

THE ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF TEACHER PROFESSIONAL  
DISCRETION OVER CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION:  
A GROUNDED THEORY INQUIRY

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

With the ever-changing requirements of a secondary level of education and the application of standardized testing criteria to determine proficiency in mastery of the subject matter, the attempt to create a standard and acceptable curriculum for all school sites has left the control of the schools. Now classrooms are scrambling for focus, guidance and support with curriculum development and implementation. Over the last three decades, there have been numerous research studies that have examined the place of the classroom teacher in the process of creating curriculum for their classroom with mixed results. The efforts to reform secondary education, from the federal level to the local level, have shut out the local input from teachers and professionals in their particular fields as to what the curriculum in the classroom should be and left that decision to people outside the classroom environment.

This research study was conducted to derive a theory developed on the empirical basis of teacher input through the lens of the methodology of grounded theory. Its goal was to identify the underlying issues and problems associated with classroom teachers; input into local curriculum as well as the barriers to changing the prevailing thought of classroom teachers on curriculum. Classroom teachers from two separate academic subject matters that are currently being taught at the middle school level were interviewed and their responses were coded using the classical grounded theory methodology and processes.

The resulting research shows that the involvement of classroom teachers is considered a benefit to the local curriculum development, regardless of experience in the classroom or length of service as a teacher. While most teachers feel that their input is paramount to learning in their particular classroom, teachers admit that they lack the skills to effectively create curriculum for implementation. It is in this manner that teachers strive to do what is best for their students; however, in some cases they lack the support and direction from the district, state or federal level. Knowing the issue as it appears to the classroom teacher, the creation, implementation and execution of locally created curriculum would be and is met with great resistance due to the adherence to the prevailing thoughts on curriculum development at the state or federal level and the need to comply with and execute the curriculum within the existing frameworks.

Further studies in looking at the existence of and use of locally teacher created and implemented curriculum, in different state or regional areas, would contribute to a better and clearer understanding of the particular issues that surround and deal with teacher involvement in the classroom curriculum decision making process. It is believed that the use of the grounded theory model as a methodological research tool provides a pathway for all interested parties to be open and candid about the issue and provide a better introspective look at the issues at hand.

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## Statement of the Problem

Classroom teachers throughout the United States and much of the Western educational sphere of influence have often complained that the adherence to a standardized curriculum, that curriculum and teaching practice which dictates their daily classroom activities and pacing and is implemented by someone outside the individual classroom or school district, affects that teacher's ability to effectively teach the students according to the ability of all students encountered. Research has shown that there is a belief that the standardized curriculum and scripted delivery of such stifles the individual teacher's sense of choice and brings into question their own individual sense of self-efficacy and academic effectiveness in the classroom. Butler (2007) explains that several research studies of classroom instructors have looked into the issue of individual differences in variables such as teachers' qualifications, competencies, individual personality, personally derived instructional values, and the perceptions of students (Brophy, 1998; Wayne & Youngs, 2003). However Butler (2007) continues to show that few studies have focused on a particular teacher's individual discretion and their choice in delivery of curricular materials.

As cited by Goddard, Hoy and Woolfolk Hoy (2004, p. 4-5), classroom teachers with strong perceptions of academic self-competence tend to employ specific classroom strategies that have more organization, they are better planned and implemented, are student centered and humanistic in nature (Allinder, 1994; Czerniak & Schriver, 1994;

Enochs, Scharmann, & Riggs, 1995; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990, p. 90). Additionally, according to Woolfolk and Hoy (1990, p. 84), research shows us that a teachers' personal sense of self-efficacy or teaching efficacy is often connected to the teachers' individual attitude about student and classroom control and to their behavior in relation to the students and behavior in their individual classroom (Ashton & Webb, 1986). It is the mindset of the classroom teacher that the supervisors (administrators) will allow the teachers (instructors) to demonstrate knowledge of the standards and curriculum that are required by the State Department of Education (DOE) and that are to be covered in the classroom. By allowing the teacher the discretion to create and effectively instruct the class based on their knowledge and experience in that specific area, we see an explanation for the positive correlation that occurs between the teachers and the achievement of the students that they interact with (Anderson, Greene, & Loewen, 1988; Armor, Conroy-Oseguera, Cox, King, McDonnell, Pascal, et al., 1976; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984, p. 572; Ross, 1992, p. 60; Ross, 1994). Richardson and Watt (2006, p. 27) also state that it is the teacher that can and does effectively make a difference in the education of their students, thereby influencing their orientation to successful learning in the classroom. This is not a theoretical problem, but one that has real problems and issues that needs to be addressed and there are real solutions that are needed to ensure that we, as educators, continue to deliver relevant and engaging material to ensure the successes of our students.

A trend that is occurring in education, at this moment, is to stifle the teachers' creative input and reduces them to mere controllable cogs in the education wheel through

the use of standardized curriculum, high stakes testing and uniformity in the classroom and thereby effectively denying teachers any discretion over curricular materials that are used in their classrooms. To continue to follow this path will lead culture of self-interest and “survivalism” dominated by those tests, accountability issues in the classroom for teachers and mandated deadlines to follow with respect to curriculum, thereby encouraging all parties involved to play it safe in education (Ball, 2008, p. 45 as cited in Berry, 2009, p. 38).

The research presented by Boote (2006) states that over the last twenty years that with the widespread “implementation of standardized curriculum and instruction”, high stakes testing and all of its associated ramifications for education, inspection of schools and districts, accreditation and the “ever increasing external control of teacher preparation programs”, the curricular choice for the teacher in the classroom and input from practicing professionals has affected the proficiency of teachers in the classroom and in the various teacher education programs across collegial spectrum. Many countries are adopting policies and programs that directly affect the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs and have led to a lack of continuity, rigor concerning future teacher input and curriculum delivery discretion in the teacher’s preparation classes. Drawing from Dobbin and Boychuk (1999), Power (1999) and Weiner (2002), Boote indicated (2006, p. 462) that countries like “Australia, Canada, and the United States of America have implemented these policies because many teachers make poor choices” and the policy-makers in these Western countries continue to operate within “tightly structured basic employment systems” in education and operate with the expectation that giving

new or inexperienced teachers fewer, or no, choices over curricular delivery matters would tend to lead less mistakes to correct..

The individual countries' Departments of Education recognize that the lack of preparation of educational personnel from all across the spectrums of education and different governmental bodies is forcing governments into taking what appear to be the corrective actions to ensure compliance in the demanding world of high stakes education, by leaving beginning teachers with fewer choices in curricular discretion decisions. The underlying fact to remember is that teachers strongly agree and believe that the individual teacher choice in curricular discretion issues improves the affective responses from students by increasing their own sense of ownership, self-interest student centered autonomy and creativity with the task at hand (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000, p. 641).

#### Research Question

Why is it that the underlying educational theory that dictates that new to the field teachers, or teachers with years of experience in the classroom, should not be allowed to be involved in classroom curricular decision-making within their specific discipline? Elements of this research will include the prevailing thought of classroom teachers on how or why this policy is in effect and who or what should guide the curricular advancement in the classroom. Are teachers better off teaching to their students in the classroom or simply following a pre-packaged curriculum as dictated by a school board or state Department of Education?

In looking at the various factors and variables that are driving this research, the following questions have to be address and answered in order to fully understand the positions taken in the research.

1. What are the issues and factors that influence teacher professional discretion over Curriculum and Instruction?
2. What are the consequences of teacher professional discretion over Curriculum and Instruction?

#### Definitions of Terms

Autonomy-supportive teachers: The description of teachers who listen more, encouraged student initiative with the instructional materials, ask questions about the student's wants, reply to questions, and offer empathic perspective taking statements. This follows a flexible student-centered approach to instruction (Reeve, Bolt & Cai, 1999, p. 546).

Core Academic Subject: The term "core academic subject" as used here, comes to mean one of the following subjects that are widely considered to fall into this specific category. The subjects are English, Reading and/or Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies.

Decision-making skills: Knowing how to evaluate and make a good educational decision based on the facts presented.



Flexibility and Control: Having the ability to have the knowledge of the state standards that need to be taught combined with the ability to develop an individual delivery style for the material

Formal Curricula: Standardized curriculum that has been mandated by a nation, state, district and school (Boote, 2006, p. 463).

Instructional Focus Calendar: State and/or School district issued instructional timeframes for the delivery of educational curriculum.

Scripted Curriculum Delivery: A style of academic content delivery that uses an instructional focus calendar and standardized curriculum which is mandated and received from a State Department of Education, or a local school district, and is followed exactly to the letter and does not deviate from the material it contains. This delivery system also advocates the leaving out of any self-introduced material.

Self-Determination Theory: The theory that has been used to explain the issues of the variations in student learning strategies, performance in the educational arena and the persistence of the students (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Self-efficacy: One's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations (Bandura, 1977).

Standardized Curriculum: The type of curriculum policy that mandates all instructors in a District or school system that teach a specific to teach the same lesson at the same time by following an Instructional Focus calendar.

Student Motivation: Characterized by showing how a motivational system can be elicited by a competitive, cooperative, or individualistic goal structure (Ames & Ames, 1984, p. 536).

Teaching Efficacy: Relating to such significant variables as student achievement, teachers' adoption of innovation, superintendents' ratings of teacher competence and teachers' classroom management strategies (Armor et al., 1976; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Guskey, 1988; Smylie, 1988; Trentham, Silvern, & Brogdon, 1985).

Teacher Flexibility: Ability of the teacher to change and modify curriculum instruction to fit a changing administrative, educational or student comprehension situation.

Teacher Instructional Autonomy: The administrative-supportive stance to allow a teacher to use all of their training and knowledge to effectively deliver the curriculum effectively and follow all of the state-mandated requirements for teaching.

Teachers' Sense of Efficacy: their belief in their ability to have a positive effect on their teaching situations and on student's learning (Ashton, 1985).

### Delimitations

This study was delimited to participants who were actively employed as Middle School teachers by the County School District in Florida during the 2011 – 2012 academic school year.

### Limitations

1. The participants of this study were selected from a suburban Florida school district that operates public school facilities that cater to students in both suburban and rural environments.
2. Since only teachers of specific core academic areas were interviewed, no equal representation with pertinent information from other core academic areas are presented.
3. The open ended interviews contain only the responses and perceptions of the teachers working in each school at that particular time

### Assumptions

The assumptions for this study include:

1. That the results gathered from the interviews were able to be generalized or non-specifically identified to the population of Core Academic Subject teachers of this district.
2. Participants' responses to interview questions were honest and representative of their particular beliefs of educational practices.
3. It is to be assumed that the interviews and demographic information questionnaire would provide valuable information as to the expectations of teachers in the classroom and their satisfaction of having individual control of that classroom and curriculum.

### Significance of the Study

As part of the educational reform movement sweeping across the American educational system, the ability for teachers to create and deliver meaningful curriculum to their individual classrooms is being stymied in the name by unfunded mandates, stronger unrealistic accountability measures being placed on the instructors, thereby leaving the educational process victim to the effects of high stakes testing accountability. In the present day, it has become the norm for state legislatures to pass educational laws, issue unfunded mandates to the local school districts and require teachers to be evaluated on variables that are out of their immediate control. All the while, teachers are being stripped of their input to and expertise in creating effective and meaningful educational curriculum in the name of high stakes accountability and the creation of scripted curriculum.

The main rationale of this grounded theory study is to investigate the teachers' own individual perception of having the professional discretion and ability to choose the style of directed instruction and the flexibility to present the material in such a way that showcases their individual strengths in the classroom, with respect to the curriculum being delivered in the classroom. The study will examine the teacher's perception of their ability to have an input in the curricular discretion in choosing material, method of delivery and instruction of the curriculum. The aim of this study is to develop a working theory that builds on and contributes to work in analyzing the situations of teacher decision making in the classroom regarding curriculum and the related issues in that if a

teacher is given a choice over material to present, direction and assistance, then the application of the teacher's discretion in presenting the material and the control in choosing the material to be presented provides for a more descriptive and engaging curriculum. Those who would benefit most from this study are the faculty of the target level of secondary schools who have to present the curriculum in a classroom. After seeing that their input is valued and respected, the teachers, along with the administration of those schools where the impacted classroom teachers work, and the county departments of education would see the results of the teacher influenced and creation of curricular materials in the areas of improved mastery.

## **CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Research has shown that a positive correlation does exist between teacher flexibility in creating curriculum for the classroom and student learning in the public school setting in America (Butler, 2007, p. 250), in Taiwan and other countries in Asia where an entirely different viewpoint from the Western outlook on motivation is present (d'Ailly, 2003, p. 86; Kim & Chun, 1994; Sue & Okazaki, 1990, p. 916), regarding behavior and differing beliefs and values in education for their societies (Hofstede, 1980; Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 228; Triandis, 1994) and we are also seeing the correlation in the rise of the home school population of American society, which has been steadily increasing as an educational option since the 1970's (Cai, Reeve & Robinson 2002, p. 378; Knowles, Marlow & Muchmore, 1992; Lines, 1991). According to Gibson and Dembo (1984, p. 569), the "evidence of the teachers' beliefs in their abilities to instruct students may account for individual differences in effectiveness" in the classroom (Armor et al., 1976; Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauley & Zellman, 1977; Brookover, Schweitzer, Schneider, Beady, Flood, & Wisenbaker, 1978; Brophy & Everson, 1977).

In a report by Reeve and Jang (2006, p. 210), the ability to ask students as to their desires and wants in the classroom, that is getting the students to 'buy-in' to the curriculum creation and lesson planning, allows for a autonomy supportive environment for the educator and increases the ease of delivery of the curricular material because it lends to the integration of student needs into the material, leading to increase in material being covered and thereby leading to better academic scores on behalf of the teacher.

Additionally, research into the effects of choice and how that choice is applied in daily education situations regarding motivation and autonomy was the focus of a study in Nebraska (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000), and, in recent years, French researchers weighed in on the intrinsic value of motivation and teaching in the physical educational department (Trouilloud, Sarrazin, Bressoux, & Bois, 2006).

Based on the previous literature and research into the ideas of teacher involvement into classroom curricular decision making have been present, however they did not specifically look at the teachers' involvement and the issues surrounding that topic. Instead, researchers chose to look at the determining factors of motivation, efficacy and subject matter knowledge and how they will perform in the classroom given a distinct set of directions. This study will look to the antecedents, issues and consequences, both positive and negative, of allowing teachers to have curricular decision making powers over curriculum delivered in their classroom.

### Teacher Motivation

In a study by Butler (2007, p. 241), it was presented that specific questions in four distinct areas were addressed with respect to teacher motivation and teacher efficacy in the educational environment. The definition that is used at this point for individual teacher motivation refers to "the conditions and processes that account for the arousal, direction, magnitude and maintenance of effort" (Katzell & Thompson, 1990, p. 144) as mentioned in Finnegan (2010, p. 162). With respect to that issue of teacher motivation, the concept of reviewing goal orientations for teaching has provided four distinct and

direct factors that reflect the teachers' view of mastery orientation such as "ability-approach, ability avoidance, and work-avoidance goals and their influence on the motivation of newer teachers in the classroom" (Henderson, 1992; Pelletier, Seguin-Levesque, & Legault, 2002; Pollard, 2002) as cited in (Butler, 2007, p. 242). This study by Butler builds on and contributes to previous research in the area of teacher motivation and the research that has occurred thus far.

The focus of the introspective look by Butler (2007, p. 241) was how teachers go about finding their motivation for teaching and successes in the classroom, in this case, by looking at how they approach their own teaching styles using four goals. This first goal is mastery orientation, which can be defined as the ability to learn, develop and acquire professional understand and skills. The second is ability approach with highlights the demonstration of superior teaching abilities and how they gain that ability to perform in the classroom. The third goal is the ability avoidance concept which states that teachers utilize this cognitive approach to avoid demonstration of inferior teaching abilities in the classroom. According to Finnegan (2007, p. 162), and others as cited in her study (Abelmann, Elmore, Even, Kenyon, & Marshall, 1999; Finnigan & Gross, 2007; Kelley, Heneman, & Milanowski, 2002; Mintrop, 2003, p. 19-20), the research that suggest that a majority of teachers report that they are positively motivated by the actual accountability measures and procedures that state boards of education and school districts put into place, which with further examination will reflect that the classroom teachers are interested their students succeed, as well as being concerned that their schools and efforts in the classroom will be viewed in a negative light and labeled as failures in the



educational realm. In this time in the education process that accountability can be viewed as a positive by teachers in response to the powers of the district or state level, the motivational factors of the classroom teacher are heightened in order to produce a quality educational product for the students they interact with. The fourth goal of the teacher is the work avoidance goal that is brought into the forefront by those teachers looking to complete the day with as little effort that can be exerted at that time.

With discovering the first and second goals and how they apply to teaching and mastery of a matter, one can see that the involvement of the teacher in taking ownership of the material that they present leads to a more cohesive learning atmosphere where students are encouraged to become involved and not simply controlled in the classroom environment (Deci, Schwartz, Sheinman, & Ryan, 1981, p. 642). However, according to Butler (2007, p. 241), there has still been little research into this particular area of teacher motivation. Given that information, it was not surprising that his study looked more at the strength of the motivation rather than the quality of the motivation. In a study by Ames and Ames (1984, p. 545), it was stated that a “qualitative view of teacher motivation begins with a study of the effects of different goals on teacher perceptions, attributions, and other cognitions.” The study goes on to provide information that teachers in this situation begin to process information about their own behavior, as well as the academic abilities and educational performances of their students in classes, and begin to put it in the context of a value orientation that assigns a certain level of importance to various warranted results that relate specifically to their teaching. If the teacher has a high value of importance in their actions, such as teaching, assisting with

material development or implementation in the classroom of material they helped develop, then the value of that action is reflective in their motivation to surpass and exceed the limitations that they have set for themselves as educators.

In looking more towards the aspect of keeping the educational motivation of the teacher within specific stipulated parameters or to stay within the dedicated curriculum policy of the district and including state mandated curriculum, we see that the policy makers are holding the teacher to strict adherence to following district mandated policies by not letting the teacher have the freedom to articulate their expertise and have curricular input, as is discussed in Leithwood, Steinbach, and Jantzi, (2002). The negative motivational responses from a district or state level department towards educators can include a number of setbacks, such as concerns about the teacher's ability to implement academic policy; concerns about insufficient time and resources to cover academic material; and negatively affecting the most basic of emotions, including frustration and anxiety on the part of the educator. Unless the classroom teacher is given some sense of autonomous control in the planning of lessons in the classroom, the motivation of the teacher has then been hampered to the extent that they no longer feel free to cover the material as best as they can as determined by their expertise and will negatively affect student motivation and learning in the process. In this case, the teacher does not feel as an equal partner in the educational control of the classroom but rather be the equal of a cog in a machine, there to help the overall education system run smoothly.

There are some positive benefits that are occurring to embrace the motivation of the academic subject teachers and to allow them the freedom, support and confidence to

be the best educator possible given the circumstances. The ability of principals to be an inclusive partner in the educational relationship between administration and the rank and file staff members have created situations that benefit the school, the principal and most importantly; the teacher. In Leithwood, Tomlinson, and Genge's 1996 study (as cited in Finnegan, 2010, p. 165) principals who involve teachers, as well as other community members, can create a culture of shared responsibility for decision making. As a result of this shared responsibility, the teachers become more vested in the performance of the students, more motivated to be an involved partner in the school (Ellis, 1984). Whereas other studies go on to explain that teachers who have this motivational buy-in to the school and the support of the administration in their classrooms tend to make more informed decisions that will support their educational efforts in the classroom (Enderlin-Lampe, 1997), there are still more that see the connection but cannot make an informed decision as to the results (Yukl, 1994). There has been some reemergence on this issue where a recent studies have linked this type of leadership collaboration between the administration of a school and the teachers as a positive endeavor that results in the increase of teacher motivation, satisfaction, efficacy and morale (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Smylie, Mayrowetz, Murphy, & Louis, 2007) and thereby leading to a more motivated educational environment to increase achievement and success in the classroom.

## Teacher Efficacy

As Woolfolk and Hoy (1990, p. 81) state that there is a need for a clear and careful examination of the many studies that have been presented and established the multitude of definitions for efficacy, however, that the concept of teacher efficacy in particular, is in need of serious research to present a clear and concise definition. Many different authors use the same term but define and measure efficacy in varying ways. They go on to explain and demonstrate at best that the “idea of teacher efficacy is complex at its best and at worst, it is confused”. Teacher efficacy is assumed by some researchers to be a two-dimensional construct consistent with Bandura's (1977, 1982) theory of self-efficacy (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984, p. 570). Other investigators have dealt with the concept of efficacy as a global concept (Barfield & Burlingame, 1974; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1987; Trentham et al., 1985). Efficacy is further described by Barfield and Burlingame (1974) as a personality trait (as cited in Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990, p. 81) and as a state that is in being a response to a particular situation (Ashton & Webb, 1986). The basis for some conceptions of efficacy is in the arena of political science (Barfield & Burlingame, 1974; Trentham et al., 1985), whereas other conceptualizations of efficacy are grounded in psychology (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984, p. 570).

In looking at the definition of efficacy for this research, it is important to look to the practical applications of the term in respect to the classroom teacher and their beliefs of affecting change in the educational aspect of efficacy. Since the time of Albert

Bandura's (1977, 1982) initial report on the concept of self-efficacy, researchers have found links between student achievement and three kinds of efficacy beliefs—the self-efficacy judgments of students (Pajares, 1994, 1997), teachers' beliefs in their own instructional efficacy (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998, p. 202), and teachers' beliefs about the collective efficacy of their school (Bandura, 1977, p. 469) as cited in Goddard, et al., (2000, p. 482). In looking at the second of these three types of efficacy, the beliefs of teachers of their own instructional efficacy, research (Gibson & Dembo, 1984) shows that teachers who have a high sense of self efficacy, combined with a sense of instructional efficacy, create what Bandura (1993) referred to as 'mastery experiences' which create better classroom learning experiences for the students and validate the teacher's instructional efficacy. In this era of teacher scrutiny and evaluation, this is the criterion by which teachers in today's classroom are graded, judged and eventually retained or dismissed from the classroom. In effect, the emphasis that is placed on teachers and their sense of instructional self-efficacy is paramount in importance in the continued educational employment of teachers.

Beard, Hoy and Hoy (2010, p. 1143) show that the efficacy of the collective academic instructors is a main key to the perception of the successful educational environment as a whole will have a positive impact on the students. This is referred to as *collective efficacy* and it can a belief or expectation, but in this case it is mentioned as a benefit that the academic focus of learning will positively affect the behaviors of a school and its students (Beard et al., 2010, p. 1136). The research states that a teacher's own sense of achievement and mastery in the matter figure into the lessons that are being

created for the classrooms and thereby being passed on to the students in the forms of lessons, end of course tests, teacher created assessments and diagnostics for every student to take to gauge mastery of the particular matter. In expanding on this concept of collective efficacy that teachers can ‘buy into’ within the confines of their educational environment, Bryk and Schneider (2002) argue (as cited in Beard et al., 2010, p. 1142) that there a minimum of four social conditions that promote student learning, with one of them being “teachers with a *can do* attitude”. Under the auspices of this attitude, the teacher sense of self efficacy, combined with academic optimism, can lead to a sense of efficacy that is magnified with this ‘can do’ attitude and it is a critical component of creating the high expectations for student success in the classroom that schools, teachers and school districts strive for in today’s accountability laden educational profession.

As research continues to look to the reasons for effective uses of teacher efficacy and how educators use and incorporate it in to their teaching style, Flowerday and Schraw (2000) believe that the use of teacher efficacy is the most important concept in influencing the amount of individual choice given to students to influence higher achievement. In this study, teachers that were tallied indicated that with the increased ability to create their own individual use of teacher choice and decision making in their chosen profession, led to better choices being made for students due to several factors, including, the need for control in their early portion of their teaching careers and adjusting the learning environment to accommodate that. Teachers will continue to give a wide variety of academic choices to the students in a classroom setting so that they can get the creative, autonomous learning environment of teacher created curriculum and

classroom management that best suits their individual teaching style and presentation of that teacher (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000, p. 643). To continue on this thought of teaching efficacy in the classroom and the effects on the individual teachers and their learning environment, Woolfolk and Hoy (1990, p. 84) state, as cited in the report by (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000, p. 641) that teachers who have a greater sense of personal efficacy will tend to operate in a more “humanistic leaning where strict control is replaced by self-discipline”.

According to Ross and Gray (2006), several indicators are presented that will contribute to high teacher efficacy. The mastery of the specific subject matter was considered by them to be the strongest and go on to further state that when teachers gain the realization that they have been successful in their classrooms and in their careers in the past, they can and will be capable handling that same type or similar tasks in the future. Along this same line within the teacher efficacy explanations is the study by Smylie (1988) that suggests that teachers are more likely to implement new teaching strategies in the classroom if they have “the self confidence in their own teaching ability and support to control their own classrooms” to thereby positively affect the student learning (Smiley, 1988, p. 23). Bandura (1977, 1997) states that the perceived social support, whether from family or the social support system in place for that teacher, does in fact provide social persuasion clues that does in fact influence that person’s self-efficacy and others have stipulated that teachers make decisions about their own self efficacy in terms of the constraints and controls of the teaching environment. This is both on a positive basis, as seen above and negative basis where the negative relationship

between the teachers' sense of efficacy and dealing with the stress that can come from parents, students and even the administrators of the school (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998, p. 205).

### Subject Matter Knowledge

In looking at the concept of teacher subject matter knowledge, it is important to realize what exactly subject matter knowledge is and how you master it. As cited in study by Ben-Peretz (2011, p. 4), Schwab (1964) tells us that in addition to content knowledge, "subject matter knowledge encompasses an understanding of the various ways a discipline can be organized or understood", as well as the knowledge of the ways by which a discipline evaluates and accepts new knowledge, which Schwab termed *syntactic knowledge*. This is in addition to the fact that Shulman (1986, p. 8) instructs educators that specialized knowledge is needed, a term he calls "pedagogical content knowledge" and Grossman and Richert (1988, p. 54) defined teacher subject knowledge as "a body of professional knowledge that encompasses both knowledge of general pedagogical principles and skills and knowledge of the subject matter to be taught" (as cited in Ben-Peretz, 2011, p. 4). Here we have three different concepts that cover teachers' specific subject knowledge in addition to the different definition terms that cover the same concept of subject matter knowledge. In the time since, teachers have been at times, thought of as just a piece of the puzzle that it there to instruct based on their own particular subject matter knowledge of their training and to be effective. Once again, Shulman (1986, p. 9) takes this a step further and after introducing the term



*pedagogical content knowledge*, defines that concept as instead of thinking of teacher knowledge as either subject matter knowledge (procedural or conceptual knowledge of the subject) or knowledge of teaching (knowledge of lesson planning, classroom management), the educator should think of it as this knowledge as the knowledge a teacher has about teaching their specific subject area, in particular the “useful forms of representations that make it comprehensible to others” (as cited in Buschang, Chung, Delacruz, & Baker, 2012, p. 2). Shulman (1986, p. 9) goes on to define the three concepts of knowledge that teachers in the education profession need to be aware of and he “conceptualize teachers’ -matter knowledge in terms of *content knowledge*, *pedagogical content knowledge* (PCK), and *curricular knowledge*”. Shulman (1986, p. 9) goes on to define (as cited in Deng, 2007, p. 505) content knowledge as “the amount and organization of knowledge per se in the mind of the teacher”. Grossman, Wilson, and Shulman, (1989) as cited in (Deng, 2007, p. 505) go on to further defining content knowledge as consisting of the following four components:

- Content knowledge—the ‘stuff’ of a discipline;
- Substantive knowledge—knowledge of the explanatory framework or paradigms of a discipline;
- Syntactic knowledge—knowledge of the ways in which new knowledge is generated in a discipline; and
- Beliefs about the matter—feelings and orientations toward the matter.

The second type of knowledge needed by teachers is pedagogical content knowledge which is the knowledge base that is expanded and needed for the teaching

profession. Not only knowing what to teach but how to identify the important aspects of the subject matter knowledge for teaching is paramount to teaching and the third knowledge based needed, according to Shuman (1986, p. 9) (as cited in Deng, 2007, p. 505) is a specific type curricular knowledge, which involves a deeper understanding of “specific curricular and instructional programs and materials that are available for teaching a specific subject” at various or multiple grade levels which, as believed by other researchers to be “included as a component of the concept of pedagogical content knowledge”.

In looking at teachers and their concepts of specific subject mastery orientation for teaching, it was found to be positively linked with the individual and self-reported rates of teachers seeking help based on not fully understanding the three aforementioned concepts for matter knowledge (Butler, 2007, p. 250; Ladany, Hill, Corbutt, & Nutt, 1996). This association was fully attributed by positive perceptions of those teachers as a benefit for promoting learning and professional development. In contrast, the more teachers were motivated by concerns to avoid the demonstration of inferior ability and the stigma that is associated with that ability, the less likely were they to report that they approached others for help or advice and therefore gain the appearance of not knowing what to do. This association was furthered by perceptions of help seeking as threatening evidence of inadequate teaching ability in that participant (Butler, 2007, p. 250; Ladany, Hill, Corbutt, & Nutt, 1996).

According to Keirn and Luhi, (2012, p. 495) when research studies begin to look at the particular matters, in this case history, researchers (Bain & Mirel, 2006, p. 213) argue that new and beginning history teachers need to acquire "robust content and disciplinary knowledge in history" which would fall in line with the concept of having pedagogical content knowledge as mentioned by Shulman (1986). According to the research of Bain and Mirel (2006) there are several things that new and pre-service teachers need to know before attempting to teach the required curriculum in a history class. These knowledge bases are that they "must understand how historians frame historical problems"; "select and organize factual details, analyze and construct historical stories"; and they must also be "conversant in historiography" that is, be able to speak to the careful inspection and viewing critically the ways various historians have organized and created historical understanding. If they do not possess this type of knowledge before entering the classroom the historical experience in the classroom becomes "at best, a story well told and at worst, merely a collection of facts" (Bain and Mirel; 2006, p. 213),

As research furthered in this area of subject matter mastery, one particular study showed that as professionals, teachers learn to draw on a "specialized knowledge base" in making informed decisions about what and how to teach (Wills & Sandholtz, 2009). This base of knowledge extends well beyond specific subject matter knowledge to include knowledge of educational aims and end results, knowledge of specific learners, specified curriculum, general subject matter pedagogy, and specific subject matter pedagogy according to Munby, Russell, and Martin, (2001) and Shulman, (1987) (as cited in Wills & Sandholtz, 2009, p. 1068). Additional research also supports the facts that several

defining characteristics of various professions (not just educational pursuits) include many of the same identifiers as you find in the professional educational workplace, with examples like, as Leicht and Fennell (2001) describe subject knowledge based on theory, mastery of knowledge base through extended specialized training, a high degree of autonomy in performing tasks, and a code of ethics that guides behavior (as cited in Wills & Sandholtz, 2009, p. 1067).

### Curricular Choice

In a study on the discretion of choosing curricula, Boote (2006, P. 474) states that “the lack of a robust, sound conception of teacher professional discretion over curriculum decisions has been a bugbear in the curriculum field since its beginning”. That being said, it does not seem that a lot has changed. As we go looking into the views of teachers and how they develop classroom curricular materials, it has been quite difficult to research this topic because there had been very little to say on this topic. According to Flowerday and Schraw (2000, p. 634) this lapse in the research is likely due to the “lack of research standing on either the effects of choice when it comes to individual learning” or “specifically how teachers implement instructor curricular choice in their classroom”. In the same seminal research study performed by Flowerday and Schraw (2000) where they examined “teacher’s beliefs about instructional choice in the classroom”, many different aspects of this dynamic were presented. In addition to looking at the beliefs, the Flowerday and Schraw (2000) study looked at the intrinsic values of motivation and found that the following points were the main focus of the motivation for creating

classroom curriculum and autonomy in presenting this curriculum to students: “(a) Teachers believe that choice promotes learning and motivation; (b) choice is used in a number of ways; (c) teachers have a variety of reasons for giving choices; and (d) teachers imposed limits on classroom choice based on (e) student age, ability, and prior knowledge and (f) teacher experience, efficacy, and management style”. As they looked at this problem and interesting aspect of teaching in the classroom, it was discovered that there was little to no research in this area as it pertains to the effects of choice in choosing curriculum or how a teacher implements choice in the classroom. There was however, extensive research into the role controlling characteristics of the teachers and motivation and autonomy in learning as researched by Flink, Boggiano and Barrett (1990), Grolnick and Ryan (1987), Miserandino (1996) and Ryan, Connell and Grolnick, (1992) as cited in (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000, p. 634).

In taking the study by Flowerday & Schraw (2000) as a baseline seminal work and building off of the arguments as to curricular decision making by the teacher that they present, you can see that the influence of the study had far reaching effects and produced more clarity on various issues and points that they bring up. In looking at the issue of teachers believing that choice promotes learning and motivation in teachers and students, Martell (2010, p. 20) believes that teachers have been traditionally allowed to make curricular and instructional decisions. However, with respect to the state’s curriculum framework, the state has taken more power over curricular and instructional decisions away from the control of teachers. This could be easily acknowledged and adjusted by simply allowing those basic curricula decisions to be used as an outline or

guide to “help teachers determine what the state recommends” rather than insist in its use as a content curricular mandate for all to follow.

Within the educational arena, it can be a benefit when the state agencies and governing bodies that determine classroom curriculum remember that as professionals in their field, teachers draw on a specific specialized knowledge base that is used to determine what needs to be taught and how to teach it in their classroom.(Martell, 2010, p. 20; Wills & Sandholtz, 2009). This is especially true across the educational spectrum when you look at entire educational systems not having much of upper administration input, as is the case with England. In a 2009 study, Halstead states (as cited in Ostinelli, 2009, p. 298) that up until 30 or so years ago, “the main object of education in England was self-fulfillment, personal growth, diversity and freedom for teachers and pupils”. Halstead goes on to mention that there was a lack of a formal national curriculum, and the academic “instructors enjoyed great sense of autonomy compared to their colleagues on the European continent”. As England had shown and decided to lead by example, by allowing classroom teachers the freedom to have the decision making for classroom curricular material, it could be accomplished and be a benefit to those in the instructors in the classroom and the students.

As we look at how the teacher’ beliefs guide them in classroom curricular decision making and to examine what Flowerday and Schraw (2000) determine as teacher “choice is used in a number of ways”, Reid (2009, p. 419) challenges administrators and curriculum writers to remember the importance of letting teachers be the true “arbiters of

classroom practice” but this is sometimes hard to accomplish in the actual educational setting. Even after the Flowerday and Schraw report (2000), much of the information that was found in research was focused on and targeted at the larger issue of curriculum revisions at the district or state level (Reid, 2009, p. 420). However, research did focus on the teacher directed curriculum decisions about their classroom lessons at the base level. Examining further into the issue of individual teacher choice and how the classroom teachers use it effectively to plan and execute lessons, a study by Munby et al. (2001) and Shulman (1987) (as cited in Wills & Sandholtz, 2009, p. 1068) state that basic base of knowledge extends past what we consider subject matter knowledge and is expanded to include knowledge of educational aims, learners, curriculum, general pedagogy, and specific pedagogy.

Looking at the last subset that Flowerday and Schraw (2000, p. 636) mention, that being “(f) teacher experience, efficacy, and management style”, this ties into other topics such as teacher efficacy, teacher motivation and subject matter knowledge that we have discussed already. The numbers of studies that can be projected into this small topic of information is extensive and contradictory at the same time. Where Willis and Sandholtz (2009, p. 1072) state that due to the pressures of improved student achievement and performance on mandated exams, the administrators are taking the choice out of the hands of the teachers and instead leaning towards the standardization, hierarchal control and mandatory change of the curriculum. By doing so, this effectively diminishes the authority and autonomy that the teacher has over curriculum and instruction in their classroom (Goldstein, 2008, p. 449).

As a shift from the mandated curriculum and standardization of teacher decisions and their perceptions of their involvement in much of the classroom curricular decision making, a case can be presented for the teacher who is able to get the professional curricular decision making discretion that they are hoping for and instead of collaborating with colleagues, the opposite is true. What research is telling us is that as teachers have been able to exercise increasingly autonomy over the classroom curricular decisions, their choice is to challenge those accepted norms and practices of their colleagues, as we are told by Kirkwood (2001) and Olsen, James and Lang (1999) (as cited in Boote, 2006, p. 471) and if a heightened state of personal professional efficacy is present in the teacher, then Poole, Okefor and Sloan (1989) state that the act of actually implementing a district curriculum guideline is diminished in nature from implementation to actual performance the more that the teacher collaborates with fellow teachers (as cited in Ross, 1992, p. 53).

### School Environment

Since there has been a robust increase of research on teacher choice, such as Flowerday & Schraw (2000), there has also been more variety in the research that looks at and examines the role controlling environments (e.g., teachers and structured classroom settings) play in motivational teaching and learning with teachers having input into curricular materials (Flowerday & Schraw; 2000, p. 634). The studies presented suggest that the controlling environments reduce a sense of personal curricular discretion for the instructor and intrinsic motivational values and result in a decreased learning environment and poorer attitudes about school in general. Quite a few other studies, such



as Boggiano, Main, and Katz (1988), Skinner, Wellborn, and Connell (1990) and Williams and Deci (1996) have examined the role that perceived control, that is self-judgments of personal competence or autonomy, plays in intrinsic motivation (as cited in Flowerday & Schraw, 2000, p. 634). These studies would seem to show that with a greater perceived sense of autonomy for the instructor often points to results in higher levels of intrinsic motivation and enjoyment in the classroom and according to Law, Logan, & Baron (1994), this is especially true when the desire for control of the classroom environment is high (as cited in Flowerday & Schraw, 2000, p. 634).

Once again, we see that in their groundbreaking work, Flowerday and Schraw (2000) looked to different studies in order to gather information in the research-deficient topic of teacher and classroom motivation. The first was a study by Zuckerman, Porac, Lathin, Smith and Deci (1978) (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000, p. 634) that looked at the problems faced by allowing some choice in tasks and time allotted. The result was that those that were given a choice were more apt to return to continue the study and enjoyed the greater feeling of control in their environment. Next, a study by Cordova and Lepper (1996) (as cited in Flowerday & Schraw, 2000, p. 635) that measured the effectiveness on elementary-aged students in the areas of mathematics and problem solving skills. They found that by allowing the students to make conscious choices that the levels of affective engagement, including perceived competence, a preference for greater task difficulty, overall liking, and a greater willingness to stay after class compared with students in a control group were present. In allowing students to make choices, the teachers have

effectively used their influential control over the educational environment to exert a controlling factor in the view of students' behavior with a positive result.

However in that same respect, with allowing students to make self-guided decisions and supporting their desire to learn, teachers have actually increased their willingness to change the school environment and support the motivation and learning increases of the students and their desire to learn (Reeve & Jang, 2006). According to Flowerday and Schraw (2000, p. 635), we can also see that the study by Parker and Lepper (1992) also failed to report any of the differences in studies involving cognitive engagement as a function of being able to have a choice but the Reeve and Jang (2006) study does address that in one aspect in discussing teachers and their classroom motivation.

In a study by Deci et al. (1982, p. 358), they expanded on the fact that in terms of actual classroom based educational practices, the environment is "to a large extent, formed by the teacher". Deci & Ryan (1982a, 1982b) (as cited in Deci et al., 1982, p. 358) also found that the teacher-personality variable in the research was "orientation toward control versus autonomy" and was one of the main factors in determining whether the classroom environment will be a causal exchange of information environment or one that is more controlling as it applied to the students. In this same idea of control in the classroom, Flowerday and Schraw (2000) looked to the study with Schraw, Flowerday and Reisetter (1998) that delved into the idea of two different control groups and the effects of what choices were made on their groups. Most studies seemed to report,

according to Flowerday and Schraw (2000), an increase as a “positive affect when individuals (teachers) are given choices, even when that choice has no simultaneous effect on student learning”. In contrast to that information, there are fewer studies that report a continuous positive effect for the teacher of choice on learning according to Flowerday & Schraw (2000).

The aspect of teacher involvement in the decision making process of choosing classroom curricular materials does promote an environment of positive learning and lead to a positive effect on the students, classroom and school as a whole. The best way to enhance effective teaching skills is to support those endeavors throughout the teachers career and provide support environments that allows the teacher to be involved in the decision making for their classroom and school environments (Allen, Hauser, Bell, & O’Connor, 1994; Boggiano, Flink, Shields, Seelbach, & Barrett, 1993; Flowerday & Schraw, 2000; Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1991; Levesque, Zuehlke, Stanek, & Ryan, 2004; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2005; Vansteenkiske, Lens & Deci, 2006; Wills & Sandholtz, 2009). Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998, p. 205) provided evidence supporting the fact that teachers make classroom curricular decisions about how to structure the teaching environment based on judgments of their own self efficacy, therefore bridging the issues of efficacy and classroom teaching and motivation.

### Student Choice

Teachers who have been given the ability to have curricular decision making powers in the classroom tend to give students choices in the classroom for three main

reasons according to Flowerday and Schraw (2000). The first reason is to” increase the student self-determination and their motivation” to do well in the classroom environment. Teachers often feel that the self-determined students were more likely to be motivated and more likely to be deeply engaged in classroom learning. This belief is closely aligned with the main assumptions of self-determination theory of Edward Deci and others that have followed. The second reason for teachers giving choice was to” increase the personal interest and self-motivation” of the students which was seen as a major catalyst for improving learning in the classroom. A third reason was to provide an “opportunity for students to practice their decision-making skills”. Teachers stressed that the students would not become accustomed at making wise choices unless they were given the opportunity to do so on several occasions and gained feedback about their progress from their teachers and other figures of authority at the school (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000).

In a research study by Pelletier et al. (2002, p. 186), they looked at the patterns of 254 teachers used to effectively gauge their decisions on a variety of areas they deemed to intensify the choices made at a classroom. Specifically, they looked at the following determiners: constraints at work and the perceptions of student motivation that were adapted from the previously created ‘The Academic Motivation Scale’ (Vallerand, Pelletier, Blais, Brière, Senécal, & Vallières, 1992, 1993), a work motivation inventory scale that was created by Blais, Lachance, Vallerand, Brière, and Riddle (1993) that looks to the measures of an academic teachers’ autonomy support in the classroom versus control orientation, using ‘The Problem in School Questionnaire’ that had been developed and validated by Deci et al., (1981). The purpose of the research was to

develop and test alternative models to gauge and study teachers' individual behavior on the basis of previously developed theory and research that had examined different determining factors of various autonomy supportive behaviors and controlling behaviors. Since there had been no past or prior research, before this time, to examine the relations among possible determining factors of behavior among teachers, the goal of the study was to test "different theoretical models, while also examining relations across these potential determining factors" (Pelletier et al., 2002, p. 187).

The basic research statement that Pelletier et al. (2002) provide in their study is their belief that "when teachers are more supportive of autonomy and a less controlling environment, students demonstrate higher levels of intrinsic motivation and self-determination in learning", as a direct result of the autonomy and choice of the teacher. The issue of teacher choice in the classroom environment, to determine learning styles and to determine teacher disposition towards autonomy or control, has been discussed before in studies by Deci, Nezlek, & Sheinman (1981). This was followed by a study that showed teachers tend to be controlling when pressured by their superiors and therefore more controlling over their students, as noted in Deci et al. (1982). We see that the situations for teacher input can change based on just the environment of the classroom and the learning environment of the school as a whole. We can also see that although some information as to the teacher choice and curricular control over a classroom has been looked at, it is still not providing the answers needed to satisfy the questions that it is raising to researchers.

The three major factors examined in the study by Pelletier et al. (2002) related to the motivation of the teacher and the impact on differing aspects of their motivation with respect to the various influences on them during the day. The first major concept developed was the teacher and student developed motivation and the impact it has on each group of students. It is revealed that the teacher's opinion and view of the student's motivation in learning and applying the skills necessary to effectively master the material and the subsequent view of the student of the teacher and their motivation for teaching were directly related. That being said, if the student perceives the teacher as being motivated to deliver the material and effectively engage them as a student, then the motivation of the student to learn the material and strive towards effective intrinsic-extrinsic motivational goals can be realized and rewarded (Pelletier et al., 2002, p. 194).

The second factors discussed and developed is pressures at work and teacher motivation. As mentioned earlier and in line with the research by Deci et al. (1982) and Flink et al. (1990), the pressures from superiors to keep and maintain order in a classroom or the entire school site for that matter, can be a drain on the motivation of the teachers that want to interact with the student population. Teachers, especially newer teachers, already feel responsible for the success or failures of the students, no matter how long that they have been in contact with the students. There was further research in this particular area that did discuss the link between teacher motivation and pressures at work (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 73). The result of this is that the self-motivation of the teacher is related to the autonomy that they perceive that they hold in making the decisions in the classroom and the exact extent of the material to cover. If the

professionalism of a teacher is to be constrained by the institutionalization of standardized high stakes testing, then one can only perceive that the move away from teacher involvement in curricular decisions will lead to the elimination of teacher input into curricular development and instructional decisions in their classroom and school sites (Wills & Sandholtz, 2009).

Lastly, it was clear that dealing with the areas of “Teachers’ Motivation and Teachers’ Autonomy Support or Control” that the final stage of the research model created by Pelletier et al. (2002, p. 194) involves “the positive relationship between teachers’ self-determined motivation toward their work and their behavior”. The results showed and point to the information that the more self-determined and prepared that the teachers are toward their work, the more autonomy supportive they are with their students. This has been stated before by other researchers and the correlation between these two areas help reinforce the statement that teacher autonomy is a benefit to all involved in the education of students and that such constraints should not hamper the self-motivation of the teacher to teach the material or the self-motivation of the student to learn it.

In reviewing all of the previously included information, it is important to note the landmark study by Deci et al. (1982) mentioned earlier. In looking at all the research for this study, all of the literature points to the self-motivation paper completed thirty years ago. First and foremost, Deci et al. (1982) wrote and stated that the previous research on this area of motivation showed that the more that you, the teacher, are orientated towards

the controlling of the students, the more that the students will display a lower intrinsic motivation and self-esteem. That developmental issue of self-esteem and motivation of the student is further hampered by the issue of pushing students too hard, to perform up to a preconceived notion of excellence, the loss of intrinsic motivation is greater than if they are allowed to progress on their own. As stated earlier and confirmed by Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 71), the issue of teachers being held ultimately responsible for the failures and triumphs of their students tend to lead the teachers into a controlling factor of non-motivation rather than the concept of helping students explore and find their own motivation for the subject that they are engaged in and excel at the subject matter.



## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 contains a discussion of the methods and procedures used for this study. This chapter includes the conceptual/theoretical framework used to design the study and descriptions of the sample selection, role of the researcher, data collection procedures, standards of quality and verification, qualitative research strategy, anticipated ethical issues, a bias statement and the basis of the interpretation of the data that was analyzed.

### Sample Selection

The primary source of the collected data was the interviews of the participants. Prior to these interviews and using a Criterion sampling method, the participants that were chosen consisted of 15 adult male and female teachers from several medium to large suburban middle schools located in the southeastern region of the United States and representing the various ethnic, socio-economic and religious affiliations of a particular school's representative student population (see Table 1). The participants selected represented the Science and Social Studies core curriculum classes and all participants were selected based on a school district's school population of licensed and certificated teachers at that site. The participants represented a wide variety of experience in the teaching profession, level of basic and/or advanced degrees and level of time in the classroom as an instructor. Participants were chosen from four (4) separate middle schools settings. The effective safeguards that were used to protect a teacher's participation in the study for measurement of teacher involvement in curricular decisions in the classroom, professional discretion and student success were maintained through the

**Table 1-Participant Demographic Information**

<u>Sex of Participant</u>		<u>Advanced Degree</u>	
Male	4	Masters	5
Female	11	PhD/EdD	0
<u>Subject Matter</u>		<u>Education Program</u>	
Science	7	Yes	8
Social Studies	8	No	7
<u>Grade Level</u>		<u>Plan on Becoming a Teacher</u>	
6th Grade	4	Yes	5
7th Grade	5	No	10
8th Grade	6		
<u>Years Teaching</u>			
<5	4		
5 to 10	5		
10 to 15	3		
>15	3		

entirety of the study, in compliance with the University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board Standards.

This research utilized the emerging design procedure and concepts of conducting a grounded theory research study due to the fluidity of the information that is being

gathered and will show that a changing dynamic of information gathered from these interviews. Information was continuously gathered and evaluated from the interviews to further saturate the categories in the search for information. Questionnaires and basic open-ended interview techniques were utilized to gather initial material which was followed up with more in-depth interviews, utilizing information from the previous survey and interviews to code the data collected.

Teacher participation in the demographic information questionnaire, initial interviews, and expanded follow up interviews was completed on a voluntary basis. Teachers were recruited by invitations extended by the researcher during scheduled department meetings at each of the four school sites, via the email system which was available and utilized by all teachers in the school district and by contact through the respective department chairs and members of the Administration team on site. Teachers that were interested in taking part in the research study were able to identify themselves as willing participants in the last section of the informed consent letter that was provided to them before the first interview takes place. This notification was at the bottom of the demographic information questionnaire.

Prior to the administration of each interview conducted, to include the initial and subsequent follow up interviews, permission was requested from each participant to allow the session to be audio taped and later transcribed. Interviews and data collection procedures were conducted using a combination of unstructured, open-ended interviews utilizing both notes and audio recording and transcription and a demographic information questionnaire. All interviews were conducted at the workplace of the participant, after

normal employment hours or in such an agreed upon location that will ensure the comfort of the interview participant and that afforded an uninterrupted timeframe to allow the interview to be conducted.

Measures to validate the study included participant interviews involving beliefs on teacher choice, teacher flexibility to choose the material to cover, teacher discretion in presenting the curriculum, and perceived student achievement and support in those areas available at the school or district level. Recorded interviews of each participant complete with transcribed notes, and demographic information questionnaires were also collected and securely maintained by the interviewer throughout the study.

In order to accurately collect, transcribe and maintain the information gained through questionnaires and interviews, the researcher utilized an Olympus VN-6000 Digital Recorder to record the interviews, both the primary establishing and follow up, and the instructions given for the demographic information questionnaire. The audio files were then be transcribed verbatim by the researcher using Microsoft Office 2007 and securely stored with the researcher. In addition to the oral interviews being conducted, a demographic information questionnaire was collected before the first oral interview and after which time that information was collected, coded and stored with the transcribed interview notes.

This research was based on the assumptions that all participants that respond to the questionnaire and participate in researcher interviews did so with honesty, integrity and conduct themselves in a professional manner. By interviewing teachers over a period of time, the researcher was able to follow trends that develop, further inquire on the

information and reexamine the results of that additional information for validation. It is also assumed that all conversations, written data, questionnaires and transcribed notes will remain the property of the researcher and the individual teachers' participation in identifying the issues surrounding professional discretion in classroom curricular matters can serve not only to improve the individual teachers self-efficacy and decision making in the classroom but will also have a positive impact on their students as well. It is believed that this research and the results contained herein was able to generalize the context in which this information was gathered and apply it to other segments of the Secondary educational process. In looking at the underlying questions and assumptions of the research, we can see that the application to other Core Academic Subject areas is viable and we should be able to transfer information with little difficulty. The information gathered from the research participants is not unconditionally tied to their specific core academic subject area, but in looking at the beliefs and perceptions that they relayed during the interview process, the research can be applied to other core academic and elective classes. By using interviews and questionnaires to gather the information for the research, it is my intent to become the outside observer who has no stake in the outcome of the research. The implementation and gathering of information, by using more than one method to gather the requisite information, is lending itself to the research as to avoid becoming a biased influencer of the outcome and rather it is letting the facts speak for themselves.

### Role of the Researcher

It was the role of the researcher in this study to be an unbiased and neutral party in determining the individual beliefs of professional choice and teacher flexibility as it applies to working in the individual classrooms and how that belief is applied to the perception of teacher involvement in the classroom curricular decision making process.

### Design of the Study

According to Flowerday and Schraw (2000, p. 634), researchers have had problems in determining choice and motivation because there has been virtually no researchable basis on either the effects of choice on learning by the students or on how teachers implement choice in their individual classroom and the concept of teacher autonomy in creating and manipulating curriculum in the classroom, surprisingly, has even less research, according to Butler (2007, p. 241).

The definition of flexibility and control in curricular decision making and implementation, for this project, is having the ability to have the knowledge of the state standards that need to be taught combined with the ability to develop an individual delivery style for the material, so that the students can create an interest in the work and the instructor is able to adapt, change and develop different strategies for different classes of student. A teacher's flexibility over curricular decisions and methods of instruction are paramount to engaging the different learning modalities and varying styles of comprehension of the students that educators encounter on a daily basis. Research has shown that teachers' having flexibility in the decision making process and having input

as to the types of instruction, such as scripted and/or standardized curricular material, students demonstrate higher levels of intrinsic motivation and self-determination in both the assessment values of the classroom material and in the general want and need for knowledge associated with the core curricular material (Pelletier et al., 2002).

In order to fully understand and build upon previous studies regarding decisions in curricular matters, a grounded theory study of selected participants was designed to gauge the concerns and a teacher's own beliefs towards professional discretion over curriculum and instruction in the classroom and how to present curricular materials; combined with their impression of teacher flexibility and academic control in the classroom and the connection that it has to teacher involvement with the curricular decision making process at the site level. In order to analyze and synthesize this process of curriculum discretion, this research study looked to grounded theory, as a qualitative research model, to help explain and determine the experiences of the participants involved in providing a basis for the research and assists in discovering an underlying theory that leads to understanding the process. Creswell provides the definition of grounded theory as a "systematic, qualitative procedure used to generate a theory that explains, at a broad conceptual level, a process, an action, or interaction about a substantive topic" (2002; p. 439). By this definition, grounded theory then aims to show and help explain the underlying experiences of those involved in the studies. Grounded theory, as a qualitative research methodology was first introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as a means for use in sociology. However, this type of study was adapted to other disciplines, to include education, and is instrumental in providing information about a

social phenomenon. This study was conducted to examine the inclusion of classroom teachers in the decision making process of choosing curricula for the middle school level classroom by focusing on the reasons for inclusion or exclusion of the teachers from this process, the decision making powers at the county or state level, as well as the teachers' own beliefs and reasons for wanting this type of responsibility.

### Procedure

The decision to proceed with a grounded theory research study relates to the information that was being studied. In looking at two specific groups of teachers and their own individualized opinions of a particular phenomenon, in this case feelings of professional discretion over curriculum and instruction in the classroom, a grounded theory research study lends itself to the modification of a theory or to help explain the information as it is extracted from two separate groups. According to Glaser (1992) and cited in Creswell (2002), an emerging design in grounded theory needs to meet four select criteria that are “central to the theory: fit, work, relevance and modifiability and this theory should not be written in stone” (Glaser, 1992, p. 15). It is important to also remember that a theory that is grounded in data should not be forced to fit into a specific category or categories in order for it to work (Glaser, 1992, p. 15).

With this research, data was collected that needed to identify the causes and problems of the issue and provide insight as to the ways that this issue can be addressed in the secondary school setting, in the hopes of providing insight as to how to better deal with the issue of discretion over curricular matters. As several middle school teachers at



four different school sites were interviewed, the interviews were conducted at the start of the new school year and concluded the interviews before the Spring Break of that same school year. It was believed that with this time frame, the ability to adequately interview the participants multiple times during the course of the research, collect sequential and simultaneous data while analyzing it accordingly would still provide enough time to complete follow up interviews if they were needed to further clarify the information. For this research, only face to face interviews were conducted to gather the majority of the information. A demographic background questionnaire was also utilized at the initial interview to gather demographic information on the identified participants. It is important to remember that since this is a research study in the beliefs and observations of classroom teachers as the issues apply to them, there was no collection of information from students, administrators or personnel for the County District or State Department of Education level.

In looking at the relationship between teacher decision making regarding curriculum, flexibility and ability to implement that decision making process in the classroom, this research questioned those teachers that are in the classroom as to the practices that are currently employed to enhance or limit the delivery of curricular material. The practicality of outside influences, meaning outside the academic classroom and combined with their hindrance or success with practices as they apply to student achievement in the classroom, will offer their views of the desired changes that are needed to ensure the perception of student achievement is maintained and validated. The

relationship to the perception of teacher professional discretion, from the viewpoint of the classroom teacher, was also investigated and is a focal point of this study.

An emerging design in grounded theory research was utilized to collect the data and begin analyzing it immediately instead of waiting for further interviews to accumulate. In using the grounded theory approach to the research, the interviewer was able to see emerging trends and be able to label the categories for later saturation as the research progresses. In utilizing the 'zig zag' data collection and analysis system (See Figure 1.), interviews were expeditiously coded to see the topics that emerged and tailor the subsequent interviews to further develop the information. This is not to suggest that any of the direct interview questions were initiated by the researcher, rather a 'prompt and inquire' method of questioning was used to further explore the information as to achieve saturation of the information and topic.

In using an emerging design in grounded theory research and specifically the concept of open coding, one needs to realize the concepts and constructs of open coding and how it allows for the information to be brought to the forefront of the information collected. In grounded theory, there are three types of coding involved (Creswell, 2002, p. 466). The first type of coding is open coding and is the preliminary source of relevant information that is pulled out of the interviews. As this information is reviewed, common ideas, concepts and general themes are placed in groups together to allow for the easier classification and saturation of the material to ensure that those particular concepts contain information that is similar and they are placed together for further analysis.

Within the information that is pulled from this first stage of coding, five separate categories of information began to emerge. These emerging categories were named using 'in vivo codes' (Creswell, 2002, p. 466), which relies on the information pulled directly from the data to 'name' the categories.

In writing and reporting the findings of this research, it is imperative that it be made readable and the information is all contained therein and relevant. By continuously comparing the information and triangulating the interview information, the emerging categories and the written response of the research the validation of the subject matter and information collected was additionally confirmed by this follow-through of the research report. In furthering the explanation of materials gathered, in looking at the questions that were posed, from where the information is gathered and identifying to saturation levels, it was additionally discussed by reviewing and referencing the existing research and literature of the subject area, to ensure complete saturation and addressing of the topic of the research. In the view of the researcher, by comparing and referencing the existing literature and research as it applies to this grounded theory research, the validation of the information was exemplified as pertinent and germane to the subject matter.

#### Anticipated Ethical Issues

I utilized questionnaires that ask for specific information regarding beliefs of the participants in regards to perceived professional discretion over classroom curricular decision making. In order to protect the anonymity of each participant in regards to this

study, a numbering system was utilized to identify a particular participant. The “key” for this identifying system is being kept under lock and key at all times when not being utilized by the researcher. In addition to written questionnaires, face to face interviews were conducted and recorded with the participant’s permission. Those recordings will be transcribed and coded the same way and according to the same key as the written questionnaires. The transcriptions were used in order to provide a narrative text and a verbatim record of each participant’s responses during the interview process. The use of transcriptions also permitted the use of ‘word usage frequencies’ that was used to assist in identifying recurring topics introduced by the participants for use in a later interview.

#### Bias Statement

In my research into the questions of teacher involvement in classroom curricular decision making process and the problems and/or consequences associated with this at the middle school level, I have read several accounts that discredit the idea of teachers having access to curricular decision making for their individual classrooms as well as reading several accounts that promote it having a positive effect on learning, regardless of their years of experience, academic level of mastery or tenure within the school system. These reports generally detail the ineffectiveness of teachers to deliver material that they do not completely understand (in the case of those not attending a traditional school of education), the unwillingness of the school to give the teacher the freedom to teach to their strengths (as to not incur a drop in test scores and affect accountability and school grades) and the lack of knowledge and mastery of teachers new to the profession, as

dictated by their time as an education professional. Keeping all of these factors in mind, it is imperative that this study does not follow the previously mentioned trappings, but rather take review the data with a fresh set of eyes and an objective view of reviewing the data, not wanting to place it into a “one size fits all” mentality. As an educator in the middle school setting for over ten years, I have seen the problems and successes that are associated with teacher involvement in this process. With that in mind, as I did the research for this study, I purposefully conducted the meetings away from the school site whenever possible, or at such a place where the participant would feel most comfortable about the subject, as to not be influenced by anyone at the school site and to also allow the participant to speak freely and frankly about their personal beliefs and perceptions of this educational phenomenon. Also, I avoided speaking with anyone who was previously served in an administrative capacity and reiterated that their comments were not for public dissemination to the particular school site, the county school district office or the state Department of Education.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

In looking to a grounded theory research study, one that is essential in developing a qualitative approach to explain social phenomena, one has to be able to explain how that particular research design is used. Creswell (2002, p. 439) explains that grounded theory is a “process” theory that is used to explain an educational process of events, activities, actions and interactions that occur over time. It is for that reason that this was the methodological design selected to guide and investigate the effectiveness of teacher input into classroom curricular decisions and the results of teacher beliefs about that input. The discussions and revelations of those involved in the study allowed for the beliefs, or misconceptions, of classroom teachers and their desire to be more involved in the daily curricular design of their classroom with respect to their matter to be stated and recognized. The initial design of this chapter is divided into the categories and subsections that developed out of the interviews with the participants and secondly and placed the collected information of the findings into discussible constructs. By discussing and developing the categories that emerged out of the open-ended interviews, the direction that these answers took only helped to further explain their beliefs and understandings. Secondly, with the connection of these theories and beliefs taken from the interviews, we began to see the formation of ideas that helped to explain the process of the theory development.

The interviews consisted of very basic and open-ended questions, allowing for the participants to discuss their beliefs regarding teacher involvement without any outside

stimulus to guide or detract from their responses. As the 'zig-zag' approach (Figure 1) was utilized to allow for the respondents to guide the interview and subject matter that we covered, topics emerged that warranted further discussion to understand the phenomena. This process was helpful in determining where the next interview prompts were going to come. The discussions and reflections of the participants formed a basis for the theory that emerged out of the interviews.

In using open coding to capture the exact phrasing of the participants, specific ideas were grouped together to identify and create six (6) categories for use later in the research. These categories were later named using in vivo codes, which are terms that are drawn directly from the data (Creswell, 2002, p. 466). These categories were labeled (1) Pre-Planning, (2) Professional Development, (3) Curriculum Development, (4) New Teachers, (5) Issues facing teachers. There is a separate category that looks at the consequences of the teachers' involvement in classroom curricular decision making, however, this is not part of the initial categories. Below, you will find the five initial categories explained to allow for the reader to understand the initial look at the research and how the categories developed (see Table 2).

The first named category, "Pre-Planning" refers to the steps taken before the school year starts that teachers' go through to ensure that they feel adequately prepared for the school year and are ready for the challenges that face them. From the issues of having mental clarity of what the year is going to bring them in the classroom to

developing new lesson plans that conform to the current state standards. In the event of the state department of education changing the current curriculum for a particular grade

**Table 2-Open Coding of Discretion in Curriculum Matters Interviews**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Properties</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Pre-Planning	Alignment to State Standards  Develop new Lesson Plans Mental Clarity of school year Changing Curriculum	See if New Standards match Curriculum Course specific alignment Mentally prepare for the school year
Teacher Professional Development	Teacher planning sessions before school year District mandate meetings School in-service days Subject specific planning meetings	Academic department meetings District wide meetings Core content specific meetings Grade level meetings at school and district
Curriculum Development	Specific Subject information Grade level Specific  Level of Course Specific Current information County created and mandated	No notice change from County Must be Data Driven Subject Specific information Follow Current Pedagogy Not tied to State EOC or FCAT Testing
School Culture	Teachers Students  Administration Parents/Community members School District	Classroom environment Subject specific academics core educational knowledge Secondary Level over Elementary undergraduate degree Single Subject academics Graduate Degrees vs. Experience Fresh ideas from new teachers



**Table 2-Open Coding of Discretion in Curriculum Matters Interviews**

**(Continued)**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Properties</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Issues Facing Teachers	Administration Oversight End of Course Testing FCAT Testing Lack of Materials State Accountability and Oversight District Mandates Building Education Foundations	Inferior adopted materials Materials do not cover the state Standards Learning not enjoyable due to oversight Curriculum politically driven No choice in curriculum Not enough experience to make effective changes to curriculum Feel like cogs in a wheel
Consequences and Benefits	Benefits Consequences Teacher Preparation Teacher involvement	Isolation in classroom New teachers teach what they are comfortable with Creating authentic assessments Not all teachers need to be that involved Creates new/dynamic experiences Not tied to state created curriculum by people in cubicles.

level, as was done for the seventh grade curriculum in 2010, this time before the school year starts allows the teacher to change existing curriculum or adapt to an entirely new one to fit the demands of the state and county departments' of education.

The second category, called “Teacher Professional Development”, discusses the professional development that a teacher is subjected to during the school year and how it

can be used to effectively to create effective subject specific curricula for the classroom. Teachers often have school district mandated meetings; school 'in-service' days where planning takes place at the school site without students present; specific meetings at the school level to collaborate with colleagues to create effective and authentic curriculum and departments meetings at the school site to discuss changes and how to implement changes that have been announced. Teachers have to attend professional development regularly to achieve enough 'in-service' points to renew their Professional Teaching Certificate every five (5) years.

The third category, "Curriculum Development", explores the different attitudes and circumstances that surround the issue of developing curriculum in a school district. From the insistence that grade level specific curriculum being developed by those grade level teachers that teacher that subject to the level of information each grade level class needs to know and understand, teachers have a vested interest in the curriculum development and it would seem that it is their hope that their concerns are taken into consideration when changes occur. This is not always the case when a county school district changes the curriculum from week to week and the classroom teacher is left scrambling to cover the material in such a way that will ensure compliance from the students as it applies to knowledge for state and county created end of course tests. The fidelity of the teachers in presenting material accurately to the students relies on the concept that the material is presented to the teachers early enough in the school year, preferably in the pre-planning phase of the beginning of the school year, to allow for

coverage of the material and possibly changing the curriculum in their particular classes.

Having the ability to accomplish this is a paramount concern of the participants.

“School Culture”, the fourth category, plays an important into the concept of teacher curricular choice for this is the concept that incorporates multiple levels of involvement. From the administrators who set the tone of the school culture on behalf of the school district and school board members, to the teacher who implement the curriculum and instruction and even the students who are adaptive to change should it come, the culture of the school and its’ influence on the staff and participants in the educational realm is of great importance to see the success or failures of the curriculum development and implementation at the school level. You must also take into consideration the issue of oversight and the influence of parents and community members have in this era of educational reform.

The last category, “Issues Facing Teachers”, displays the actual issues that teachers face on a daily basis when it comes to creating authentic curriculum for implementation in their classrooms. From the oversight from their school administration, to even the newly implemented state accountability and oversight measures on student achievement, the ability for the classroom teacher to create effective curriculum for the classroom is being hampered at all levels. In addition to the oversight, the problems of adhering to curriculum that follows the pre-designated ‘end of course’ test, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) compound the issue of teachers’ ability to effectively create quality materials for the classroom. This is not to say that these are the

only problems that plague the classroom teachers. The lack of proper materials also leads to the lack of being able to build proper educational foundations in the students in the classroom. The benefits and compromises for the classroom teacher do not always even out in the end, however, the classroom teacher is not being given the opportunity to effect change in most cases and it is accomplished on a minimal scale when the opportunity does arise.

Upon saturation of the categories, a more direct system of coding was implemented to provide a better understanding of the categories and develop the relationship between the categories. Axial coding was utilized to help form a model to explain the theory of curricular decision making ability, teacher and student motivation and perceived student success with teacher support in the classroom that this research is based on, knowing that the end product and categories were formed from the data collection and coding. The grounded theory derived from these data is presented in Figure 2.

#### Category One: Planning for the upcoming school year.

The intention of this initial guiding question at the onset was to get a generalization of what teachers do prior to the beginning of the school year, with respect to their preparation for the material that they will cover. While some responded that they do nothing except relax and think as little as possible about the upcoming school year, the majority of the respondents spoke of involvement of planning activities, both on their own and also within site or department groups. The most immediate and profound

pattern that emerged is the statement that respondents looked at the state standards for the core subjects that they teach and how, and if, those standards were changed for the coming school year and how the standards fit into the changing curriculum for that specific subject.

**Table 3- Quotes from “Planning for the upcoming school year.”**

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1. “spend the time looking at the standards to see if they fit into new curriculum”
  2. “aligning what my lesson plans I already have to the ever changing curriculum and new direction from the state
  3. “looking at district directed curriculum maps to see if corresponds to my course load”
  4. “take a break mentally and look before the school year starts for any changes”
  5. “look to see how the states has changed curriculum, again, and develop plans with colleagues to change our pacing of the matter”
- 

When looking at the initial reaction of respondents, the patterns that emerged began to diverge with respect to the amount of effort that each teacher gave to the coming school year and their input into the curriculum. While the vast majority looked to the state standards and any changes that they would face, there were some of those looked more into modifying their current developed lessons and looked to supplement the new material in with what they already have created. Some of the teachers kept notebooks of what actually works in their classroom and what would need to be changed in order to be successful in the classroom. The idea of district offering in-service trainings and workshops appealed to some of the participants while the majority chose to go about the information collection and dissemination on their own. While some felt that it was important to stay abreast of the current changes and how it affects their classroom, others felt comfortable to implement these changes in their classroom as the year progressed.

The fact that they all took an active participant role in the development of the curriculum for their particular class is amazing in the face of the opposition that confronts them from the district to the federal level. They believe that their commitment makes a difference and they will continue to be proactive in the classroom curricula decision making process.

Within the responses that the teachers discussed, an underlying determination exists for these teachers to achieve positive outcomes regardless of the circumstances that surround curriculum development. The skills needed for classroom teaching are slowly becoming degraded in favor of that person who can 'teach to the test' and get information across in such a way not to bring negative repercussions to the school site. As one respondent mused in the interview, classroom instruction is being guided by test preparation and standardization and it is up to the teachers to carry that mantle or object to it. According to Martell (2010, p. 6), state mandated tests have a pronounced and strong influence on teacher's content choice, although it rarely impacts them on their instructional practices. However, when and if they do change their practices, it is in the form of teaching to test preparation and thereby narrowing the subject specific curricula. In Yeager and van Hover's study (2006), (as cited in Martell, 2010, p. 6) the nature of what has become state-mandated testing in the state of Florida and others has greatly influenced teacher curricular decision making and the paths that they choose to follow in their classroom; one teacher increasing the amount of the content that they cover while the other focuses on the literacy skills of their students. As with this study and this opening glimpse of the beginnings of the school year, it is important to realize that the

‘one size fits all’ aspect of educational preplanning and preparation does not really work in the classroom of the modern teacher, nor is that teacher willing to accept that construct.

With all of the respondents giving information to the above issues of preparing for the new school year and the influence of state-mandated curriculum, the clear consensus for this is that all of the teachers do something to prepare for the new school year. The issue facing each of them is how and to what extent they prepare and if the input of the teacher is welcomed or do they simply follow the directives of the state board of education. The ability of teachers to think, create and implement specific curriculum is noted but the fact remains to discover if their involvement in classroom curricular decision making is a hindrance or a benefit.

#### Category Two: Teacher planning days and the effectiveness in building better classrooms.

As discussion began to explore several different issues that teachers face on a daily basis, the prevalent topic that occurred was the issue of teacher planning meetings, either mandated by district or as the result of teacher desired enrichment and their effectiveness in helping to create an environment where teachers still feel that they have curricular input in the classroom. While some of the teachers felt that the planning sessions were of a beneficial nature, ultimately they spoke of the circumstances where those sessions make the biggest impact. Teacher requested or content specific informational sessions were found to have the greatest impact on teachers and their curricular decisions in the classroom in order to use what is most beneficial. These types

of meetings included those related to specific core content strategies rather than generic meetings to fulfill a required meeting, core content strategies that included some type of actual follow-up or post session debriefing to gauge the effectiveness of the meeting and any associated meetings that would come with specific grant funded workshops or programs.

**Table 4-Quotes for teacher development and planning sessions working for creating a better classroom**

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1. “no, I do not think they are worthwhile. To improve your teaching, go to a good classroom, see good ideas being applied in the classroom”
  2. “you learn as a teacher by being in the classroom every day, not at meetings telling you how to be a better teacher”
  3. “not beneficial if not specifically driven towards core curriculum. The ‘one size fits all’ approach is not working”
  4. “It appears that all training is the same information wrapped up in a different box”
  5. “no, it feels that the district is only interested in getting everyone on the same page by only emphasizing cohesion when approaching the FCAT or EOC tests.”
  6. “If it part of the bigger picture, such as a specific grant or overall core content specific information, then it can be very useful”
  7. “If the training or subject matter is teacher driven, core content driven, it can be of some benefit. If the district is simply putting out the ‘flavor of the month’ in teacher training, then I have no use for it”
- 

Given that the teachers did have positive points to share regarding district mandated and required testing, the main points towards the negative feel was the requirement that all teachers attend and take part in the training. In the State of Florida, in order to renew the Professional Teaching Certificate, a required number of hours in Professional Development must be earned during a specific period. In order to achieve that number, trainings are offered by the district level office and specific points are offered. By virtue, a majority of the teacher trainings according to the teachers are for



strategies, concepts and tools for the student in a non-specific manner, which is to say that they do not directly apply to the core academic subject specifically. Rather, they appeal to the generalization of students and their work and try to use a non-explicit strategy to help in the classroom.

While this is a welcome endeavor and attempt to get all students the directed help that they need, the interview participants feel that there are too many outliers for this way of creating better classrooms to be effective. From overloading the teachers with multiple strategies to address one problem, to mandating training on specific strategies and not offering any follow up or debriefing to see if it was effective, teachers are subject to so many differing views of how to be effective classroom teachers and how to structure their curriculum that they are often overlooked as a viable resource and tool for developing curriculum for their classrooms. In order for teachers to be effective in the classroom, they need to be allowed the curriculum discretion to develop what is necessary for their classrooms. Discretion over their classroom and especially over curricular decision making in that classroom is what is wanted by the teachers interviewed. According to Boote (2006), this simplest kind of professional discretion is a key component, albeit tacit, when teacher educators and administrators decide that a teacher is able to teach. Teachers have indicated that if the curricular decision making process is taken away from teachers, then they are left as cogs in a wheel, offering no differentiation to each individual student and not able to effectively participate in their job.

### Category Three: Issues with Changing Curriculum at the District level.

The amazing part of the interview process came up with the next topic and the very strong and opinionated reactions from the interviewees. As the subject of curriculum, development and the issues that surround this topic were discussed; most teachers had offered very succinct reasons as to why this is an issue in the school and more importantly in the classroom. After discussing the issue further to get to the underlying issues with the curriculum at the state and/or district level some patterns began to emerge. While most teachers agreed that issue of the county school district being responsible for the curriculum creation is not in the best interest of the students in the classroom, it was generally agreed that it was the better of the two alternatives currently in place, the other alternative being the state department of education.

With respect to Florida and the educational standards that they currently require teachers to follow, no continuity is present in the differing approaches; however, there is a commonality in the various styles that they employ. Mathematics and English/Language Arts currently employ and follow the Common Core State Standards (Florida Department of Education; 2010) while Science and Social Studies follow the Florida created 'Next Generation Sunshine State Standards' (Florida Center for Instructional Technology; 2010). However, neither follows the 'National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies' as presented and developed by the National Council for the Social Studies, a non-governmental agency with no enforcement powers that was created to bring social studies in the United States to a common point in teaching secondary

social studies classes to allow for uniformity nationwide. The disconnect that the state has with itself and how it presents the material is recognized by the teachers and the discussion that ensued presented the avenues to implementation and issues regarding the individual classrooms and following the standards.

**Table 5-Quotes for issues with developing curriculum at the district level**

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1. “development should never be at the district level, it should be a National issue and the state needs to work off of that”
  2. “too much change happening at the district level at a moment’s notice for the classroom teacher”
  3. “not beneficial if not specifically driven towards core curriculum. The ‘one size fits all’ for curriculum uniformity approach is not working”
  4. “needs more teacher input, especially in the Social Studies”
  5. “how can we know what to teach from year to year as the curriculum changes every year?”
  6. “the county and state have no clue as to effective pacing to teach all the material they require us to teach”
  7. “standards and curriculum presentation now seems to be tied to ‘End of Course’ tests, the FCAT or other standardized testing procedures. There is no more joy in the discovery of information”
  8. “there is no reason a person at the state level, who has been out of a classroom for more than 5 – 10 years, to dictate wither a student can master a concept or certain lesson”
- 

While discussing this topic further, a definite difference in attitude towards the curriculum is experienced and noted and that animosity is also transferred to those that create it and the manner in which it is created. In speaking with the interviewees, those teachers that taught a course as part of the Science curriculum seemed to harbor more disdain for the process of curriculum creation and implementation in the classroom. As they reported, the amount of time that is spent on implementation of new curricular standards, which differ from the last year and still the year before that, could be better

spent getting the students ready for more involved and topical lessons. As it turns out the curriculum for a middle school science class has, according to the respondents, changed every year for the past five years. The information provided is that the pacing of the material is moved around, the topics drop off without notice and more of the curriculum is geared towards the end of course testing and the Florida state mandated standardized test, the FCAT.

To offer equal observation to the argument of curriculum in the classroom and teacher involvement, it would be a mistake not to mention that the generally held belief from these interviews is that the teachers must be involved in the curriculum creation, planning, implementation, pacing and feedback for that curriculum to be effective. The directives from the state department of education or the local governing agency are not providing, according to most respondents, the necessary tools for mastery of the curriculum and a disconnect between what the state feels that a student should know about, how to master the material and how to teach that and the reality in the classroom that the teacher faces. The instructors feel that the further the distance from the classroom a curriculum developer or specialist gets, the greater the disconnection from the students. Because of this, teachers want the curriculum development to involve teachers who teach that subject, who know how to best present that material to their particular set of students.

#### Category Four: New teacher involvement in curriculum planning and development

As with the other topics that we have discussed for this research, the fourth topic grabbed the attention of all the interviewed participants, for it became clear that this was a topic of contention and real concern for the teacher in the classroom. When the respondents began to recall and offer their own observations and recollections, it is clear that this is a current issue that teachers face and there has not been adequate discussion at the county and possibly state level. Some of the examples of the beliefs and insights of the teachers gaining this valuable asset for their classroom stated unequivocally that teachers not only should, but need to be involved in the curriculum development and planning in their classroom, but that there were other considerations that needed to be satisfied before free reign was given to any particular teacher. Many spoke of the benefit of new teachers coming from college and teacher education courses in having the fresh new ideas and latest research methodologies at their disposal to create effective curriculum. Other rationalities for the inclusion of new teachers in curriculum development included if their primary academic teaching subject was the focus of their undergraduate degree and the insistence that new teachers work with mentors to guide them in their first years.

**Table 6-Quotes for new teacher involvement in curriculum planning and development**

- 
1. “they come in with fresh ideas and enthusiasm, that can be a great benefit”
  2. “if they teach in their primary subject matter that they got their degree in. Education majors might not be the best qualified to offer specific curricula decisions”
  3. “people with background in elementary education do not have the depth of knowledge needed to develop curriculum at the secondary level”
  4. “they should be involved but not creating curriculum exclusively by themselves for the classroom”
  5. “they are on the cutting edge of education being fresh from college, more so than a supposed veteran teacher with 20 years’ experience
  6. “you need some classroom experience as to what works and what does not. Three to five years’ experience would be a huge help in that area to write curriculum with fidelity”
- 

As with the respondents that were in favor of the new teacher being involved in curriculum decision making for the classroom, there were others that mentioned that the hindrances for the new teacher were at times insurmountable and there were more negatives than positives to letting new teachers develop or help develop curriculum for the classroom. They mentioned detractors such as not enough time in the classroom or in the profession to be effective, the lack in depth of content knowledge, other than what was taught in the college course and simply adding a specific subject endorsement to make your teaching credential more appealing to those in the school administration and at the district level. When pressed in discussions about the main factor that would be an obstacle to having new to the profession teachers creating curriculum, the general consensus was that the lack of time in the classroom and time in the profession were the largest hurdles to teachers feeling comfortable in letting newer teacher be more involved in the curriculum creation process.

Since they did not have a decision either way about new people to the profession not out of a college of education program, but rather coming from the professional world into teaching, they simply chose to include those individuals in their groupings of new teachers and not try to differentiate between those who have recently entered the teaching profession from other professional fields and those who have attended a college of education teacher credentialing program as part of the requirements for becoming a teacher.

Category Five: Main issues or antecedents facing teachers when given discretion over curricular decisions in the class

As this topic began to take the focus at the end of each interview, the participants had various opinions and views on this matter. They mentioned that the previous issues that teachers face, the start of the New Year and the inclusion in classroom decision making really took a backseat to the issue of the walls and obstacles that teachers face when it comes to antecedents and issues facing teachers if they have the opportunity to be involved. The intense scrutiny from the school and district level were of the most concern while relatively few mentioned the pressures from the state or federal level to follow the guidelines set in place. When asked to expand or define their concerns, the issues of administration always assuming that they know the best course for curriculum creation and inclusion and therefore not giving the teacher the choice of curriculum, the county developed pacing guides taking discretion out of the hands of teachers and the lack of secondary resources, not tied to adopted textbooks, being available to present a well-rounded view of a specific topic. Another major consideration was the curriculum

that is being developed by the state and county levels are being tied to FCAT testing, the state mandated “End of Course” exams that are being implemented and the standardization of information across the broad spectrum without taking into account the differences in students that are in the classrooms.

**Table 7-Quotes from Issues or antecedents facing teachers when given discretion over curricular decisions in the class**

- 
1. “Administration is being told by people who wanted out of the classroom what works best in a classroom”
  2. “adopted text materials do not cover all of the standards that the state requires them to cover”
  3. “always feel that you have to teach to a test that someone else at the county or state level has created without regard to your individual pacing in your class
  4. “teachers cannot be flexible due to constraints regarding FCAT testing and End of Course testing”
  5. “there is no ability to have fun with the information and make learning enjoyable”
  6. “no opportunity to build long term foundations if teachers cannot chose the pace of the class”
  7. “despite teachers being given the discretion over curriculum, it is still an issue that is politically driven and can be seen in the fast changing requirements from the national, state and county level”
- 

Others discussed that aside from the administration of the school concept and the push for classroom standardization that is the current educational rally point, the issues that teachers face are personal ones and those can be the ones that hinder the advancement of the teacher created curriculum for the classroom. While the county develops the pacing guide and the curriculum for it to follow, the teachers want the discretion on how to present the curriculum in the classroom. Teachers feel that they know how to teach and instruct in their particular classes but they recognize that the periphery decision making regarding the curriculum implementation is an obstacle to



overcome. From the lack of materials to effectively create and present curriculum; to the push to standardize the curriculum across the state; trends in teacher bias against a particular portion of the state standard due to lack of knowledge and even the idea how to effectively teach a concept or idea, teachers know and commented that they are held at an arms distance when it comes to creating effective curriculum for their individual classes and recognize that the county school districts are caving into the pressure from the state department of education to produce satisfactory numbers, regardless of the education value of the material. For the teachers, the issue is not what can happen if they are given the discretion over curricular materials for their classroom; the issue is what is happening because they do not have that already.

#### Consequences for allowing teachers to have discretion over curriculum and instruction in the classroom

This topic was covered knowing that all of the participants were actively involved in their schools and it connects with the earlier topic discussion regarding issues facing teachers and discretion, as they offer differing views on the same idea of teacher involvement in the classroom curricular decision making process. As this topic was broached in the interviews, the majority realized that there indeed issues facing teachers. When this discussion turned to the negative consequences that can be faced, the precise knowledge of those issues appeared to be surrounding the teacher and their particular handling of the input for the curriculum. Some of the participants point to the issue of teachers being isolated in their classroom, not wanting to collaborate with colleagues for a number of reasons such as they have limited knowledge of the full curriculum and only

want to teach to their strengths and thereby leaving the students with a limited knowledge base of material, while others pointed to the issue that not all teachers are good teachers, that some of them will ignore any direction for the state or county level to 'teach their own way' and not fully realize the needs of the students.

Along the same lines of that negative consequence is that some teachers, if given the opportunity will simply teach what the county tells them to teach, with no input or questioning and following the pacing guide to the letter; never wavering. It is the fear of the some of the participants that bad teachers will simply create bad curriculum, curriculum that is not educationally sound and does not appeal to the needs of the students. A lasting consideration of note for this study is that the participants of this particular study were all middle school academic teachers and their overwhelming responses and discussions to the problems and consequences associated with giving teachers the curricular discretion over material presented in a classroom is a good number of teachers at that level lack the proper classroom management skills needed to have a cohesive room to where they could be effective in creating and implementing curriculum in their classroom.

**Table 8-Quotes for Consequences for allowing teachers to have discretion over curriculum and instruction in the classroom**

- 
1. “teachers will ignore the curriculum they get from the state”
  2. “teach only what they feel comfortable with or that they are interested in”
  3. “spend too much time on one specific section and ignoring the pacing to cover the rest of the material”
  4. “can affect the learning experiences of the students by getting away from the normalcy and routine of the traditional classroom”
  5. “keeps teachers new to the career field excited about their profession”
  6. “if bad teachers are given the discretion for curriculum, it will fail because not all teachers are good teachers”
  7. “allows teachers to create authentic assessments based on what their students have covered and not be held to a pacing guide created in a cubicle at the state level”
- 

Not all consequences for allowing teachers discretion over curriculum and instruction in the classroom were negative. Many reported the satisfaction of creating exciting and interesting lesson plans, especially in social studies classes, that can be adapted to the students in the classroom and also relevant to current events. The ability to increase the rigor of the material covered and promote student understanding and achievement was also of great importance to the respondents as they stated that with the district or state created material and pacing, they are hampered by the simplicity of it all and want to engage the students in more authentic ways other than the standardization that is currently in place. Being able to create lessons that are outside of the box of normal curriculum development allows those in this discussion to create more holistic lesson plans for specificity to the individual assignment.

By allowing the teachers the discretion and the creativity to use all of their experiences in covering the curriculum that they create, they can instruct and deliver the material in a creative way while also allowing the teacher to relay the skills that they

learned in teacher preparation programs to help the students grow as overall students with information that crosses specific lines. Many others pointed to the fact that with the responsibility of discretion over curriculum comes the responsibility of the creation of assessments that effectively challenge the student over material covered and leads to better mastery of the subject matter. The interviewees state that if they create the material, then they can create effective assessments. They find this hard to do if they have to create material, based on state adopted standards, but the county school district of the state department of education insists on creating standardized test materials based on those standards, for each academic subject area. The participants feel that the disconnect between teacher involvement in classroom, district curricular decision-making process and insistence that the county school district create everything in this area is the biggest detriment to delivering creative and effective curriculum across the spectrum of the different school boards in this state.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to develop an empirically grounded theory characterizing the antecedents and consequences of classroom teacher professional discretion over the curriculum development and instruction. This study focused on the beliefs and professional opinion of classroom teachers as to the issues and consequences faced in giving those classroom teachers discretion over what is developed in the area of an academic subject specific curriculum, how it is delivered and the assessment of that material.

### Restatement of the Problem

Classroom teachers throughout the United States and much of the Western educational sphere of influence have often complained that the adherence to a standardized curriculum, that curriculum and teaching practice which dictates their daily classroom activities and pacing and is implemented by someone outside the individual classroom or school district, affects that teacher's ability to effectively teach the students according to the ability of all students encountered. Research has shown that there is a belief that the standardized curriculum and scripted delivery of such stifles the individual teacher's sense of choice and brings into question their own individual sense of self-efficacy and academic effectiveness in the classroom. Butler (2007) explains that several research studies of classroom instructors have looked into the issue of individual

differences in variables such as teachers' qualifications, competencies, individual personality, personally derived instructional values, and the perceptions of students (Brophy, 1998; Wayne & Youngs, 2003). However, Butler (2007) continues to show that few studies have focused on a particular teacher's individual discretion and their choice in delivery of curricular materials.

As cited by Goddard, Hoy and Woolfolk Hoy (2004, p. 4-5), classroom teachers with strong perceptions of academic self-competence tend to employ specific classroom strategies that have more organization, they are better planned and implemented, are student centered and humanistic in nature (Allinder, 1994; Czerniak & Schriver, 1994; Enochs, Scharmann, & Riggs, 1995; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990, p. 90). Additionally, according to Woolfolk and Hoy (1990, p. 84), research shows us that a teachers' personal sense of self-efficacy or teaching efficacy is often connected to the teachers' individual attitude about student and classroom control and to their behavior in relation to the students and behavior in their individual classroom (Ashton & Webb, 1986). It is the mindset of the classroom teacher that the supervisors (administrators) will allow the teachers (instructors) to demonstrate knowledge of the standards and curriculum that are required by the State Department of Education (DOE) and that are to be covered in the classroom. By allowing the teacher the discretion to create and effectively instruct the class based on their knowledge and experience in that specific area, we see an explanation for the positive correlation that occurs between the teachers and the achievement of the students that they interact with (Anderson, Greene, & Loewen, 1988; Armor, Conroy-Oseguera, Cox, King, McDonnell, Pascal, et al., 1976; Ashton & Webb,

1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984, p. 572; Ross, 1992, p, 60; Ross, 1994). Richardson and Watt (2006, p. 27) also state that it is the teacher that can and does effectively make a difference in the education of their students, thereby influencing their orientation to successful learning in the classroom. This is not a theoretical problem, but one that has real problems and issues that needs to be addressed and there are real solutions that are needed to ensure that we, as educators, continue to deliver relevant and engaging material to ensure the successes of our students.

A trend that is occurring in education, at this moment, is to stifle the teachers' creative input and reduces them to mere controllable cogs in the education wheel through the use of standardized curriculum, high stakes testing and uniformity in the classroom and thereby effectively denying teachers any discretion over curricular materials that are used in their classrooms. To continue to follow this path will lead culture of self-interest and "survivalism" dominated by those tests, accountability issues in the classroom for teachers and mandated deadlines to follow with respect to curriculum, thereby encouraging all parties involved to play it safe in education (Ball, 2008, p. 45 as cited in Berry, 2009, p. 38).

The research presented by Boote (2006, p.462) states that over the last twenty years that with the widespread "implementation of standardized curriculum and instruction", high stakes testing and all of its associated ramifications for education, inspection of schools and districts, accreditation and the "ever increasing external control of teacher preparation programs", the curricular choice for the teacher in the classroom

and input from practicing professionals has affected the proficiency of teachers in the classroom and in the various teacher education programs across collegial spectrum. Many countries are adopting policies and programs that directly affect the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs and have led to a lack of continuity, rigor concerning future teacher input and curriculum delivery discretion in the teacher's preparation classes. Drawing from Dobbin and Boychuk (1999), Power (1999) and Weiner (2002), Boote indicated (2006, p. 462) that countries like "Australia, Canada, and the United States of America have implemented these policies because many teachers make poor choices" and the policy-makers in these Western countries continue to operate within "tightly structured basic employment systems" in education and operate with the expectation that giving new or inexperienced teachers fewer, or no, choices over curricular delivery matters would tend to lead less mistakes to correct..

The individual countries' Departments of Education recognize that the lack of preparation of educational personnel from all across the spectrums of education and different governmental bodies is forcing governments into taking what appear to be the corrective actions to ensure compliance in the demanding world of high stakes education, by leaving beginning teachers with fewer choices in curricular discretion decisions. The underlying fact to remember is that teachers strongly agree and believe that the individual teacher choice in curricular discretion issues improves the affective responses from students by increasing their own sense of ownership, self-interest student centered autonomy and creativity with the task at hand (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000, p. 641).



## Summary of Discussion and Findings

This study was designed and implemented to identify the antecedents and consequences of classroom teachers having professional discretion over curricular decision-making and implementation of material in the classroom. The study looked at attitudes and opinions of practicing middle school teachers and their beliefs relating to how to prepare for the year; the teachers' district mandated planning for their classroom and its effectiveness; development of subject specific curriculum at the county level; new teacher's and their involvement in creating classroom specific curriculum. In addition to those issues, the study also looked at the variety of issues that classroom teachers face with having the professional discretion to create classroom curriculum decisions, combined with the positive and negative reactions from stakeholders in allowing teachers professional discretion over classroom curricular decision making. With the ongoing issue of allowing teachers to have more input into the decisions that directly affect them as professionals and their students in the classroom, this had to be a grounded theory study, as proposed by Glaser (1992, p.15), to "allow the data to open up and reveal the underlying understanding of this issue" and how it affects teachers in their professional opinions towards curriculum and instruction.

### Research Question 1: What are the issues and factors that influence teacher professional discretion over Curriculum and Instruction?

Two very distinct theories began to emerge that helped to explain the development of teacher discretion over curricular decision making and implementation of that material in the classroom. When those who were interviewed began speaking about

their own reflective beliefs and attitudes towards teacher involvement in curricular decision making and implementation in the classroom, they understood that this is a major issue facing teachers, as mentioned in Flowerday and Schraw (2000), and they were supportive in the fact that teachers needed to be part of the involvement in classroom curricular decision making. The participants realize that while the county will continue to develop the pacing guides and the specific curriculum for the classroom teachers to follow, the teachers, as the experts in their field, want the discretion on how to present the curriculum in the classroom to their specific students.

The teachers interviewed believe that they know how to teach their specific subject matter and possess the abilities and pedagogical knowledge to effectively instruct students who are entrusted in their particular classes. However, they do recognize that the periphery decision making regarding the curriculum implementation in the classroom is an obstacle to overcome for the typical classroom teacher. Although it was not as a unanimous decision as one would have thought or would believe it to be. The result that was achieved is a positive reflection of the curricular decision making process as someone would expect from teachers or from one in the teaching field.

With regard to allowing teachers that individual discretion, they understood it to be that as professionals, teachers need to be involved in the material that they deliver, as affirmed in Reid (2009, p. 419-420), rather than simply being a cog in the wheel of the educational system. The ability to involve the teachers in the classroom in the creation of the curricular material that they will ultimately deliver in their classroom is one aspect of

the teaching profession that, according to the respondents', all teachers would like to have. With that professional understanding, they were also cognizant to the fact that not all teachers, regardless of numbers of years of experience, need to have that individual discretion in creating classroom curriculum (Boote, 2006; Henderson, 1992; Pelletier et al. 2002; Pollard, 2002). The measure of a teacher's total time in the educational profession, combined with years of classroom experience and exposure to the mastery of the subject matter, all played a big role in determining the respondents' beliefs and ideals of whom and, more importantly, when someone should be involved in helping to create local classroom curriculum (Enderlin-Lampe, 1997; Leithwood et al., 2004, Smylie et al., 2007; Yukl, 1994).

Research Question 2: What are the consequences of teacher professional discretion over Curriculum and Instruction?

Not only did this study look to the issues facing school districts and teachers in allowing teachers to have professional discretion over classroom curricular decision making (Enderlin-Lampe, 1997), it also explored the consequences, both positive and negative (Leithwood et al., 2004, Smylie et al., 2007) of allowing those teachers to have that input into the classroom curriculum and the ability to affect the overall result of subject mastery. In looking at the results of the interviews and the information presented, consequence may not be as big of a negative issue to deal with for all of the teachers. Respondents' believed that they were advocating the positive effects of classroom teachers' involvement as well as warning about the negative implications of all teachers having the ability to teach their own curriculum in the classroom. The ability to be more

effective in the increase of rigor, of the material covered in the classroom, and promote a deeper student understanding of the material covered is a personal and professional goal of the classroom teachers that took part in this study.

The increase of rigor was not the only purpose of the teachers involved in the study. Respondents' also stated that the desire to increase the achievement of students in subject matter knowledge and boost the knowledge base of the material was also of great importance to the teachers. The respondent's' stated that with the district or state created material and pacing guides, they are hampered by the simplicity of it all and want to be able to engage the students in more authentic ways, to ensure that the subject matter material is current, relevant and informational; rather than accepting the basic standardization of the material that is currently in place. Being able to create lessons that are informative, interesting and 'outside of the box of normal curriculum development' allows those in this discussion to create a more holistic lesson plan specifically adapted to the individual assignment in their particular class.

In looking into the circumstances that allow for the ability for teachers to become more involved in the curricular decision making process at the local school district level, it would appear that the general consensus of those interviewed is that while state mandated testing and end of course examinations are not going away in the near future, the ability for teachers to affect the curriculum in a positive manner and how it is presented at the local classroom level can be achieved (Beard, Hoy & Hoy, 2010, p. 1143; Goddard et al., 2000, p. 482; Pajares, 1994, 1997; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998, p.

202). Once again, we look to the report (Boote, 2006) that states that the simplest kind of professional discretion is a key component when teacher educators and administrators decide that a teacher is able to teach. Teachers have repeatedly stated that if the curricular decision making process is taken away from the classroom teachers, then the teachers are reduced to mere cogs in a wheel, offering no individual differentiation to an individual student, or group of students, and furthermore making it so they are not able to effectively participate in their chosen profession.

### Conclusions

The design of this particular grounded theory study was intentionally narrow and focused on the one suburban school district that is examined. Previous research has shown that a positive correlation does exist between teacher flexibility in creating curriculum for the classroom and student learning in the public school setting in America (Butler, 2007, p. 250) and it is that flexibility of allowing teachers that discretion in making curricular decisions in the classroom that was examined and discussed. The information from this study can still be the starting point and source of further studies in teacher discretion over classroom curricular materials by utilizing the questions and concerns that have been raised in this study. There are still some issues, ideas and conclusions that can be drawn from the information that has been presented regarding the ability of teachers to have curricular decision making powers over the material that they deliver in their classroom.

The allowance for individual teacher professional discretion over classroom curriculum and instruction can have a positive effect and influence over the manner that the instructor presents the material to the students in their class, as well as, over the end result of students and their mastery of the particular subject matter. The ability of the classroom instructor to utilize all of their prior knowledge of the material to be discussed, combined with their knowledge of the individual students in their classes, can create an atmosphere where the students in attendance will receive a rigorous and demanding lesson, while the teacher can continue to develop lessons that adhere to the content standards for their specific curriculum as required by the state department of education and the individual school districts. The state department of education will, while combined and working with the local school district personnel, continue to dictate the specific curricular and subject matter material that needs to be covered in a calendar school year.

However, when the local classroom teacher has been entrusted with the ability to create classroom curricular materials and have been given discretion to create curricular materials for their specific class, the end result is a more rigorous, relevant and informational educational process that utilizes the locally adaptive and created material for the students with the final end result of improved student achievement in the classroom.

### Recommendations for Future Research

The main purpose of this study was to look at the antecedents and consequences of teacher professional discretion over curriculum and instruction in the classroom setting. Based on the conclusions of this research, the following recommendations are presented to enhance and strengthen the area of teacher discretion over classroom curriculum and instruction and specifically to assist classroom teachers in adapting locally created curriculum to the students that they serve.

1. Research the ability to allow for more relevant and comprehensive teacher in-service training in proven and effective ways to create meaningful classroom curriculum that is relevant to their specific subject matter that they teach.
2. Research the direct result of the implementation of Florida Senate Bill 736, called the “Student Success Act”, and the effects on teachers as it applies to job satisfaction and merit pay, taking into consideration the major impact that this piece of legislature has on teacher salary and evaluation and its direct relationship to student achievement and academic growth in the classroom.
3. Research the inclusion of more rigorous curriculum development classes at the college and university level and as part of Teacher Education Programs, both locally and nationally.
4. Research the ability and desire for local school districts to include classroom teachers when creating pacing guides, academic calendars and in-service trainings

to allow for more direct communication with teachers with regards to teaching the state mandated academic standards.

5. Replicate this study in other school districts in Florida and nationally.



**APPENDIX A**  
**IRB APPROVAL FROM STUDY SCHOOL DISTRICT**

## THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF OSCEOLA COUNTY, FLORIDA

817 Bill Beck Boulevard • Kissimmee • Florida 34744-4492  
Phone: 407-870-4600 • Fax: 407-870-4010 • [www.osceola.k12.fl.us](http://www.osceola.k12.fl.us)

### SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

District 1 – Jay Wheeler  
407-590-0505  
District 2 – Marjorie Guillen-Melendez, Vice Chair  
407-922-5113  
District 3 – Cindy Lou Hartig, Chair  
407-832-3999  
District 4 – Barbara Horn  
407-744-3009  
District 5 – Tom Long  
407-892-5835



Superintendent of Schools  
Michael A. Grego, Ed.D.

December 17, 2010

Mr. Marc M. Spittler  
9833 Poplar Place  
Orlando, Florida 32827

Dear Mr. Spittler:

This letter is to inform you that we have received your request to conduct research in our School District. Based on the description of the research you intend to conduct, I am pleased to inform you that you may proceed with your work as you have outlined.

I will remind you that all information obtained for the purpose of your research must be dealt with in the strictest of confidentiality. At no time is it acceptable to release any student or staff identifiable information.

I wish you the best of luck in your future endeavors. If I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Angela Marino  
Director  
Research Evaluation & Accountability

*Student Achievement – Our Number One Priority*  
Districtwide Accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools  
An Equal Opportunity Agency

**APPENDIX B**  
**IRB APPROVAL FROM UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA**



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
 Office of Research & Commercialization  
 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
 Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
 Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

### Approval of Exempt Human Research

**From:** UCF Institutional Review Board #1  
 FWA00000351, IRB00001138

**To:** Marc Spittler

**Date:** March 29, 2011

Dear Researcher:

On 3/29/2011, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination  
 Project Title: THE ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF TEACHER DISCRETION OVER CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION: A GROUNDED THEORY INQUIRY  
 Investigator: Marc Spittler  
 IRB Number: SBE-11-07562  
 Funding Agency:  
 Grant Title:  
 Research ID: N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Kendra Dimond Campbell, MA, JD, UCF IRB Interim Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 03/29/2011 02:12:54 PM EST

IRB Coordinator

**APPENDIX C**  
**EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH FOR PARTICIPANTS**



## **EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH**

**Title of Project:** The Antecedents and Consequences of Teacher Professional Discretion over Curriculum and Instruction: A Grounded Theory Inquiry

**Principal Investigator:** Marc Montgomery Spittler

**Other Investigators:** none

**Faculty Supervisor:** Dr. Stephen Sivo

**You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up to you.**

- The purpose of this study is to investigate the results of the teacher having the professional discretion to choose the style of directed instruction and the flexibility to present the material in such a way that showcases their individual strengths in the classroom, with respect to the curriculum being delivered in the classroom. Included in the results are the teacher's perception of curricular discretion in choosing material, method of delivery and instruction of the curriculum. This study builds on and contributes to work in analyzing the situations of teacher decision making and related issues in that if a teacher is given a choice over material to present, direction and assistance, then the application of the teacher's discretion in presenting the material and the control in choosing the material to be presented provides for a more descriptive and engaging curriculum and by which students have the opportunity of learning the information contained within the state curriculum standards based on the instructor's expertise and experience.
- If you choose to be part of this study, you will be asked to participate in a maximum of 3, one on one, interviews with the researcher to discuss your position and insight to the

issue of teacher involvement in curriculum decisions in the classroom. All interviews will take place at the worksite of each participant unless other considerations for location are agreeable to both the Principal Investigator and the participant before the beginning of the interviews.

- All interviews will be recorded via a digital audio recording device. In order to be included in the research study, you must consent to the use of your recorded audio responses. All recordings will be kept in the possession of the Principle Investigator and kept in a secured safe within his control. The Principal investigator will be the only person with access to the recordings, either in digital form or transcribed copies. All recordings will be destroyed after the completion of the research project.
- The duration of the research should take no longer than a total of 6 months, with each participant being asked to allow for approximately three to four hours total time, spread out over this timeframe. The time constraints are only limited by the duration of the individual interviews and the time to fill out a basic demographic questionnaire.
- You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.
- There is no compensation of any type for participating in the study.

**Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem:** If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, please contact Marc M. Spittler, Graduate Student, Doctorate of Education Program, College of Education, (407) 803-3286 or Dr. Stephen Sivo, Faculty Supervisor, College of Education at (407) 823-4147 or by email at [ssivo@mail.ucf.edu](mailto:ssivo@mail.ucf.edu).

**IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint:** Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901.

**APPENDIX D**  
**INFORMED CONSENT LETTER**



## INFORMED CONSENT

### **The Antecedents and Consequences of Teacher Professional Discretion over Curriculum and Instruction: A Grounded Theory Inquiry**

**Title of Study:** The Antecedents and Consequences of Teacher Professional Discretion over Curriculum and Instruction: A Grounded Theory Inquiry

**Principal Investigator:**

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**Background:**

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear of if you need more information.

**Study Procedure:**

I am seeking help in a study of the determining autonomy and choice in decision making in the Secondary School Classroom. This study is part of an effort to learn what factors influence the decision making process as to what is being taught in the classroom as well as determining the ability of the classroom teacher to make decisions concerning curriculum in their classroom.

I am looking for participants that have been teaching in the classroom for at least one year. I am contacting a random sample of classroom teachers from all over the Osceola School District to ask what their role is in developing curriculum for their classroom, what their teaching experience has been, and whether the current system of creating curriculum is meeting their needs and the needs of their students.

**Risks:**

The risks of this study are minimal. These risks are similar to those you experience when disclosing work-related information to others. The topics in the interview may upset some respondents. You may decline to answer any or all questions and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose.

**Benefits:**

There will be no direct benefit to you for your participation in this study. Results from the interviews may be used to help design ways in making curriculum implementation more relevant for teachers like you.

**Confidentiality:**

Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

- Assigning code names/numbers for participants that will be used on all researcher notes and documents.
- Notes, interview transcriptions, and transcribed notes and any other identifying participant information will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher. When no longer necessary for research, all materials will be destroyed.
- The researcher and the members of the researcher's committee will review the researcher's collected data. Information from this research will be used solely for the purpose of this study and any publications that may result from this study. Any final publication will contain the names of the public figures that have consented to participate in this study (unless a public figure participant has requested anonymity): all other participants involved in this study will not be identified and their anonymity will be maintained.

**Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem:** If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, please contact Marc M. Spittler, Graduate Student, Doctorate of Education Program, College of Education, (407) 803-3286 or Dr. Stephen Sivo, Faculty Supervisor, College of Education at (407) 823-4147 or by email at [ssivo@mail.ucf.edu](mailto:ssivo@mail.ucf.edu).

**IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint:** Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901.

**Voluntary Participation:**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you do decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part in this study, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. You are free to not answer any question or questions if you choose. This will not affect the relationship you have with the researcher.

**Unforeseeable Risks:**

There may be risks that are not anticipated. However every effort will be made to minimize any risks.

**Costs To:**

There are no costs to you for your participation in this study

**Compensation:**

There is no monetary compensation to you for your participation in this study.

**APPENDIX E**  
**EMAIL TO SITE ADMINISTRATORS**

To be included in an email to School Administration to gather volunteers. Each email message will be personalized with their name and location before being sent out.

Greetings\_\_\_\_\_

My name is Marc Spittler and I am a Doctoral Candidate at the University of Central Florida. My doctoral research advisor is Dr. Steven Sivo, College of Education, University of Central Florida. I have been granted permission to conduct research in the School District of Osceola County by Angela Marino, Director of Research Evaluation and Evaluation.

I am seeking help in a study of the determining autonomy and choice in decision making in the Secondary School Classroom. This study is part of an effort to learn what factors influence the decision making process as to what is being taught in the classroom as well as determining the ability of the classroom teacher to make decisions concerning curriculum in their classroom.

I am looking for participants that have been teaching in the classroom for at least one year. I am contacting a random sample of classroom teachers from all over the Osceola School District to ask what their role is in developing curriculum for their classroom, what their teaching experience has been, and whether the current system of creating curriculum is meeting their needs and the needs of their students.

Participants will be asked to participate in a maximum of 3, one on one, interviews with the researcher to discuss your position and insight to the issue of teacher involvement in curriculum decisions in the classroom. All interviews will take place at the worksite of each participant unless other considerations for location are agreeable to both the Principal Investigator and the participant before the beginning of the interviews. All interviews will be recorded with a digital audio recorder

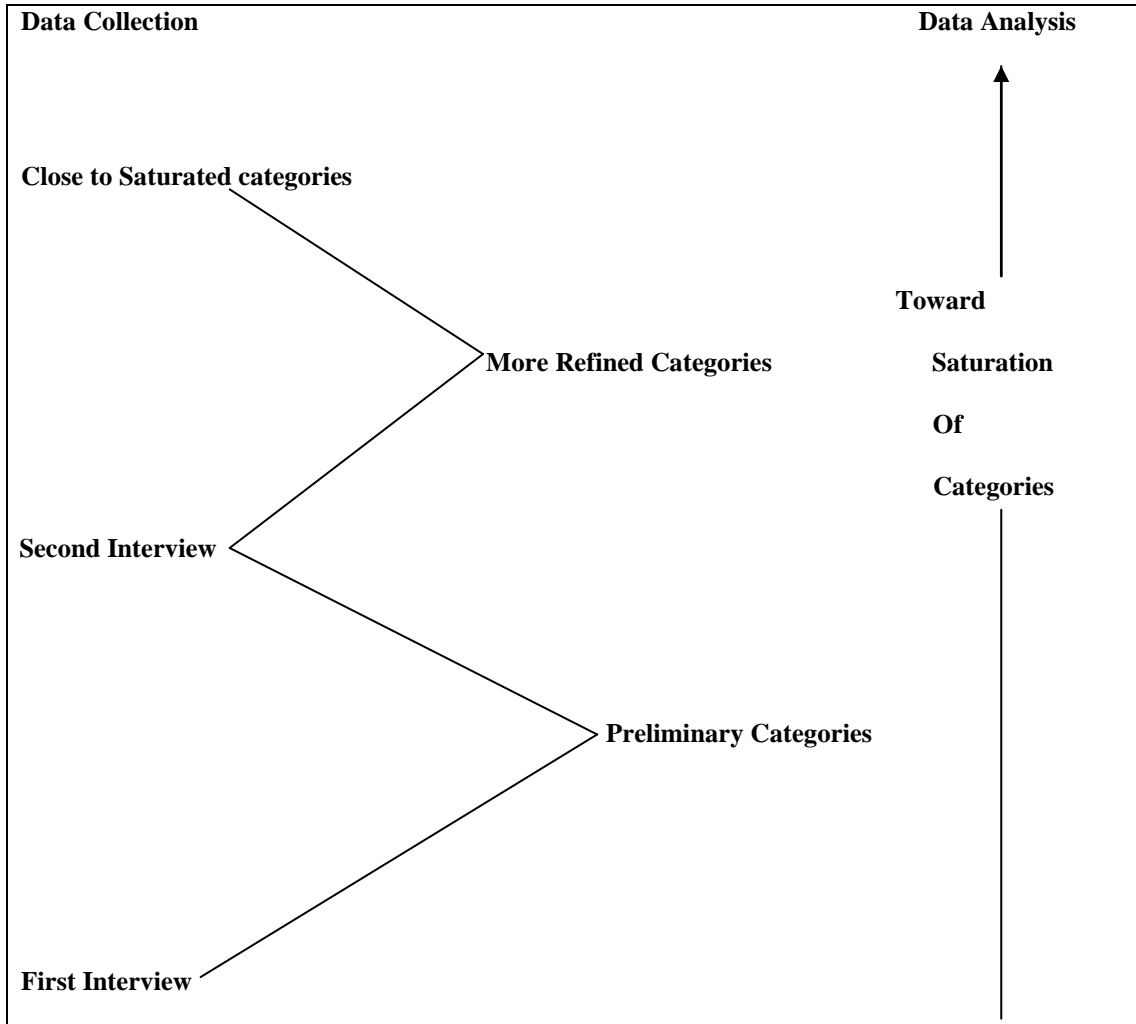
Results from the interviews may be used to help design ways in making curriculum implementation more relevant for teachers like you.

Your answers and discussion are completely confidential and will be released only as summaries in which no individual's answer can be identified. If you agree to participate, when you return your completed questionnaire your name will be deleted. This survey is voluntary. However, you can help us very much by taking a few minutes to share your experience and opinions about implementation of your curriculum in your classroom.

If you have any questions or comments about this study, I would be happy to talk with you. You can contact me at 407-803-3286 or at Fenian117@hotmail.com.

**APPENDIX F**  
**FIGURE 1--ZIG ZAG DATA COLLECTION MATRIX**

**Figure 1 -- Zig-Zag data collection matrix**

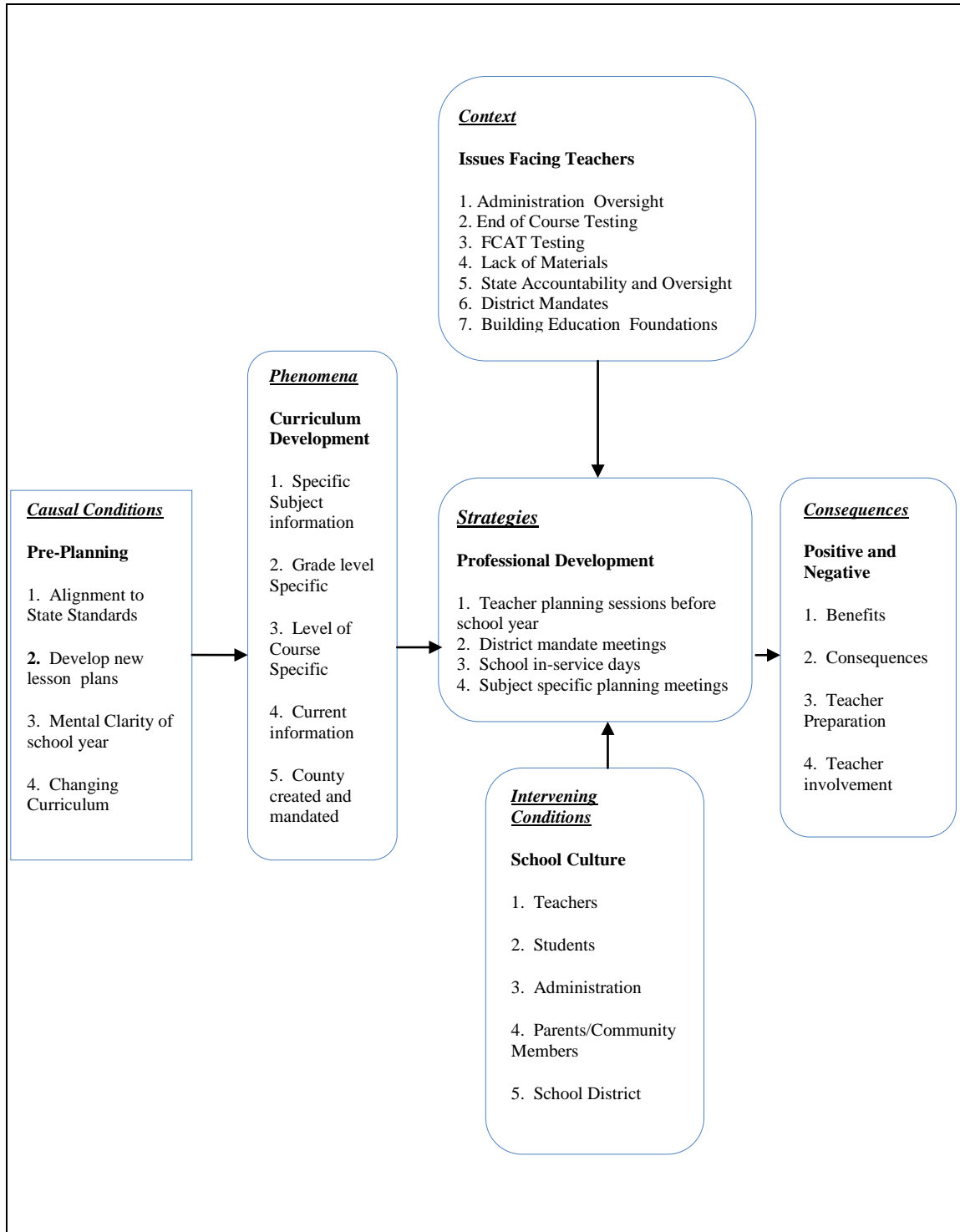


**Derived from table in Educational Research-Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research by John W. Creswell. Copyright © 2002 by Merrill Prentice Hall.**

**APPENDIX G**  
**FIGURE 2 -TEACHER DISCRETION OVER CURRICULUM**



**Figure 2 -Teacher Discretion over Curriculum**



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