.

There hasn't been a significant amount of research on how success is measured within social learning programs. Research by CASEL (2015), Elias (2004), Elias et al. (2013), Durlak et al. (2011) and Zins et al. (2004) very clearly indicates which competencies are believed to be the measure of a successful social learning program, such as: teamwork, effective communication, respect, responsibility, healthy relationships, and a belief in self-efficacy. What the scholarly literature does not present is quantifiable data to support their claims to show at which levels a school or context is considered to have students that are socially aware. So, the question remains: how do we know when a social program or initiative has achieved success? Collecting quantifiable data to support the assertions that programs are achieving the anticipated results and to what extent can inform actionable next steps within institutions that can drive an

authentic move toward students enhanced personal and social responsibilities that lead to social justice mindsets.

Recommendations

In order to address the policy, practice, and research implications, I suggest some critical recommendations to remedy the issues that arose through this study.

Recommendations for Policy Makers

Adjustments to public policy are required in order to create consistency regarding vision (expectations), capacity, and parameters.

Vision. Expecting the federal government and each state to develop a singular model for social learning policy is a complicated task. However, it is important to provide some level of consistency. If the federal government explicitly demonstrates that social learning is a priority in the same way that we call for academic mandates, states will be better able to create unique models statewide for districts. Nationwide states are proactively establishing components of social learning throughout their daily academic schedule. Appendix D illustrates the Northeastern Region character education initiatives by state. The Northeastern Region of the nation varies in the degree to which character education legislation exists and is mandated. For example, the New York Department of Education is the only state within the region to mandate character education and/or social programming. Project Safe Schools Against Violence (SAVE) Act:

New York's schools must develop comprehensive plans to be prepared to intervene in and to manage difficult and violent situations, to work with community partners to initiate proven prevention and intervention

strategies which address risk factors for potential violence in local communities, to adopt civility, citizenship and character education programs to create an environment of respect and responsibility among all members of the school community...Such component shall instruct students on the principles of honesty, tolerance, personal responsibility, respect for others, observance of laws and rules, courtesy, dignity and other traits which will enhance the quality of their experiences in, and contributions to the community (WASD, 2000, p. 8).

Although the money is a useful incentive for districts statewide, they explicitly state 17 competencies that should be embed within programs at the school level. Emulating the vision from the federal level through the district level can shift the culture of education nationwide and initiate change by district and school based leadership.

Capacity. Teacher preparation programs should be better prepared to equip teachers with the mindsets necessary to address diverse students and their individual needs and experiences. According to Sleeter (2001), pre-service multicultural teachers are more likely to bring a lens of teaching for social justice to the classroom than White pre-service teachers who bring an expertise of pedagogy and practice. The point that Sleeter (2001) is making suggests that teacher experiences impact their approach to classroom instruction. It is vital for pre-service programs to integrate a variety of experiences to better inform their practice. This idea is the core of Bandura's (1986) social learning theory that contends that people learn from the experiences they have with different people.

Ranked as the top school on the 2014 U.S. News and World Report Education Teacher Preparation Rankings scale, Dallas Baptist University is founded on a belief that teachers should be servant leaders who are prepared to create learning environments for students to have a local and global impact. Enacting higher education policy that accounts for the realistic complex and interconnected goals and of education as a field would enhance the capacity of pre-service teachers to manage and avoid burnout in the field and efficacy of traditional and nontraditional teacher preparatory programs.

Parameters. Redesigning the constituent policy that governs educational practice (Anderson, 2011) won't necessarily decrease academic expectations but better balance them with expectations for students' social development. The North Carolina Department of Education has a history of enacting progressive policy at the higher education level (Mitchell, 2013). The state developed a nationally recognized model of streaming the social needs of students within the academic objectives of schools with their multiple pathways policy. Although their model's focus was creating pathways for students' achievement from secondary education to higher education, similar programs can be adapted at the middle school level.

Engaging in backward design to determine what skills middle school students will need in the future to be successful can help to redefine the policy that governs school performance. According to Gomez (1996), acquiring skills to be civically responsible and socially engaged at the middle school level will be beneficial for students throughout their lives. A proposed policy for student success should embed social components, as these are essential skills for success as a learner and citizen in society.

Recommendations for Practitioners

Change in educational institutions often fails because more efforts are focused on the planning of change rather than the actions related to carrying out change (Fullan, 2007). Table 4 illustrates the change recommended changes needed to achieve a school climate where social learning is the pervasive ideology. In order to achieve a thriving academic environment, academic and social learning must equally be a priority. From the conclusions in this study, four primary recommendations for practitioners can be made.

Table 4

List of Recommendations

Factor	Recommendation	Goal
Safety, Inclusion	Evaluate school climate, incorporate risk-prevention programming, create school/team values, and	Creative safe spaces for learning and exploration
Collaboration, Cooperation	Develop collaborative partnerships between practitioners and parents, practitioners and mental health professionals, and cooperative teams practitioners, parents, and students	Enhance working relationships to provide consistent goals and messaging to students.
Pedagogy	Establish professional development series to support teacher development, incorporate DDMS model throughout academic courses	Shift mindsets and approach to instruction to reflect a dual focus
Accountability	Routine staff, student, and parent evaluation (surveys, questionnaires,	Increase school accountability and

Table 4 (continued)

Factor	Recommendation	Goal
	or focus groups); conducted by internal and/or external staff	quantifiable measurement

Creating “safe zones.” The social environments of academic settings have a vast and profound affect of student adaption and development (Brand, Felner, Shim, Seitsinger, & Dumas, 2003). In the area of social justice education, creating safe and responsive learning spaces unifies the academic and social goals of schools. Cohen (2006) details a list of factors that define school climate, including: environmental (cleanliness), expectations for student achievement, sense of community, open communication, peer norms, and student morale. The coexistence of these dynamics has the potential to transform learning for students and create safe ad caring spaces. Happier people tend to be healthier, make healthier decisions, and are generally more successful and socially engage (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005).

There are a variety of ways that schools can foster positive, caring, and safe learning environments. Operating with an ethic of care suggests a commitment to those whom practitioners are serving (Noddings, 2013) and an optimistic approach to daily practice. In order to effectively serve students and families with purpose, it is important to know what issues are concerning them from their perspectives. Administering a school climate survey can provide data that can be used to make critical decisions concerning school climate that address the reality that students, teachers, and families are facing. In response

to the data, incorporating risk-prevention and risk-management programming to support healthy decision making among students to reduce the statistics of those engaging in high-risk behavior (Greenberg et al., 2003).

Another strategy is by developing school grade level team, and/or cohort values and vision. DuFour and Eaker (1998) suggest, that “an effective vision statement articulates a vivid picture of the...future that is so compelling that a school’s members will be motivated to work together to make it a reality” (p. 62). The likelihood that staff will work toward ensuring a consistent vision for students and school climate increases when the vision is birthed from collaborative efforts.

Partnerships. Surviving change within any organization requires the efforts of individuals at multiple levels. Ellsworth (2000) states that the work of enacting change in schools should be a collaborative effort between teachers (teacher-educators), principal, students, district administrators, consultants, and community together with parents.

Figure 1 shows the necessary collaboration between stakeholders. Cole (2010) states, “in order to situate learning as authentic community contexts, schools rely on partnerships” (p. 15). The effectiveness of merging social learning and academic learning occurs when educators and parents form collaborative partnerships in teaching purposefully about social, emotional, ethical, and cognitive competencies (Cohen, 2001; Zins et al., 2004). Mental health professionals, in the form of counselors, nurses, etc., can help to mediate the stress and anxiety (Cohen, 2006) that students endure as they courageously step out of their comfort zones within this novel school climate and environment based on social awareness.



Figure 1. Collaborative partnerships

Note. The figure does not denote a hierarchy but a mutual relationship.

Pedagogical shift. Educational practitioner pedagogy should be constantly evolving to meet the demands of the field and emergent student needs. Traditional methods of teaching and learning are not adequate enough to address social, emotional, and academic challenges within today's schools. A change in methodology will make it possible for schools to support the intellectual development of a child (Greig et al., 2012). The daily work of educators is so complex and unpredictable. In order to overcome these obstacles and provide a meaningful education to students, a shift in pedagogy and better use of evolving best practices is key. Two strategies that school and district leaders can use to shift pedagogical beliefs is approaching the development of professional development and the implementation of a coaching model with purpose and vision aligned to addressing the dual focus of schools.

Professional development. Although educational policy and best practices increasingly demonstrate a concern for addressing issues of equity and justice in schools,

standards and licensing programs for practitioners do not explicitly value the same concerns (Marshall, 2012; Marshall & Young, 2006). Cohen (2006) argues that there is no curriculum or package that can address the array of complex issues affecting students' lives. Therefore, the use of regular and objective driven professional development aligned to a change in school vision and climate is important to provide teachers opportunities to refine their practice for the same reasons we are expecting students to. Although it can be a challenge to demonstrate the connection between professional development (PD) and student outcomes (Borko, 2004) and Kedzior and Fifield (2004) detail characteristics that determine the effectiveness of professional development programs/sessions and increased student success. Each PD should be:

- content-focused,
- collaborative,
- part of daily work,
- coherent and integrated,
- inquiry based,
- teacher driven,
- informed by student performance,
- and self-evaluated.

Coaching model. Thoroughly planned coaching models have a significant effect on teacher performance and offer a chance for both novice and advanced teachers to learn from one another. Smith (2002) states the practitioner peer relationships have resulted in increased feelings of efficacy, experience using broader approaches to instruction, and

improved attitudes. Teacher development is central to school improvement and coaching provides a method through which schools can achieve higher levels of student achievement in a variety of areas. Figure 2 illustrates various coaching models by degree of invasiveness.


<div> <div>Less</div> <div>  </div> <div>More</div> </div>	Mentoring New Teachers
	Peer Coaching
	Cognitive Coaching
	Subject-Specific Coaching
	Program-Specific Coaching
	Reform-Oriented Coaching

Figure 2. Coaching model variations (Neufeld & Roper, 2003)

The overall goals of the school or district should drive the implementation of a specific coaching design. Each school has a need to improve in order to benefit the students and families that are served. Through this process, teachers become more aware of the relationship between engagement, feedback, and learning for students (Lofthouse, Leat, & Tower, 2010).

Evaluation. Sustainable change is complex and cyclical. In order to test to determine whether the newly implemented system of social learning is having the anticipated impact, it is important to conduct routine measurement of the goals to increase accountability and assess the need school or district needs. Program evaluation is essential whenever a new intervention of program is implemented (Royse, Thyer, & Padgett, 2015). Evaluation by collecting qualitative or quantitative data gives leadership a more objective base from which to make future decisions regarding a particular initiative. The most meaningful evaluations should collect a variety of data from individuals at each level of the organization, school, or district. In reference to Herzberg's (1966) need theory, Burke (2011) suggests that as long as stakeholders feel that their input is valid and that the system benefits their needs their commitment and motivation will stay at peak levels. Routine evaluations through surveys, questionnaires, and/or focus groups not only measure the overall success of the program, but it also serves as an opportunity to revisit original goals and reset priorities in order to ensure the achievement of the objective and use resources wisely.

Recommendations for Researchers

This section will make three recommendations for further research based on the findings of this study and review of the literature.

Future research should focus on the process of curriculum development. Eisner (2013) maintains that one of the challenges of creating curriculum is determining what students should know and who makes that decision. Developing curriculum is not a fixed event. The formulation of curriculum should not be perceived as culmination or end goal,

but rather as a phase in a continuous developmental process. As reviewed in the literature, Jacobs (2010) contends that if any school is going to keep pace with the dynamic trends of education consideration of the needs of students and families is important. Future research should investigate the different models that are used to develop curriculum within districts. The efficacy of curriculum is dependent upon who informs the process. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) propose a tool called understanding by design (UbD), which encourages practitioners to analyze performance data and academic outcomes in order to implement an appropriate curricular design process. Scholarly investigation of the curriculum process may add another dimension to the conversation on the convergence of academic and social learning that is missing within the current literature.

An additional area for research is the execution of social learning using academic curriculum. Kliebard (1982) proposed a theory of curriculum that relies on differentiated instruction to reach the diverse interests of students. The question, now, is not whether or not learning based on principles of social engagement but rather how is it done successfully. In other words, do we have models of successful social learning that can be used to glean best practices in this area and serve as the basis for professional developmental programs? Several of the scholarly resources describe the importance of considering the unique and dynamic needs of students when planning and executing instruction (Bloom, 2004; Lawson, 2001; Rawls, 1999; Singh, 2004). These approaches to holistic teaching take into consideration the dynamics of student demographics, the

goals and purpose of schools, and instructional parameters. Are these models sustainable? How can we replicate these models in schools of different types?

It would not only be important to replicate effective instruction inclusive of social and academic learning, but also to measure the and analyze the longitudinal impact of the social learning process on student performance, student behaviors, and school climate. Although this study focused on socially embedded curriculum and perceived student mindsets, evaluation and measurement are essential components. It would be valuable to study social learning from an instructional perspective in a way that includes teacher-voice.

Finally, additional quantitative research on the success or failure of instruction based on a social-based perspective is needed. Does social learning have an impact in the middle school context? This question is does it matter or make a difference to shift the lens through which teachers instruct their classes. What does success look like in courses that equally prioritize social and academic learning. It was clear from the study that schools are responsible for the social development of students. Discovering what strategies work and don't work in practice would provide a much needed element for district coaches, administration, and teacher who carry the responsibilities for ensuring meaningful and effective instruction.

Conclusions

The future of public schools depends on practitioners' abilities to keep pace with the dynamic trends of our social world. With regard to both teaching philosophies and practice, educators are responsible for ensuring that they are providing the most

meaningful and significant learning experiences to students. Learning is not just about core academic knowledge. Dewey (1938) contends, that we cannot continue to treat students as oppressed learning's. Students are capable of and equipped to become active participants in and learners of their broader social world. The role of schools is to empower students to realize their significance and to behave in personally and socially responsible ways. Although educators cannot escape the focus on academic content, they must couple that with a priority on social learning as well. Collaboration between students, families, educators, the community, and mental health professionals ensures that each stakeholder has a voice and informs school discourse. Students have changed. Local communities have changed. Schools, too, must change by providing an education that relies on academic and social content in order to prepare students to become citizens that can actively engage in their social world.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Demographic Questions

- 1) What is your name (pseudonym)?
- 2) What is your position in this district?
- 3) How long have you been in your current position?
- 4) What is your highest earned degree?
- 5) What was your field of study?

Teacher Interview Questions

- 1) What role do you think schools play in the academic development of students? Social development?
- 2) Thinking about identity and this unique phase in your students' development, how do you see this play out in their lives? [How do students manage some of these challenges and obstacles?]
- 3) What factors do you think impact student mindset (life, school, friends, etc.)?
- 4) What are the three overarching goals you have for your 8th grade students?
- 5) How would you describe the term "social justice"? [How would you define the term?]
- 6) Do you believe your students understand this concept? Why or why not?
- 7) Are there opportunities within your academic curriculum to teach social concepts?
 - i) *How are those messages conveyed to students? How do you determine if students understand those messages?*
- 8) What do you know about your students' belonging to social groups?
 - i) *How do you think this contributes to their social and/or academic development?*
- 9) On a scale of 1-5, how comfortable do you think your students feel working with diverse populations (culturally, ability, etc.)? What makes you say this?
- 10) What opportunities do your students have to collaborate with one another in class?
What do you think students should learn from these types of learning opportunities?
- 11) How do your students demonstrate personal responsibility? Social responsibility?

- 12) **Students are important change agents.** What are your thoughts about statement?
- 13) Hypothetically: What skills/dispositions/mindsets would a successful graduating 8th grade student embody?
- 14) **Are there any other thoughts/insight you would like to offer before we close this interview?

Curriculum Specialist Interview Questions

- 1) How would you define curriculum?
- 2) What is the process for selecting curriculum for use in the classroom?
- 3) What factors are considered when deciding what curriculum will be used in certain grades? [Grade 8 specifically]
- 4) There has been a push on a national and state level to include more character education in schools. Has this been considered at all when making curriculum decisions? [How, so?]
- 5) What opportunities are there for students to inform the curriculum process?
- 6) What role do you think schools play in the academic development of students? Social development?
- 7) What factors do you think impact student mindset (life, school, friends, etc.)?
- 8) What are the three overarching goals for 8th grade students in the district?
- 9) Hypothetically: What skills/dispositions/mindsets would a successful graduating 8th grade student embody?
- 10) **Are there any other thoughts/insight you would like to offer before we close this interview?

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

TITLE OF STUDY: An Analysis of a Middle School Curriculum: Through the Lens of Personal Responsibility, Social Responsibility, and Social Justice

Principal Investigator: Maria Sudeck

Co-Investigator: Kristen A. Clark

This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study and it will provide information that will help you to decide whether you wish to volunteer for this research study. It will help you to understand what the study is about and what will happen in the course of the study.

If you have questions at any time during the research study, you should feel free to ask them and should expect to be given answers that you completely understand.

After all of your questions have been answered, if you still wish to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this informed consent form.

I will also sign this informed consent to demonstrate that we agree to the terms of the research. You will be given a copy of the signed consent form to keep.

You are not giving up any of your legal rights by volunteering for this research study or by signing this consent form.

Why is this study being done?

As a doctoral student in Rowan University's Educational Leadership Department, I am conducting this dissertation research as a part of the program. As the idea of "social learning" becomes more popular, it is important for schools to address both dynamics in light of tight financial and material resources. The purpose of the research is to explore how concepts of social responsibility and personal responsibility are embedded within core academic curriculum, policy, and assessed within core classes. Furthermore, I hope to gain insight as to how those concepts translate into students' social justice mindsets.

Why have you been asked to take part in this study?

As a staff member, you have direct experience with 8th grade students, which is the focus of the study. You have a particular expertise in both your academic content area in addition to student behaviors that is useful for the study?

Who may take part in this study? And who may not?

I am looking for teachers that teach a core content area and/or specialize in curriculum.

How many subjects will be enrolled in the study?

There will be approximately 7 participants chosen to participate in the study.

How long will my participation in this study take?

The complete study will take place over a period of approximately 1 year. As a participant, I ask that you dedicate at least one 25-35 minute session with the potential for a brief follow-up meeting as needed.

Where will the study take place?

You will be asked to select a convenient location within the school and/or office space that can ensure a level of confidentiality and privacy. You will be asked to come to the agreed upon location during the month of November/December to participate in a one-on-one taped in-person interview.

What will you be asked to do if you take part in this research study?

<i>Step 1</i>	<i>Participate in a one-on-one taped interview</i>
<i>Step 2</i>	<i>Participate in a follow-up session (as needed on a case by case basis)</i>

What are the risks and/or discomforts you might experience if you take part in this study?

Minimal risk has been identified as a part of this study. However, if at some point you feel uncomfortable with the nature of the research and/or interview environment, you are free to opt out of the remainder of the study.

Are there any benefits for you if you choose to take part in this research study?

The benefits of taking part in this study may be that you will be contributing to the growing body of knowledge on the issues of social justice and school curriculum.

The following alternative treatments are available if you choose not to take part in this study:

If you choose not to take part in a taped interview, you can opt for an email version of the same questionnaire instrument.

How will you know if new information is learned that may affect whether you are willing to stay in this research study?

During the course of the study, you will be updated about any new information that may affect whether you are willing to continue taking part in the study. If new information is learned that may affect you, you will be contacted directly and in a timely manner

Will there be any cost to you to take part in this study?

The only cost for you to participate in the study will be in the form of your voluntary time. No financial and/or material resources are necessary to participate in the research study.

Will you be paid to take part in this study?

For your participation in the research study, you will be compensated with a Saxby's gift card.

You will receive up to \$10 for taking part in this study according to the following schedule:

- \$ 5.00 at your first session
- \$ 5.00 at your second session (as needed)

How will information about you be kept private or confidential?

All efforts will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential, but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. In order to ensure the confidentiality of each participant, you will select a pseudonym that only I have access to and asked to provide general anecdotes that cannot be traced directly back to you. All recordings, coding materials, and memos will be stored in a secure location outside of the school and communicated regularly and sincerely to participants to ease any potential anxiety regarding participation in the study.

What will happen if you are injured during this study?

Minimal risk has been identified for participation in this research. If you are injured in this study and need treatment, contact XXX, School Nurse (2nd Floor), and seek further treatment.

We will offer the care needed to treat injuries directly resulting from taking part in this study. Rowan University may bill your insurance company or other third parties, if appropriate, for the costs of the care you get for the injury. However, you may be responsible for some of those costs. Rowan University does not plan to pay you or provide compensation for the injury. You do not give up your legal rights by signing this form.

If at any time during your participation and conduct in the study you have been or are injured, you should communicate those injuries to the research staff present at the time of injury and to the Principal Investigator, whose name and contact information is on this consent form.

What will happen if you do not wish to take part in the study or if you later decide not to stay in the study?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may change your mind at any time.

If you do not want to enter the study or decide to stop participating, your relationship with the study staff will not change, and you may do so without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

*You may also withdraw your consent for the use of data already collected about you, but you must do this in writing to **Kristen A. Clark via e-mail, clarkk82@students.rowan.edu.***

If you decide to withdraw from the study for any reason, you may be asked to participate in one meeting with the Principal Investigator.

Who can you call if you have any questions?

If you have any questions about taking part in this study or if you feel you may have suffered a research related injury, you can call the Principal Investigator:

Maria Sudeck, Ph.D.
Rowan University
College of Education
856-256-4500 ext. 3805

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you can call:

Rowan University
Office of Research
(856) 256-5150 – Glassboro/CMSRU

What are your rights if you decide to take part in this research study?

You have the right to ask questions about any part of the study at any time. You should not sign this form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have been given answers to all of your questions.

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

I have read this entire form, or it has been read to me, and I believe that I understand what has been discussed. All of my questions about this form or this study have been answered.

Subject Name: _____

Subject Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator/Individual Obtaining Consent:

To the best of my ability, I have explained and discussed the full contents of the study including all of the information contained in this consent form. All questions of the research subject and those of his/her parent or legal guardian have been accurately answered.

Investigator/Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

You have already agreed to participate in a research study conducted by Dr. Maria Sudeck and Kristen Clark. We are asking for your permission to allow us to audiotape (sound) as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by the researcher.

The recording(s) will include the investigator questioning and participant responses excluding your personal name as an identifier.

The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet and linked with a code to subjects' identity and will be retained until the completion of the study. At that time, the audio recording will be destroyed.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

AGREEMENT TO AUDIO RECORD INTERVIEW

I have read this entire form, or it has been read to me, and I believe that I understand what has been discussed. All of my questions about this form or this study have been answered.

Subject Name: _____

Subject Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator/Individual Obtaining Consent:

To the best of my ability, I have explained and discussed the full contents of the study including all of the information contained in this consent form. All questions of the

research subject and those of his/her parent or legal guardian have been accurately answered.

Investigator/Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Interview Memos

Interview 1 (AE)

The teacher seemed to be very aware of the need for socialization as a part of the academic process. The teacher readily admitted that there seemed to be very little diversity by way of traditional factors (socioeconomic, race, religion, etc.). The diversity that does exist is among Asian students who apparently joke about their being Asian and a minority. Is this out of comfort or a coping mechanism? How do other students understand their possible discomfort? There was a comment regarding the town being accepting of diversity: is it? The dividing line for students seemed to exist around sports (privilege) and how well students are at it (ability). Although this is her first year in her specific role, the teacher has been in the district quite some time and is a specialist in her content area. I am wondering whether or not the teacher realizes that the teacher has the prime opportunity to balance learning since there is no learning curve for her in terms of content. The teacher seems to believe that there is a responsibility for students to take the ownership in learning (uses the word independent to describe student expectation), however the teacher believes that students cannot handle it right now. The teacher suggested that a lot of the responsibility for structure and including social content is the responsibility of the teachers. How do students develop independence when there isn't the culture for that? Teachers should anticipate student needs, which is true. What opportunities are created for teachers to become knowledgeable about those needs? Do the tiered classes prioritize diversity and/or social aspects of learning or academics?

Parents are clearly the most important factor in determining student's performance/behavior. Are parents accepting of diversity?

Interview 2 (AZ)

The teacher understands the complexities of identity. The teacher discusses identity development as one of the main struggles of students, which hinders their performance and/or personal responsibility. The teacher speaks at length regarding the connection of self and identity within the academic content and curriculum is vital to success and meaningfulness in middle school. The course itself is centered on the belief that each person has a unique version of self and with it strengths and challenges. The teacher prioritizes social learning within the classroom as it is an integral part of the class itself. The teacher owns this content area and it impacts her confidence and teaching decisions. Teacher identifies social contact and relationships as a significant factor in students' development, but that parents can and have been a hindrance in major ways. (Difference between parent goals and school goals?) The teacher believed that it is important for students to balance academic performance with being "good people" and "good citizens." When asked whether or not students understand their role as a part of society or community, the teacher believes that students at this level are unable to see this without guidance. When considering social justice and issues of fairness, the teacher admitted that it was hard to determine this or get students to see this for the lack of diversity (connection to the lack of diversity in schools in general—segregation). Teacher recognizes that the real world is very different from school and that the classroom ad

schools are the catalyst to create change—student led change, but that student discomfort gets in the way of exploration.

Interview 3 (RL)

The administrator has extensive experiences in social learning from previous professional employment. The administrator believes that social learning is a mindset that influences the development of social programming. The administrator believes that collaboration is essential to make sure each viewpoint is taken into consideration while engaging what is considered a backward design model to curriculum development. Knowledge construction should not just be focused on the why but the “how” as well. In the interview, the administrator was asked what was important for students at this level to be able to do upon successful completion of middle school. His goals for students included: self-awareness, critical thinking, being accepting of diversity, and evaluating the credibility of information. One of the big takeaways is that students should be able to develop goals for themselves and be equipped to measure progress toward those goals. (Are schools preparing students to accomplish this type of task?)

Interview 4 (AU)

The teacher felt that schools are not only responsible for academics but also the social development of students. A focus on legislation such as NCLB, though, makes it difficult to do so according to the teacher. The teacher believes that the schools are responsible for the social development of students, specifically teaching them “right from wrong.” (Who defines this?) Teacher also felt it critical that both home and school have similar goals for students otherwise they undo each other. There are always conflicting

goals and roles students must adjust to. The teacher wants students to learn to be comfortable with who they are not define themselves through outside people or influences. Their insecurity and lack of confidences impacts their academic performance and willingness to get involved and participate. Teacher feels as if the structured CPR programming isn't working. The teacher said that students are so stuck in their comfort zone that the thought of risk-taking becomes too much especially when coddled from home and familial influences. The teacher was unclear as to what social justice was and felt that students were unaware of their own privilege but that families use their privilege to their advantage.

The teacher truly felt as though students are not socially responsible out of fear and enact exclusionary practices in relationship to their social groups. Schools should create safe spaces for student exploration of self and academics, but the parameters (structure of school and instruction) make it difficult.

Interview 5 (IA)

The teacher discussed that schools should be better and more equipped to develop individualized learning plans and goals for students as progress should be measured according to where each student starts and not necessarily in comparison to one another per se. The teacher admits that there is a lot of ambiguity around learning today especially as it relates to social goals and programming. The question of what's most important and who sets the tone concerning school and home goals and behaviors was eye-opening. The teacher mentions that with so many groups that students belong to, they are constantly trying to figure out who they are and with such a technology driven society

students are constantly capturing who they are at any given point in time. Social conflicts come with this constant shift and a majority of students cope with “avoidance” since they are concerned with social acceptance. There is some social hierarchy that hinders acceptance of difference and pushes stigmas of certain groups. The teacher does believe that students have the potential to make changes regarding these circumstances, but do not feel empowered to do so.

Interview 6 (OU)

According to this teacher, academics are secondary to social development in middle school. The students define themselves based on their abilities, which can also affect who they hang out and associate with. School and home should equally share the development of student goals, perspectives, etc. Students often try out what they are taught at home and use schools as “laboratories.” The teacher agrees that students experience great discomfort when they are “forced” to operate outside of their comfort zone. There is a common theme that adults (parents, teachers, etc.) stifle student exploration because of the strict academic parameters and the issues of and between adults. [Academic] subjects should merge students’ experiences with what they are learning, but schools have a very challenging time doing that. Instead of students seeing themselves in the text [curriculum, etc.], they use technology as a way of figuring out who they are and what they are into “positively and negatively.” To be able to find true balance there should be a shift in professional culture to accommodate this developmental phase for students. In this financially stable school the parents/family feel a sense of entitlement. The privilege is only understood by the adults. The idea of a “American

Dream” creates a false image that everyone will be well off and make it. (What does this mean for the students who are not well off?) Money also has created a sense of self-centeredness and not personal responsibility. The teacher also feels as though students and unaware of social responsibility to any degree. The teacher also believes that any change that will ultimately occur has to be led by teachers because they are equipped with varying degrees of knowledge to be able to do so.

Appendix D

Northeastern Region Character Education Initiatives by State

The following section details the differences between character education implementation throughout the Northeastern Region of the nation. It was adopted from a more comprehensive national report entitled, “What Are States Doing?”

Connecticut (Supports without/ legislation)

The Connecticut State Department of Education received a \$250,000 grant to use from 1996-2000 from the U.S. Department of Education in order to establish character education programs. There is currently no legislation proposed for character education; however, the state department of education does encourage districts to address character education in their curricula.

Delaware (Encourages)

In 2000, Delaware's Legislature recognized the state as a "State of Character" and urged citizens to promote character in schools, businesses, homes, churches and other places. The state signed a Bullying Prevention Law into effect in 2008, which includes many of the same principles as character education. Legislation enacted during the 1994-95 school year and generous resources support school-based intervention programs that positively effect school climate, discipline and safety. While schools are using resources to implement character education, legislators intentionally avoided using the specific term “character education” due to past objections to the term “values education.” In May, 2001, Delaware hosted it’s first Character Rally, a two-day event founded by Junior Achievement of Delaware to provide a fundamental understanding of ethics and the

importance of building character in the lives of youth. More than 5,000 eighth graders attended. In 2003 Governor Minner declared that Character Education would become part how youth are educated and not a separate class. Delaware hosted the “Don’t Laugh at Me” project and held many follow up training sessions for schools throughout the state.

District of Columbia (No Character Education legislation)

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education held an Evening Policy Forum on December 11, 2007 entitled “Establishing School Climate for Academic Success.” This forum included references to character education and CEP. Previously, the District of Columbia received a federal grant through "The Partnerships in Character Education Project Program" to implement character education programs from 2000-2005, but research has not yielded any more information. The grant aimed to help "design a reform model to connect character-building content and instructional strategies with existing curriculum standards, and to improve overall school climate" for 11 DCPS schools, serving 6,926 students (six elementary schools, two middle/junior high schools, and three senior high schools located in each of the District of Columbia's eight Wards).

Maine (Encourages)

Title 20-A, Section 254.11 of the Maine Statutes (passed in 1999 and amended from 1821 Maine Law) established "Statewide Standards for Behavior." These standards call for the teaching and modeling of values that will result in educating successful students of good character. The importance of character is implied throughout the language of Maine’s Common Core, as well as in academic standards of learning formally adopted by the Maine Legislature in 1997.

Maryland (Encourages)

The Maryland Legislature introduced Senate Bill 737 in 2000 to mandate that all Maryland public schools develop curricula to teach character education, but the bill was not passed. However, state legislation does encourage character education. In 1979, a resolution established the Governor's Commission on Values Education. This Commission had 51 recommendations, which encouraged local school systems to adopt the state's citizen and character objectives as their own, and to begin action immediately with existing resources. Though this commission was disbanded after the completion of their report in 1983, all 24 local school systems have worked since then to integrate character education into their curricula. Maryland was the first state to appoint a statewide character education coordinator. In 2006, Section 7-304 of the Maryland Code was amended to alter the standard by which a county board of education and the Board of School Commissioners of Baltimore City must require certain elementary schools to implement a positive behavioral intervention and support program.

Massachusetts (No Character Education legislation)

In 1999, the Department of Education sponsored a conference on character education entitled, "Cultivating Character and Civility through the Curriculum Frameworks." This was the first in a series of initiatives in character education sponsored by the state. From 2000-2005, the Department of Education formed a partnership with Boston Public Schools (BPS), Hampshire Educational Collaborative (HEC), Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character at Boston University (CAEC), and Lynch School of Education at Boston College. "A Foundation for Citizenship Through

Character Education” brought together rural and urban school districts from across the state to develop critically needed and timely educational curricula to incorporate a K–12 character education initiative in rural districts of Western Massachusetts and in urban Boston. This pilot project aimed to provide a replicable model for schools that educate rural and/or urban youth, and that educate student populations that are diverse with respect to age, grade levels, and a host of other demographics.

New Hampshire (No Character Education legislation)

In 1993, New Hampshire established a values program for its teachers. A new state rule required educators who desired recertification to complete five hours of instruction in character and citizenship education. (These hours were included in the 50 hours of professional development that teachers must accumulate every three years to maintain certification.) To provide technical assistance in meeting this new rule, the New Hampshire Department of Education formed an advisory group of professionals from school districts, teachers unions, principals associations, and teacher education programs. This group now encompasses staff development committees, regional workshop centers, and liaisons with national character education organizations. In 1995, the state received a Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Grant to address the occurrence of violent incidences on school grounds. In 2004, House Bill 1162 amended RSA 193-F, the Pupil Safety and Violence Prevention Law, to require that school boards have a safety and violence prevention policy.

New Jersey (No Character Education legislation)

In 2000, the Governor established the New Jersey Character Education Partnership (NJCEP) Initiative. The purpose of this initiative is to assist public school educators in adopting character education programs that will meet the developmental needs of students by promoting pro-social student behaviors and creating a caring, disciplined school climate conducive to learning. The Governor's FY 2003 budget provided \$4.75 million to public school districts, charter schools and state facilities to support character education program development and implementation during the 2002-03 school year. In 2002, the governor of New Jersey signed an executive order, which established The New Jersey Character Education Commission. This commission now reviews best practices for character education and sets forth options for communities and school districts to undertake the development of community-based character education programs. In 2006, Senate Bill 1749 required boards of education to offer elementary school students instruction in gang violence prevention. Additionally, N.J.A.C. mandates that each district school board adopt a set of core ethical values to guide student behavior, with input from the local community.

New York (Mandates)

In 2000, the New York Assembly enacted Project SAVE, the Safe Schools Against Violence in Education Act. This provided for codes of conduct on school property, school safety plans; uniform violent incident reporting system; protection of school employees; omnibus school violence prevention grant program; and instruction in civility, citizenship and character education. In January 2002, Bill Number A4816 was

referred to the Committee on Education to require the development of curricula in character education. As of yet, it has not been passed.

Pennsylvania (Encourages)

Passed in 1999, Act 36 provided grants for schools to provide safety-related technology, personnel, or programs for their students. More recently, Act 70 of 2004 amended Article 15-E in the Pennsylvania Public School Code by encouraging character education in all Pennsylvania K-12 schools. Specifically, the bill defined character education, established a character education advisory group, and outlined State Department of Education duties, including: establishing criteria for programming, providing resources and technical assistance to school districts, analyzing effective programs, disseminating information, and establishing the Character Education Grant Program to support schools. The Pennsylvania Alliance for Character Education (PACE) was an initiative of the Pennsylvania Service-Learning Alliance to support the integration of character education across Pennsylvania, but it dissolved in 2007.

Rhode Island (Encourages)

In 1997, House Resolution 387 endorsed the implementation of character development education in Rhode Island public schools. In 2000, the US Department of Education and the Rhode Island Department of Education jointly funded a pilot character development program called “Healthy Schools! Healthy Kids!” The program was built on the principles of social and emotional learning and the incorporation of current state and local reform efforts. The Rhode Island Character Education Partnership (RICEP) is currently engaged in a learning and planning year of a three-year grant award. Years two

and three will support the implementation of objectives in professional development, curriculum revisions, students' character development, parent and community involvement and support, promotion and recognition, and replication of RICEP programs throughout the state. RICEP maintains that there is no single formula for character education programs. They do use CEP's 11 Principles of Character Education as a guide for program design and implementation. The RI jointly funded pilot character development program ended in 2003. The RI Department of Education and RI Coordinated School Health Program - thrive - continue to support social emotional competencies and 11 Principles of Effective Character Education.

Vermont (Supports without/ legislation)

Vermont's Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities includes personal development standards (worth and competence, healthy choices, making decisions, relationships, and workplace) and civic/social responsibility standards (service, human diversity, and change.) In 2001, Vermont received a 5-year Partnerships in Character Education Project Program grant from the US Department of Education. In order to design and implement character education curricula in Vermont, the Vermont Commissioner of Education invited each of the 60 local education agencies to join in partnership with the Vermont State Education Agency. The Department planned a curriculum design team to identify, design, adapt and revise character education curriculum components. After completing an intensive summer institute, teachers, special educators, and paraprofessionals in each model site implemented the curriculum. An

annual statewide Character Education Conference will disseminate the project's results statewide.