# Non-Traditonal Secondary School: Teacher Perceptions of Similarities and Differences Compared to Traditional Secondary Schools

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#### **Abstract**

This qualitative study was conducted to explore the experiences of educators who previously worked in traditional secondary schools, working in a non-traditional secondary school in a midwestern suburban school district (School A). Ten responsive interviews with 9 teachers and 1 administrator were conducted to study the phenomenon. Documents from teachers and the school district were utilized to triangulate the data to strengthen the study. From the study, the following themes emerged: relationships with colleagues and administrators is what participants benefited from; School A being a new school presented frustrating challenges; participants appreciated the similar pedagogy philosophy in School A; schedules and collaboration opportunities were not different from the other traditional secondary schools in the school district; the daily experiences between the previous traditional secondary school and School A had various differences; and regardless of the building being traditional or nontraditional, participants shared their desire for effective building leadership. The eductaors yearn to feel supported in taking risks and having building leaders who instill structure and high expectations for all students and all staff. Future leaders in positions to create and establish nontraditional secondary schools are recommended to identify leaders that will outshine the new building. What educators like or benefit from the most is leadership, not the environment, the study suggests.

#### **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to mother of my children, Pamela, and my children, Jace, Jonah, and Juna. This journey would never have happened if it were not for Pamela's encouraging note she scribed on my Baker application when I questioned whether to enroll into the Doctorate Program, "What are you waiting for?" Even though I spent countless hours away on Thursday nights and Sunday mornings for 2 ½ years; Jace, Jonah, and Juna thrived due to Pamela's incredible love and parenting. I love you guys!

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#### Chapter 1

#### Introduction

During the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, mass schooling systems were constructed by states that eventually encompassed the entire populations of children (Boli & Ramirez, 1987). Centuries later, the mass schooling systems have grown tenfold; the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported there were 24,280 secondary schools in the United States in 2012-13 (U.S. Department of Education). Tony Miller, the former U.S. Deputy Secretary under the Obama Administration, highlighted that 7,000 students drop out from these secondary schools each day (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Peter D. Hart Research Associates and Public Opinion Strategies (2005) affirm after their research: "Although public schools are doing a good job preparing many graduates, they are seriously failing a substantial minority" (p. 2). America's schools are covered wagons that were created and designed in 1892 (Dintersmith & Wagner, 2015).

Combatting the thousands of students dropping out of high school every day are the efforts by multiple funders supporting reinventing high schools and trying new models of K-12 education (Hall and Callahan, 2017). These efforts are creating non-traditional models of schooling providing an alternative experience from the traditional model of schooling for students. Holzman (1997) defines a non-traditional school as the following: an academic institute's desire for a greater level of autonomy and participation in creating more educational choices for their students that holds a varied complex political, cultural, and/or religious motivation for an alternative way of learning. In San Diego, California, High Tech High (HTH) is a non-traditional network of schools that serves five thousand predominantly minority students (Dintersmith & Wagner, 2015). Wagner and Dintersmith (2015) describe the learning

environment in a non-traditional school as team teaching occurring within interdisciplinary courses so that students can master core competencies through engagement in challenging projects. Non-traditional schools can create a brighter future for more students as flexibility is embedded in non-traditional settings through the curriculum being individualized for each student (Aronson, 1995; Quinn & Poirier, 2007).

Operating within flexible schedules and structures is a primary characteristic of non-traditional schools (Crowe, 2018). The High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) is a project of the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy at Indiana University-Bloomington created to survey high school student perspectives on their work, learning environment, and their interaction within the school community (Yazzie-Mintz, 2010). According to the HSSSE in 2009, "two out of three students are bored either every day or every class" (Yazzie-Mintz, 2010, p. 56). Eighty-one percent of students were bored because the material was not interesting (Yazzie-Mintz, 2010). Within the flexible schedules and structures, the following strategies in non-traditional schools engaged students to battle the boredom reported in the HSSSE: individual learning, cooperative learning, competency-based learning, team teaching, peer tutoring, teaching to multiple intelligences, and an absence of tracking are innovative academic strategies Aronson (1995) discovered when studying successful alternative (non-traditional) programs.

Given the aforementioned differences between non-traditional schools and traditional schools, it is understandable that teachers, who are working in a non-traditional school setting for the first time, need to be supported and prepared. Literatures suggested that staffing a non-traditional school with the right people who understand students' needs, is vital to the functioning of the alternative school (Neve, 2017; Rennie Center, 2014). Professional development for teachers in non-traditional settings specific to the needs of the teacher is

essential (Rennie Center, 2014). Also, additional training for teachers in the area of special education benefits teachers in non-traditional school settings (Foley & Pang, 2006). However, the literature on the first-year experience of teachers working in a non-traditional school who previously worked in a traditional school setting is limited. District and building leaders need to prepare teachers for what they will experience in their first-year teaching in a non-traditional school setting to ensure success is maximized for students. The current research explores the experiences of teachers working in a non-traditional school setting after previously working in a traditional school setting.

#### **Background**

School A, the non-traditional school where the study was conducted, is a Midwestern suburban public high school that opened in the fall of 2017. School A will be the fifth of five high schools in the school district. According to the website of School A (2017), the building is designed for a project-based learning environment. The student population in the first year of School A was approximately 850 students. Of the 850 students, only freshman, sophomores, and juniors were attending in its first year. Seniors joined School A starting the 2018-19 school year. Table one represents the school district demographic breakdown.

Table 1
School District Demographics

## School District

Demographic	Percentage of Students
White	68.02
Hispanic	15.64
African-American	7.17
Other	9.17
English Language Learners	11.23
Economically Disadvantaged	27.87

Note. State Department of Education (2017)

#### **Statement of the Problem**

With the alarming number of students who are not graduating high school on time, school districts throughout the country are exploring and pursuing non-traditional secondary school models to meet the needs of all students. Therefore, traditional school teachers will be pursued to teach in non-traditional schools. There is plenty of literature on the qualities and dispositions school leaders should pursue to work in a non-traditional school (Lashaway, 2000; Ike, 2012; Williams, 2015). However, with the limited knowledge of first-year experiences of educators working in a non-traditional school, this study will share lessons on what district leaders, building leaders, and teachers can expect.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of educators working in a non-traditional secondary school. Also, differences of working in a non-traditional secondary school as opposed to a traditional secondary school were explored.

#### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study was to explore the experiences of a group of teachers who chose to teach in a non-traditional school without prior experience in that model of school. The qualitative data collected and analyzed in the study may contribute to the limited body of knowledge on the experience of educators working in a non-traditional school. More specifically, the study can be valued by districts with similar demographics and geography to anticipate experiences of educators working in a non-traditional school for the first time.

#### **Delimitations**

"Delimitations are conditions or parameters that the researcher intentionally imposes in order to limit the scope of a study" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 8). Due to reasonable access,

time, and resources, this qualitative study was conducted with 10 educators who work in School A, who had previously worked in a traditional secondary school, in one Midwestern school district, and in one Midwestern city.

#### **Assumptions**

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) note that assumptions "reflect what you hold to be true as you go into the study and from which you believe you will be able to draw some conclusions" (p. 66). This study included the following assumptions:

- 1. The participants selected to be interviewed were truthful and best to their knowledge and memory in their responses;
- 2. The participants were consistent between one another with the components and implementation of progressive teaching methodologies discussed in interviews.

#### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were addressed throughout the study:

- **RQ1.** What were the experiences of educators in a non-traditional secondary school?
- **RQ2.** How was working in a non-traditional secondary school different than working in a traditional secondary school?

#### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined to provide context to support the understanding and interpretation of the study.

**21st Century learner.** A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learner refers to the student who needs to be exposed to 21st century skills. Twenty-first century skills refer to a broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits that are believed to be critically important to success in

today's world, particularly in collegiate programs and contemporary careers and workplaces (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2016).

Achievement gap. Achievement Gap refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students. This gap is visible in various measures of success: academic grades, standardized test scores, course selection, dropout rates, college completion rates, etc. (Education Weekly, 2004).

**Non-traditional secondary school.** Non-traditional secondary school is defined by Korn (1991) as a secondary institution which provides an alternative education with a curriculum and methods that are non-traditional.

**Postsecondary education.** Postsecondary education refers to a formal education one may receive after earning a high school diploma.

**Secondary school.** Secondary school refers to a school immediately between elementary school and college and usually offering general, technical, vocational, or college-preparatory courses.

**Underemployed.** Underemployed refers to highly skilled workers working low paying jobs (Investopedia, 2017).

#### **Organization of the Study**

Five chapters present this study. The first chapter provides a broad overview of the study that includes background information, terminology, the purpose, research questions, and significance of the research. The researcher reviews the literature related to this study in chapter 2. In chapter 3, the researcher thoroughly explains and defines the procedures for collection of the data and the design of the research. The collected data is analyzed by the researcher in

chapter 4. The study concludes with chapter 5 and the researcher offers recommendations and implications of the study for future research.

#### Chapter 2

#### **Review of the Literature**

The purpose of chapter 2 is to review literature that provides a balanced, clear picture of leading concepts, theories, and data related to the topic of the researcher (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Initially, the chapter begins with an examination of the history of state-sponsored education and the roots of education in the United States of America (USA). Progressive education reform movements in the USA follows and subsequently school organization models are highlighted. The final two sections of chapter 2 look closely into the teaching and learning philosophies that have shaped public education we presently see; while the literature review concludes with the close-up analysis of non-traditional education case studies and the leadership that oversees these attempts to make education better for all students. The thread that is fundamental to the review of the literature in this chapter is the attempt to provide a different experience to students in a state-sponsored education setting. As time evolves, so does the purpose of education.

#### The History of State-Sponsored Education

**Prussia.** The roots of state-sponsored education for the masses lies in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with Frederick the Great of Prussia. The sole purpose of this state-sponsored education model was to consolidate imperial power. Compliance was the desired behavior the King wanted from this state-sponsored education model: "We do not confer upon the individual or upon society any benefit when we educate him beyond the bounds of his social class and vocation..." (Reisner, 1922, p. 143-44). Boli and Ramirez (1987) note the efforts in education were aggressively directed towards teaching all children to identify the purposes and goals of the state rather than their local communities.

**United States of America.** In 1843, 70 years later, the efforts to replicate the Prussian model of state-sponsored education to the masses in the USA was led by Horace Mann. According to Cubberley (1920), Mann understood the model of the Prussians derived from dark intentions, but believed he could use the model "for the highest good" (p. 488-489). The unintended consequence of Mann's leadership created a near unbreakable foundation of efficiency that was convenient for the state, not the individual. This one-size fits all approach that perpetuated compliance and a lack of critical thinking amongst the masses was strengthened in 1892 by the Committee of Ten. The Committee of Ten valued efficiency and viewed students as products and concerned themselves with producing a product as quickly as possible (Nelson, 1992). Nelson (1992) notes the disposition of the Committee of Ten: the committee consisted of all white males between the ages of 34 and 63; dominated by easterners, mainly from Ivy League and institutions that were similar; recommendations for this committee focused on students determined to go to college; and there were no females or minority members on the committee. Wesley (1957) highlights the committee's elitist nature, "[The Committee of Ten] then proceeded to discuss the teaching of only those subjects which colleges did recognize..." (p. 73). Clearly, the state-sponsored mass schooling attempt was intentionally or unintentionally designed for a certain demographic.

Public education for the dominant culture. The mid-nineteenth century ideology believed that African-Americans, and all other races that were not White, were intellectually and physically inferior (Gholar, 1990). Gholar (1990) notes these beliefs that governed society were absorbed into education policy, simultaneously creating a more adequate educational experience for the "dominant culture" (p. 13). Gholar (1990) continued to highlight the results of her research: public education was either non-existent or unequal and inadequate for students of

color when compared to the education of White students. Spring (2013) notes before the time of the American Civil War, seven percent of African-Americans were literate (p. 57). The perceptions of White children and children who were non-White were impacted to the extent that the dominant race was White (Gholar, 1990).

The disparity between Whites and non-Whites, specifically African Americans, grew worse in public education for the latter. Anderson et al. (2001) argued that the African-American community knew equal educational opportunities in northern society were not guaranteed; therefore, the purpose of education was recalibrated to focus on pursuing freedom. The mindsets and perceptions of Whites toward non-Whites combined with the pursuit of freedom that African Americans passionately believed in, were clearing a path for an unprecedented battle in public education: separate but equal.

Separate but equal. Tracing educational models throughout the history of state-sponsored education, not all populations have been given access. The following court cases, *Roberts v. City of Boston* (1849), *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), were highlighted in Bordman's (1993) research. The "popular mood and attitude regarding divisive racial issues" (p. 12) began to shift due to these three court cases that were racially motivated. Before the American Civil War, the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled keeping schools segregated in *Roberts v. City of Boston* (Bordman, 1993). Although an unfortunate outcome for the African-American community at the time, multiple arguments made by the prosecution would be strengthened in future court cases. Bordman (1993) points to the first-time suggestion that "separate schools perpetuated race prejudice by instilling feelings of inferiority in Blacks and superiority in Whites" (p. 53).

Nearly 50 years later, separate but equal was elevated from the state supreme court to the highest law of the land, the United States Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) (Bordman, 1993). Spring (2013) brings to light the explicit difference in financing public education between Whites and African-Americans in the 1930s, "Black southern citizens had to pay directly from their own income to build schools for their children, while, at the same time they paid local and state taxes, which went primarily to support White segregated schools" (p. 63). Clearly, separate but equal was upheld in *Plessy v. Ferguson* but the arguments for tearing down the doctrine of separate but equal were slowly growing and strengthening over time. Nearly 60 years later, separate but equal would be struck down.

Brown v. Board of Education. In 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled separate but equal unconstitutional, roughly 105 years after separate but equal was upheld at the state level. Although desegregating schools was mandated, more than 30 years had passed with many schools in the country who had not complied (Burrell, 1996). Subsequently, segregation has yet to be adequately systemically addressed in present day public education. In April, 2016, the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) released data that highlighting "the percentage of all K-12 public schools that had high percentages of poor and Black or Hispanic students grew from 9 to 16 percent," and "these schools were the most racially and economically concentrated: 75 to 100 percent of the students were Black or Hispanic and eligible for free or reduced-price lunch" (para. 1). These data reveal public education is not meeting the needs of all students, regardless of how well intended districts and states may be.

#### **Progressive Education Movements**

**John Dewey.** Contrary to the state-sponsored educational mindset born in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe, John Dewey valued the individual over the interests and pursuits of the

systems and institutions. Dewey's philosophy of education was fundamental in his progressive, yet short-lived Laboratory School at the University of Chicago (1896-1904). In a speech to parents who were sending their students to the Laboratory School, Dewey's educational philosophy was shared,

We want to find out how much can be given to a child that is really worth his while to get, in knowledge of the world about him, of the forces in the world, of historical and social growth, and in capacity to express himself in a variety of artistic forms. (Tanner, 1991, p. 101)

Dewey's tone was one that valued human and moral development over what was in the best interest of the state. Lamons (2012) highlights one of Dewey's goals for education, "the development and maturation of human intelligence" (p. 14). This humanist perspective on education valuing individuality took a polarizing stance during an era where efficiency was everything. Efficiency was a society norm and classrooms were not immune.

John Goodlad. Over multiple years, an ethnographic study of education, the largest research project of its kind was conducted in the 1970s by John Goodlad (Weltman, 1995). Weltman (1995) describes Goodlad's educational philosophy as one that pushed "a social-centered curriculum and child-centered pedagogy, promoting individualization rather than individualism, and aiming for all-around personal, social, emotional, intellectual and vocational education of students within a supportive, cooperative school environment" (p. 390). Goodlad's (1976) conclusion to his study was the liberal intentions of teachers and parents undermined the culture of schooling that is predominantly conservative.

Individuality, one of Goodlad's beliefs, was evident in non-graded schools. Graded schools, where grades are created and students are moved to the next grade level based on age, length of time in the grade, and the level of knowledge and performance moves a student to the next grade level are the opposite of non-graded schools. Non-graded schools are a *flexible grouping system* (Hoffman, 1985) based on philosophical and psychological studies that at the rate and ways that students learn are different; the continuous growth of the child was at the heart of non-graded schools (p. 29). Robert Anderson (1971) argued that non-graded schools was more than an administrative plan, non-graded schools is a philosophical commitment. Non-graded schools never gained the momentum necessary to be implemented country-wide but non-graded schools can still be found in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Theodore 'Ted' Sizer. Unlike the prior progressive movements in education during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, The Coalition of Essential Schools was more than a model for reform; The Coalition of Essential Schools oriented themselves around nine common principles (Peters Kitchen, 1999). Theodore Sizer (1989) argued that schools, high achieving or low achieving, are never alike; and within each school, each year will be different and unique. Additionally, Sizer desired to empower the local districts and schools with the nine common principles; this desire was contrary to prior progressive movements. "The Coalition is, in effect, a process, an unfolding among a widely diverse group of schools of structures, routines, and commitments appropriate to each, which are consistent with our shared principles" (Sizer, 1989, p. 2). Instead of progressive models being implemented from outside groups and progressivists, Sizer's approach was counterintuitive with a framework to start locally.

Peters Kitchen (1999) shares Sizer's nine common principles of reform in order:

- intellectual focus;
- set simple goals;
- goals should apply to all students;
- personalize learning;
- student-as-worker;
- diploma by exhibition;
- attitude;
- teacher is a generalist first and a specialist second; and
- lastly revisit the budget philosophy and formula. (p. 5-6)

In 1997, The Coalition of Essential Schools moved from nine common principles to 10 common principles, the last one being democracy and equity. Since 1986, The Coalition of Essential Schools reform was aimed at returning schools to the fundamentals of education. Sizer's impatience for the similarities between high schools in the 1970s and 1980s with the founding model in the 19<sup>th</sup> century resulted in his suggested principles to create an educational experience for each student, across the vast country that maximized each student's potential (Peters Kitchen, 1999).

**Experiential education.** Activities, acting, experiencing, observing, reflecting, and testing in the educational process are forms of experiential education (Manson-Dimmer, 1999). Experiential education became much more relevant for students as the 20<sup>th</sup> century evolved due to advances in technology and new discoveries. Although Dewey was an advocate for experiential education, Dewey was ahead of his time (Manson-Dimmer, 1999). What the worker needed to be able to know and do in the

1920s and 1930s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was much different than the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Therefore, Manson-Dimmer (1999) highlights the learning process for students began to include schools and employers collaborating to prepare students for what they will be doing rather than delivering content for students to memorize.

Affective education facilitates learning and commitment, thus affective education allows the student to organize and internalize values in such a way that the behavior of the individual is affected (Kaplan, 1986). Manson-Dimmer (1999) adds experiential education has advantages to learning: self-directed learning; active involvement of the student; and the exposure to work values, ethics, and attitude. Experiential education is not a reform, but a philosophy. Different forms of experiential education are seen in multiple types of progressive movements and gravitates more toward a philosophy of pedagogy than a massive restructure to educational models. Unlike the rote memorization of content educational model of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, experiential education values learners producing and doing rather than consuming.

Charter schools. According to Uncommon Schools (2017), a charter school "is an independently run public school granted greater flexibility in its operations, in return for greater accountability for performance" (para. 1). In the late 1980s, privatization of schools began to gain traction as a progressive movement (Sperling, 1999). Sperling (1999) notes the charter school movement became official in 1993 when legislation was passed by Congress to encourage states to use funds to support charter schools. Charter schools provided choice to parents if parents were not satisfied with their local public school or district.

According to McGree (1995) charter school advocates' assumptions were that charter schools would do the following: cause reform by non-charter schools to increase competition; increase innovation; be held more accountable and to a higher standard than traditional schools; increase opportunities for professionalism for teachers; require little to no money to implement and sustain charter schools. At the core, charter schools are designed to create innovative public schools and reduce politics, bureaucracy, and school board interference to produce academic results (Sperling, 1999). The progressive movement of charter schools is a pragmatic approach with the focus on local, state and federal legislation to increase the effectiveness of education with elements of capitalism.

21st Century skills. At the turn of the 20th century, society dramatically changed. Pearson (2014) pointed to the U.S. Department of Labor's declaration that we live in an economy that is powered by technology, fueled by information, and driven by knowledge. Friedman (2011) argued that education is now a necessity and education is no longer a choice. In 1991, 61 percent of jobs required education beyond high school and by 2014 that number had increased to 85 percent (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory & Metiri Group, 2003; Crew, 2007). With the many attempts to reform education since the inception of education as we know our public schools today, Pearson (2014) argues that 21st century skills are essential for students to survive globally and that the practices that currently exist will not be good enough for our students.

After extensively interviewing and surveying business owners and corporate executives about what they believed to be the most important skills to have as students transition from high school to college or work, the Seven Survival Skills was published in 2008 by Wagner (Pearson, 2014). These skills are:

- critical thinking and problem solving;
- collaborating across networks and leading by influence;
- agility and adaptability;
- initiative and entrepreneurialism;
- effective oral and written communication;
- accessing and analyzing information; and
- curiosity and imagination. (Wagner, 2008)

Wagner's Seven Survival Skills disregard content as the primary focus; the focus is on what a student can do with the information that is already available. The movement to teach and evaluate skills provides a foundation of learning that can help a student be successful in a society that is rapidly changing. The Seven Survival Skills are a framework for schools and districts to use as creative problem solving is urgently underway in the present educational landscape.

#### **School Organization Models**

Practice theory. The interaction between learner and environment, is an education ideology that has evolved in education (Lippman, 2013). Lave and Wenger (1991) explained that a transactional relationship of the learning environment helps one to understand the motivations of the learner with respect to the place and time in which knowledge is acquired. For learners to develop into what society desires, Lippman (2013) argues that creating places of learning should be driven by the latest research with an aesthetically pleasing environment. Various school organization models have been implemented throughout the years to help students become successful. The various

school organization models that will be addressed are the following: traditional, small learning communities, and project-based learning.

Traditional model. Herman (1998) noted that traditional models of schools are not defined by theory but empirically due to the common characteristics of schools.

Teachers work independently in physically segregated classrooms and have the option to share their work (Goodlad, 1984; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1991). Typically, in a secondary school classroom, the teacher is responsible for teaching the curriculum for a specified amount of time before a bell rings and students move through the hallways to another class. Fullan (1991) highlighted the reality of the principal's role as frequently managing crises and working in a limited capacity as an instructional leader. In more than three-quarters of schools, teachers paid moderate to minimal attention to school goals in a case study researched by Rosenholtz (1991).

Due to the demands and tasks required by schools, a division of responsibilities is necessary (Adams, 2003). Adams (2003) elaborates on those responsibilities and divisions: teachers are specialists within a specific grade and/or subject; administrators are responsible for curriculum, discipline, facilities, and personnel. The traditional model is the antithesis for school reform that promotes collaboration among stakeholders.

Traditional models of schooling are the opposite of schools that Sizer (1989) imagined, "generalists first and specialists second" (p. 3). The elements of the traditional model in today's schools are a legacy of the 1920s "when professional administrators started implementing scientific management principles to govern schools" (Adams, 2003, p. 6).

Traditional models subtly created a value and belief system that demand students adjust to the teacher and structure of school, participate in a passive manner, and be a direction

follower rather than a problem solver. Desks, chairs, and work tables make up the basic layout of a traditional classroom similar to classrooms in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hartin & Yeager, 2011). Throughout the years, the traditional model of school works for most students, but not all.

**Small learning communities.** Small Learning Communities (SLC) originated in the mid-late 1990s in non-vocational schools to increase the effectiveness of education in large high schools (Zakrevsky, 2007). Zavrevsky (2007) notes the effectiveness of SLC was driven by making the learning more intimate for the student. Achieving the intimacy desired by schools, there are two main model's large schools favor:

- a career cluster with a thematic focus; or
- an academic cluster (Zavrevsky, 2007).

Almeida and Steinberg (2001) add that an essential component to a successful SLC is, ". . . a clear instructional and curricular focus to foster a shared understanding of and commitment to, agreed performance expectations are necessary" (p. 75). The essential component for a SLC is the desire to help students succeed. Contrary to the departmental model's characteristics that originated from Prussia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, SLCs focus on three elements to create an effective school culture. Cibulka and Nakayama (2000) highlight the three elements:

- teachers are continually improving their skills;
- an "all students are capable of succeeding" attitude is expected; and
- teachers do not work in isolation collaboration is evident.

In the mid-late 1990s, over 1700 high school students were sampled from an academy oriented SLC that follow the students through the end of their 12<sup>th</sup> grade year (Kemple &

Snipes, 2000). Kemple and Snipes (2000) reported two key findings: 1) interpersonal support to students by peers and teachers improved, and 2) there were slight increases in student achievement data but no significant increases in math and reading standardized test scores. However, high school outcomes were significantly improved among students at risk of dropping out of school (Kemple & Snipes, 2000). Kemple and Snipes (2000) indicated that dropout rates, courses completed for core subjects, and completion of credits for graduation were three, statistically significant, data points that suggested academy oriented SLCs were most effective with the highest-risk students.

Project-Based Learning. Arne Duncan, former US secretary of education under the Obama administration, exclaimed the education state in America is in a crisis (Chuck, 2013). Duncan elaborated, "Findings of a study showed that American adults fare poorly in mathematical and technical skills needed for the modern workplace compared to their counterparts in most other developed nations" (Chuck, 2013, para. 1). The sense of urgency Duncan felt was similar to the sense of urgency that politicians and leaders of the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century faced that prompted a response to educate the youth of America. One model of organizing schools was created because of that sense of urgency in recent years, Project-Based Learning (PBL). Mussman (2000) defines PBL as "a constructivist approach to learning in which a student draws upon previous knowledge, transforms boredom into excitement, and expands cognitive skills while solving real-world problems" (p. 34). Clearly, a student-centered approach is valued over a teacher-centered classroom. PBL is unlike other school organization models - PBL is flexible and can occur within any type of environmental structure.

Diffily (2002) indicates that PBL not only supports and improves achievement for students who are at-risk and may have lower abilities, but students who are gifted are more challenged by the meaningful PBL activities. Academics is not the only area that improves for students. PBL also lends itself to benefiting students in their socioemotional development (Welsh, 2006). The benefits for the project method of schooling are not a new finding; as early as 1919 this type of schooling was explored. "Habits of self-reliance and mutual helpfulness . . . have been given a kind and degree of exercise that they could never have had under [traditional circumstances]" (Hennes, 1921, p. 8). The demands of society create an environment in schools that promotes the individualities of learners. Personalizing the learning for students becomes more difficult in a traditional setting; PBL naturally lends itself to relevant tasks to which students are attracted. To make learning meaningful for students, relevant learning tasks are essential. Because of PBL instructional techniques, an increase in student motivation is a benefit that various studies have documented (Bartscher, Gould, & Nutter 1995; Curtis, 2005; Liu & Hsaio, 2002). The evolution of society and the workplace will continue to demand schools increase effectiveness; PBL in schools are starting to accumulate the evidence of the PBL effectiveness. The pressure on schools, districts, and states to increase standardized test scores contradict the aims and goals of PBL. These aims and goals of PBL are consistent with Wagner's (2008) Seven Survival Skills.

The effects of project-based learning on the self-direction and overall success of high school students. Bright (2015) examined the impact that project-based learning (PBL) had on the self-directions and overall success of high school students.

Additionally, the framework of project-based learning was explored in the study to better

prepare students for institutions of higher education or the workforce with the knowledge and skills needed beyond high school (Bright, 2015). According to Bright (2015), examining the impact PBL had on the self-direction and overall success of high school students was the primary objective. A mixed methods research design was utilized to conduct the study, specifically a quasi-experimental design. Seventy-three 11<sup>th</sup> grade U.S. History students in a public suburban high school in the Middle Tennessee area were the participants in the study.

The study examined the impact of three dependent variables: student engagement, student motivation, and student self-efficacy. In relation to student motivation and student self-efficacy, after students were taught using PBL, there was a significant difference in the students' motivation and self-efficacy. A significant difference was not found for student engagement. To conclude the study, Bright (2015) suggests, "high school teachers use PBL to improve students' academic performance by going beyond teaching content to teaching students how to learn" (p. 61).

#### **Teaching and Learning**

Effective teaching strategies within the classroom accomplish two things: improve student achievement; and are the most likely to better prepare students for the world they will encounter when they walk across the stage at graduation (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1993). Multiple variables are occurring at any given time within in a classroom: the pedagogy of the teacher, the learning style of the student, and the technology that is utilized to enhance the learning. Teachers are expected to connect and increase the learning for each student. Connecting and increasing learning becomes progressively difficult as students become more diverse in their learning style. Selecting

the appropriate method of teaching, or pedagogy, for that day, week, or unit creates another challenge for teachers; Teachers are expected to diversify their delivery. Lastly, the embedded technology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century completes the layer of complexity for teachers to set the learning stage for students in the classroom.

**Pedagogy.** In education, teachers or instructors do not teach the exact same way; the teaching strategies, or pedagogy, teachers utilize is determined by many variables. These variables include, but are limited to, the cognitive development, socio-economic status, upbringing, behavior, and learning style of each student in any given classroom at one time. The challenge becomes choosing and executing the pedagogy that is best to help all students learn. Lahue-McCully (2012) highlights teachers who choose traditional teaching strategies requires students to absorb what the teacher explained. The teacher is the expert of the knowledge and the students are expected to be quiet and listen attentively.

Progressive teaching strategies are the research-based effective practices that prepare students for what they will encounter when they graduate from high school. Progressive teaching strategies fundamentally focus on student-centered pedagogy. Progressive teaching is inclusive: collaboration and differentiation are valued over separating students by ability levels and memorizing isolated facts that will be regurgitated on a test (Zemelman et al., 1993). Access to information is endless through the internet, therefore students understanding how to access information and discern appropriately is more essential than memorizing the information (Olson, 2009). Teachers are the individuals expected to help and empower students to navigate the rough digital terrain. If we do not want students to be forgotten and lost in the traditional model of

schooling, Darling-Hammond, Trani and Irvine (2010) recommend the following: pedagogy must create an intellectually challenging environment; performance-based curricula is highly valued; and the highly competent and collaborative teacher must facilitate strong relationships with students.

Learning styles. Lahue-McCully (2012) points to a common argument to justify traditional teaching and structures for students: traditional models strengthen classroom management. Teachers who do not acknowledge their students as different learners make the classroom experience more difficult for themselves. As far back as 1976, Canter and Canter observed the common belief teachers who were disciplinarians to limit the inappropriate behavior was how a teacher created an environment of engagement. However, Pogrow (2006) asserted the classrooms that were quiet and attentive were classrooms that put the responsibility of behavior entirely on students and hid the necessary skills and management practices the teacher needed to improve. Discipline problems rarely occur when students are highly engaged (Olson, 2009; Wormeli, 2001). High student engagement is evidence of a teacher meeting the needs of their students.

In 2014, Howard-Jones shared that over 90 percent of teachers in five countries agreed that individuals learn better when they receive information tailored to their preferred learning styles. The strongly embedded belief of learning styles in education is inconsistent with the literature of the last 30 years that concludes most evidence does not support any of the learning styles theory (Dobolyi, Hughes, & Willingham, 2015). The common term known as *learning styles* implies two components: styles and abilities (Dobolyi et al., 2015). Styles and abilities could not be any more different in this context. ". . . style refers to *how* one does things, and abilities concern *how well* one does them"

(Dobolyi, et al., 2015, p. 267). The learning style theory had no empirical support after a study was conducted by Kozhenikov, Evans, and Kosslyn (2014). The research findings of Kozhenikov, Evans, and Kosslyn (2014) were consistent with findings of Pashler et al. (2009). Pashler et al. (2009) conducted a seminal meta-analysis of past studies examining learning styles and a few studies which held up to the standard of rigorous control failed to justify conventional wisdom of learning styles. A compelling example as to why educators may believe in the learning styles approach can be observed in a plausible situation between a student and a teacher. A teacher explains to a student a concept but the student struggles to understand the concept verbally; therefore, a teacher draws a diagram and the concept makes sense to the student and the teacher labels the student as a *visual learner* (Dobolyi et al., 2015). Dobolyi et al. (2015) argues in this example, many variables play a role: any student might benefit from the drawn diagram; the diagram was an effective way to teach the concept; the explanations prior to the diagram led to the learning.

The intention of educators to categorize their students to meet their needs is admirable. However, the research is simply not there to support students and their learning style. What does work in the classroom is supported by psychology; spacing learning over time and quizzing improves memory (Dunlosky, Rawson, Marsh, Nathan, & Willingham, 2013); and teachers modifying the environment in the classroom to decrease behavior issues (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010). Dunlosky et al. (2013) argue for utilizing learning techniques that fall under four categories of variables: learning conditions, student characteristics, materials, and criterion tasks. Learning techniques allow for a more fluid approach. If one student learns a concept after a

that specific concept via verbal explanation. The verbal explanation would fall under the learning technique of learning conditions. Little distinctions about students and their learning can lead to mismatches that make the struggles for students more difficult. However, one of the most amazing moments is when a teacher's delivery and a student's learning align to create achievement.

Technology. In the classroom, students learn at different paces. Teachers who utilize traditional instructional methods teach at a pace that is comfortable for them (Williams, 2009). Williams (2009) adds that technology in the classroom allows students to explore, skip material that is deemed irrelevant, and work ahead. Technology allows for students to learn at their appropriate pace. The National Center for Educational Statistics ([NCES], 2002) reported 99 percent of all K-12 students have access to a computer at school which means technology is theoretically available for students. Technology integration will not occur if teachers and students do not have technology available (Williams, 2009).

Teachers must use reliable technology to supplement their pedagogy. The U.S. Department of Education reported on reliable technology in their e-Learning report:

To realize the goal of universal access to educational technology for students and teachers, we should ensure sustained and predictable funding for technology; ensure that technology plans reflect the educational needs of students are regularly updated; improve the affordability, reliability and ease of use of educational technology; ensure that school buildings and facilities are modern; strengthen our

commitment to eliminating the digital divide; and ensure that all students have equal opportunities to access and use technology. (U.S. DOE, 2005, p. 1)

In other words, if the infrastructure for technology integration is inadequate in schools, technology will have limited to no benefits for students graduating into a 21<sup>st</sup> century society. Thus, the potential for traditional pedagogy to creep back into the classroom becomes a reality.

To battle traditional pedagogy, technology support is essential. "Technophobic teachers will quickly give up on technology use when it doesn't work after they have spent many hours learning about the software and planning technology-enhanced lessons" (Barnett, 2001, p. 5). Because the use of technology is becoming more and more prevalent in the field of education, it is essential that the infrastructure and system support are ever present and available to school districts. Without a strong system of technological support, the use of technology could become counterproductive. Teachers who have 20 to 30 students waiting to be taught can lose faith in the promises of technology if the technology is not working. Ronnkvist, Dexter, and Anderson (2000) conducted a technology study that showed 50% of teachers fall into categories of *help not available* or *sometimes available*. Some leaders in education have seen technology obstacles as opportunities for students. Levin (2004) highlights examples of how schools are taking an innovative approach by leveraging their students to provide technology support. Utilizing student support is a 21<sup>st</sup> century solution to a 21<sup>st</sup> century problem.

## Non-traditional Schools and Leadership

Non-traditional school leadership. Effectively serving all student needs in schools is a difficult mission for school leaders to accomplish. Ike (2012) highlights the essential role principals play in influencing their schools via collaboration, sharing decision making, and coaching. Additionally, Lashaway (2000) argues a principal is the main individual who champions the cause of the school while simultaneously addressing school community concerns. Unfortunately, Local Education Agency's (LEA) reported principal openings lacked qualified applicants (NASSP, 2011).

Non-traditional schools have a commonality of being different than the traditional school setting, but the similarities end there. Non-traditional schools are created, implemented, and sustained differently due to their nature of being non-traditional. Therefore, non-traditional schools need leaders with more specific skills which may limit their principal hiring pool and significantly reduce access to the already limited pool of unqualified principal applicants. Collaboration and decision-making are the two skills identified by Ike (2012) that principals perceive as the most difficult skills to acquire in a non-traditional school setting. The research on leaders leading non-traditional schools indicates stronger partnerships and communication must exist between school districts and universities that prepare the next generation of principals.

Outperforming non-traditional urban school. A study conducted by Ramirez (2017) identified organizational practices that narrowed the achievement gap and sustained success for minority students over time. The study took place at one urban high school in Los Angeles County, California. The study utilized a survey, interviews, observations, and a review of documents culminating in a qualitative research method.

The participants of the study included teachers, site administrators, counselors, and support staff. Ramirez (2017) concluded six themes emerged: student-centered mindset, open and constant communication, culture, effective professional development, college-centered mentality, and support from the administration. Specifically, administration support included consistent classroom visits, an open-door policy, and constant checkins. Additionally, administrators are visible to staff, approachable, and maintain positive and respectful relationships.

Unlearning as school reform: How principals facilitate school improvement in non-traditional Schools. Williams (2015) conducted a study that focused on the experience of PK-12 principals unlearning while successfully facilitating school improvement. The study defined unlearning as "a process through which learners discard knowledge. . .and make way for new response and mental maps" (Hedberg, 1981, p. 18). The qualitative research study conducted was an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The IPA approach was utilized to make more meaning of the participants' experiences because of the affective, emotional, and intense human experiences of the principals in the study (Merriam, 2009; Williams, 2015). The growing achievement gap between low socioeconomic Black and Hispanic students and their White counterparts through standards based accountability measures have been attempted to narrow the achievement gap (Williams, 2015). Subsequently, Nelson and Guerra (2014) argue school reform efforts have generally, fallen short of improving schools.

Five principals who successfully facilitated school improvement in their respective buildings were interviewed for the study. Unlearning was found as the primary component in school improvement and reform. Additionally, professional

development opportunities were replaced with philosophical frameworks of the initiatives the principals chose to promote and evoke learning (Williams, 2015). Williams (2015) suggests "Unlearning in education has implications for academia, practitioners and policy makers to consider unlearning as an effective approach . . ." (p. xiii).

The principal's role in increasing teacher implementation of effective instructional practices in Marion County, Indiana: An analysis of key strategies for principals in sustaining school change. Law's (2013) quantitative study sought to determine whether there was a significant difference between teachers' and principals' perceptions of the leadership actions that increase teachers' implementation of school improvement initiatives regarding five categories: school improvement, principal as instructional leader, creating a culture for learning, professional development and teacher supervision, and sustaining school improvement. (p. 81)

Additionally, Law (2013) inquired if there was a statistical difference in the five school improvement initiative categories with the perceptions of novice teachers, experienced teachers, and principals to determine if the actions of leadership increase the teachers' implementation of school improvement initiatives. The sample of study consisted of 206 teachers and 56 principals in five school districts in Marion County, Indiana (Law, 2013).

Law (2013) shares, "The results in this research illustrated that experienced teachers perceive the role of the principal as not as significant in increasing teachers' expertise and the implementation of school improvement initiatives" (p. 89). To the contrary of the perceptions of the experienced teachers, "novice teachers perceive the role of the principal as important in increasing teachers' expertise and the implementation of

school improvement initiatives" (Law, 2013, p. 90). The conclusion to Law's (2013) study is consistent with what we already know: the principalship matters. Therefore, districts wanting to improve student achievement, Law (2013) suggests "district leaders should consider the development and training of principals in leadership actions" (p. 91).

Teacher and student relationships and student outcomes. Northup (2011) conducted a study of students in three non-traditional high schools that explored the nature of their relationships with teachers and how the relationship impacts the student's academic engagement and achievement. The purpose of the study was to extend the knowledge of the nature of student and teacher relationships, student achievement, and academic engagement (Northup, 2011). The mixed methods research was utilized to conduct the study. Student perceptions of teacher-student relationships and statistical analyses of student questionnaires and teacher questionnaires were collected to gather the data to help answer the two research questions. The non-traditional schools in the study served students who were mainly minorities and/or low-income students. Many of the students enrolled in the school were unable to be successful in other high schools they attended (Northup, 2011).

Northup (2011) noted in his study that when student ratings of instrumental help (the degree to which a teacher is viewed as a resource for the student) from teachers were high, so were teacher ratings of satisfaction with students. Additionally, interviews found that lower levels of teacher satisfaction were associated with lower levels of academic engagement. Overall, there was some evidence there is a positive relationship between teacher and student relationships and student academic engagement (Northup, 2011). To conclude the mixed methods study, Northup (2011) suggests teachers effectively interact

with students who are diverse is essential to help students be successful. Regardless of a traditional or non-traditional school setting, the teacher-student relationship is an element of school that transcends all other components and intricacies.

## **Summary**

The literature review in chapter 2 highlights several key points. The first key point is state-sponsored education has evolved from the sole purpose being serving the state to serving the aspirations and ambitions of individuals in which the public will benefit. The second key point is multiple trailblazers have laid the foundation to open education to what we see today. Another key point examined the models and approaches education leaders and teachers utilize to create the K-12 educational experience for future generations. The last key point is non-traditional schools need leaders, specifically principals, who are strong and skilled individuals to navigate the unknown territories that non-traditional schools take students and teachers. The next chapter presents the method, research design, participants, data collection, researcher's role, limitation, and data analysis.

## Chapter 3

## Methods

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of educators working in a non-traditional secondary school who previously worked in a traditional secondary school. Also, differences in experiences, teaching methods, and facilities were explored between teaching in a non-traditional setting as opposed to a traditional-school setting. In addition to the study limitations, a description of the research design, the participants in the study, sampling procedures, and how the data were collected and analyzed is explained in the methodology.

# **Research Design**

A qualitative research design was chosen to explore the experiences of educators working in a non-traditional secondary school. "Qualitative research is suited to promoting a deep understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 27). Specifically, a phenomenological approach was used, as described by Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), to investigate the meaning of the lived experienced. The researcher utilized a form of responsive interviewing to collect data. Rubin and Rubin (2012) explain responsive interviewing "emphasizes the importance of building a relationship of trust between the interviewer and interviewee that leads to more give-and-take in the conversation" (p. 36).

## Setting

The non-traditional disposition of the school is described on School A's (2017) website as "focusing on the use of technology, open, modular learning spaces, efficiency and collaboration among students" (p. 1). Additionally, the building will include "a centrally-located

learning commons providing student gathering and education collaboration spaces that connect to the entire building" (School A, 2017, p. 1).

School A is a midwestern suburban public high school that opened in the fall of 2017. The building is a state-of-the-art facility that is designed for a project-based learning environment. The Buck Institute for Education (BIE), one of the leading organizations in providing professional development and implementation for project-based learning in schools across the United States of America, defines project based learning as "a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging and complex question, problem, or challenge" (para. 1). The student population in the first year of School A was approximately 850 students. Of the 850 students, only freshman, sophomores, and juniors were attending. Seniors joined School A starting the 2018-19 school year. At the time of this research, all the other building's demographic information was unavailable. However, School A makes up 1 of 5 high schools in the 29,029-student school district (State A Department of Education, 2017). Of the district student population, the demographic information is as follows: 27.87 percent of students are considered economically disadvantaged; 68.02 percent of students are white; 15.64 percent of students are Hispanic; 9.17 percent of students fall under the category of other; African-Americans make up 7.17 percent; and English Language Learners (ELL) make up 11.23 percent of the population (Kansas State Department of Education, 2017).

# **Sampling Procedures**

In qualitative research, selection of the research sample is purposeful (Patton, 2001). "The logic of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation" (Bloomberg &

Volpe, 2012, p. 104). For the current study, participants were selected by purposeful sampling. The participants selected to participate in this study had to meet the following criteria:

- 1. Be employed and work in School A.
- 2. Have prior experience working in a traditional secondary school.

All ten participants of this study were from School A. To ensure a diverse group of individuals who would provide a comprehensive picture of the school, educators in table two were invited to participate in the study:

Table 2

Participant Reference and Information

Educator	Experience in years	Position
Administrator A	25	Assistant Principal/ Activities Director
Teacher A	4	English
Teacher B	13	English and Video Production
Teacher C	8	Physical education
Teacher D	20	Social studies
Teacher E	13	English Language Learner
Teacher F	9	Physical education
Teacher G	9	Math
Teacher H	21	English
Teacher I	7	Social studies

#### **Instruments**

To better understand the complexities of the lived experience of School A participants, interviews were the primary measurement used. Lunenburg and Irby (2008) explain interviews are used for describing central themes and their meaning in the life of the participants. To triangulate the data collected during the interviews, document analysis was utilized as a secondary measurement tool (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Irby and Lunenburg (2008) explain document analysis critiques or analyzes significant, meaningful, and relevant documents related to the study.

To strengthen the response of the participants, the interview questions were validated to align with the research questions. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) explain the relevance of validating research questions: "Methodological validity involves asking how well matched the logic of the method is to the kinds of research questions that are being posed and the kind of explanation that the researcher is attempting to develop" (p. 125). The research questions were validated by four educational experts that included the following: two post-graduate instructors with over 30 years of experience in K-12 education; one K-12 district leader; and one secondary building leader. The researcher corresponded via email with the educational experts to validate the research questions.

The researcher used a responsive interviewing technique called semi-structured interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Using semi-structured interviewing, the researcher prepared 24 questions in advance with plans to ask follow-up questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The main questions were reviewed by an expert panel prior to the interviews. However, elaboration probes and continuation probes were utilized to ensure depth and clarity to the answers of the participants. Rubin and Rubin (2012) explain that continuation probes tell the

participants that the researcher is interested and that the interviewee should continue their answer. An elaboration probe, as defined by Rubin and Rubin (2012), asks for more detail or explanation of a concept or theme that the researcher has selected from what the participant has said.

Table 3

Response Interviewing Probes

Continuation Probes	Elaboration Probes	
So?	Such as?	
Then what?	Could you give me an example?	
And?	Can you tell me more about that?	
How about?	Can you say more about that?	

*Note*. Examples of the two types of recommended probes

The following factors were considered for the study conducted:

- the disposition of the school's organizational structure;
- the secondary grade levels; and
- the location of the school.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

Data for this study were collected using a qualitative research methodology. Responsive interviewing was used to collect the data. The following steps were followed to effectively collect the data:

An Internal Review Board (IRB) approval was received from Baker University on May
 15, 2018, to conduct the participant interviews;

- The staff of School A was emailed individually. The intention was to email a diverse group of personnel that represented most departments of School A. A summary of the focus of the study and the format of the study were provided to each of the desired participants. Also, confidentiality and anonymity was assured;
- The Voice Memos application on an iPhone was used to record the responses while the interviewed was conducted via FaceTime;
- The public information on School A's website provided context for the researcher when there was a chance to probe for more robust responses during the interviews. To strengthen the data from the interviews and online resources, documents were elicited from participants in the study to fulfill the purpose of triangulating the data; and
- Within weeks of the interview, the recordings were transcribed by the researcher using Rev. Notes related to important cues were listed to help with clarity and accuracy in understanding (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

## **Data Analysis and Synthesis**

Rubin and Rubin (2012) outline a seven-step process to analyze and interpret the data gathered from the interviews that was followed with additional steps and information added by the researcher. The process for the study is listed below:

- Transcribed verbatim the interviews;
- Excerpts were coded (define, find, and mark in the text) that had concepts, themes,
   events, examples, names, places, or dates that were relevant. This was done by the
   researcher;
- Excerpts marked with the same code were sorted into categories depending on the concepts and themes that derived from interpretations of the researcher;

- Categories as trends emerged within the data analysis;
- Within each coded selection, material was sorted into categories and themes and summarized;
- A complete picture was created and presented after integrating, synthesizing, and weighing the different coded responses from the interviews;
- While combining the concepts and themes to generate one's own theory to explain the
  complete picture created during the previous step, the researcher's assumptions were
  constantly tested by examining the categories and themes that resulted from the
  interview;
- To see if the results were generalized beyond the individuals in the interview, results were reviewed by the researcher.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) note the researcher must systematically code to see what ideas one might modify or how and when the researcher's ideas might be true or not true. Coding was executed twice: first, through the personal reading of the researcher and the separation of the information into various categories and themes; and secondly, through emphasis of certain interviewee responses that had not been considered initially (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Documents requested to help triangulate the data and strengthen the study were, but not limited to; website information, vision and mission statements, sample assignments, community newsletters, collaboration documents, and schedules. The content of documents was analyzed to compare interview responses to synthesize a well-rounded and robust picture to fulfill the purpose of the study.

# **Reliability and Trustworthiness**

Triangulation is crucial to qualitative research to reinforce relevant themes and to avoid misinterpreting the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Additionally, Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) note that triangulation procedures are considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning. Aforementioned documents were gathered and analyzed to supplement the interviews to fulfill the purpose of triangulating the data. In addition to triangulation, to ensure honesty from informants, each participant was given an opportunity to refuse to participate (Shenton, 2004). Given the option to refuse coupled with honesty strengthens the trustworthiness; "participants should be encouraged to be frank form the outset of each session" (Shenton, 2004, p. 4). Building the trust between the participant and researcher is strengthened when the participant feels secure their ideas and experiences discussed will not detract from their credibility through the lens of their leader or manager of the organization (Shenton, 2004).

## Researcher's Role

Creswell (2013) highlights that the researcher is a key instrument when conducting qualitative research. "Documents are examined, behavior is observed, and participants are interviewed to collect data, but questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers were not used" (Creswell, 2013, p. 45). To ensure the researcher's role was objective and effective "researchers should be aware of how their own attitudes might influence the questions they ask as well as how they react to the answers" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 72). Therefore, a conscious effort was made by the researcher to prepare for the interviews to ensure a sharp focus to be objective and listen empathetically.

The researcher's core paradigm was one derived from the interpretive constructionism within the naturalist paradigm (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

A naturalist paradigm emphasizes the importance of context, complexity, of examining situations in which many factors interact. . .interpretive constructionism argues that the core of understanding is learning what people make of the world around them, how people interpret what they encounter, and how they assign meanings and values to events or objects. (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 19)

The researcher tried to "elicit the interviewee's views of their worlds, their work, and the events they have experienced or observed" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 20). Interpretations of the data are subject to the biases and experiences of the researcher. The researcher taught social studies in an affluent suburban traditional high school for five years; worked as an instructional coach at a rural school district for one year; and currently works as a high school associate principal at a suburban traditional high school.

### Limitations

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) point to the definition of limitations in a qualitative research study by Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman, (2000) and Rossman and Rallis (2011) as conditions that may weaken the study. Since not all departments and support staff participated in the study, limiting the insight into the comprehensive experience of working in a non-traditional secondary school. Also, for various reasons, there was a possibility participants may not have been entirely truthful in the responses. Lastly, qualitive research creates an environemt for possible researcher bias.

# Summary

The study was conducted to determine the variables that derive from the experiences of educators working in a non-traditional secondary school who previously worked in a traditional secondary school. School A was chosen via purposeful sampling to ensure the participants aligned with the purpose of the research. Expert panels reviewed the interview questions and the documents analyzed provided triangulation of the study to ensure validity of the phenomenological qualitative research study.

# **Chapter 4**

# **Results**

The results of this study are described in this chapter. The purpose of the study explored the experience of educators working in a non-traditional secondary school who previously worked in a traditional secondary school. The findings related to the two research questions are separated, a description of what each finding was, key trends that emerged related to the findings, and summaries of the responses supporting each emerging trend related to the findings. The ten educators interviewed all worked in the same non-traditional secondary school; table four is a breakdown of the participants:

Table 4

Participant Reference and Information

Educator	Experience in years	Position
Administrator A	25	Assistant Principal/ Activities Director
Teacher A	4	English
Teacher B	13	English and Video Production
Teacher C	8	Physical education
Teacher D	20	Social studies
Teacher E	13	English Language Learner
Teacher F	9	Physical education
Teacher G	9	Math
Teacher H	21	English
Teacher I	7	Social studies

Four themes emerged from participant responses: two themes from each research question, respectively. For district, local, and state leaders considering creating non-traditional secondary schools, the following themes emerged:

- Collegiality and Leadership
- Unexpected Challenges
- Similarities (with a traditional secondary school)
- Pedagogy Philosophy

The four themes emerged and the sub-categories created under each theme are represented in Figure 1:

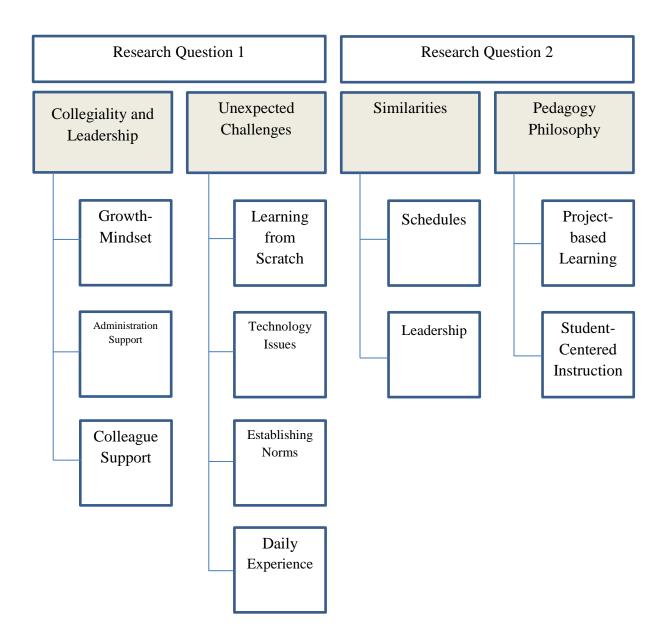


Figure 1. An overview of the themes and sub-categories provided in this chapter.

# Research Question 1: What were the experiences of educators in a non-traditional secondary school?

# Theme 1: Collegiality and Leadership

In exploring the experiences of educators, participants were asked what their likes and benefits were in working in a non-traditional secondary school. Seven of the 10 participants

responses focused on the types of educators in School A and their relationships with colleagues and building administration.

Growth Mindset. Dweck (2006) defines growth mindset as, "the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts, your strategies, and help from others" (p. 3). Four participants shared the willingness of their co-workers to improve their skills by being open-minded to new strategies and best practices. Teacher I highlighted the growth mindset by sharing School A "hire[s] people. . .willing to try new things and kind of be willing to fail at some things . . .I like that we have people trying new things and trying to push the envelope a little bit." Teacher G shared "[School A] kind of pushes me to try new things."

Teacher B appreciates the expectation to do things differently and believes the needs of students are met due to the openness of the staff to doing things differently. Teacher D adds "[School A is] special in a sense that you don't have a lot of old school teachers that are not willing to think outside the box or challenge themselves to try something new."

Administration support. Four participants discussed the support the administration provided. Teacher C shared, "Our administration is awesome. They're very supportive." Teacher E conveyed the leadership they appreciated by building administrators "I feel supported by my administration in taking risks. . . I feel like my voice is heard." Teacher H shared that a benefit of working in the building was "The outstanding admin[istration]." Teacher D highlighted the administration is not afraid of risk which promotes risk-taking amongst the other teachers.

**Colleague support.** The experience of being supported by their colleagues was shared by four participants. Teacher D shared "You're around the same type of people . . . they understand the instructional practices that you do because they do them too . . . the teachers are all extremely

positive people." Teacher G highlighted the type of staff that were recruited to the non-traditional secondary school, "If you were going to come to [School A] as a teacher, you had to be willing to kind of go with the flow in terms of learning a new way and being open to things . . . and I think because of that, it [is] a pretty special staff that came together." Administrator A illustrated this with the following response, "The thing I like most is we have a really, really good staff. . . They're risk takers." Another way colleagues support each other at School A is through social media. Teacher A shared "Most of the staff have Twitter accounts and we're constantly tweeting pictures, here's what we're doing in our class and we're always celebrating and building each other up."

**Overview.** Future leaders should consider the type of an educator's disposition: collaborative, growth-mindset, and failing forward. Each non-traditional secondary school is different and there is not a blue-print to duplicate, therefore fostering relationships amongst staff will be key to thriving.

# **Theme 2: Unexpected Challenges**

The next experience emerging from participants was the first-year challenges of opening a new school when answering questions about the drawbacks of School A. Six of the 10 participants keyed in on the unexpected challenges inherent to opening a new school. Some supporting evidence presented in the chapter are also from documents collected and analyzed.

**Learning from scratch.** Specifically, four participants shared the element of being a brand new school played a role in unexpected challenges. Teacher I addressed drawbacks of School A, "Everything's new. . . there isn't really that guy that's been teaching for 20 years or that lady that's been teaching 20 years that I can go to and say, 'All right, how can I do this?'." In a blog post, one educator shared,

Turns out, opening a brand new high school, adapting to no classrooms and flexible seating, rolling out devices for the first time in the district's history AND establishing positive school culture is a lot of work (I'm exhausted from reading that sentence). (Teacher A, 2018)

Teacher G touched on the reality of School A not assigning teachers to classrooms and having to adjust to a new daily experience, "We have these airport roller bag suitcases that we have to lug around with us that basically carry everything that we'll need for that day." Teacher G added the teachers have to be deliberate and conscientious enough with what is in their bag, so they can address most scenarios, something they did not have to do before. Learning how to manage students during instructional time when the learning spaces are flexible was a drawback for Teacher H, "Trying to up my game to engage my students more than anything else going on past the glass wall or in the open hallway."

Technology issues. Obstacles were created by problems with technology according to three participants. Teacher B addressed the drawbacks of experiences in School A, "So I think a lot of us felt-like first year teachers. . . the technology was new, it didn't work well all the time. . . so all the newness." "Probably our biggest challenge this year was technology in terms of the Wi-Fi service" Teacher F shared, and elaborated on the Apple TV's not working in the flexible learning spaces and each student's inability to operate their individually issued MacBook.

Teacher G addressed the reality of School A being the district's first school to implement a one-to-one initiative on top of being a non-traditional school, "working through all the Wi-Fi issues that come along with putting 1000 plus devices onto the same Wi-Fi connection."

**Establishing norms.** Routines, traditions, culture, and consistent expectations had to be established in School A. Teacher C shared a challenge about the non-traditional secondary

school, "It's challenging to establish traditions, routines, all those sort of things that come with a new school that weren't already in place." Teacher F illustrated the challenges of consistency with building procedures and protocols, "My tardy was different than someone else's tardy description, and then so you had to come together." Administrator A identified the lack of tradition and culture School A has yet to establish being a brand-new school. School A began their first year with only freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. Administrator A noted, "Our school was just so young that we didn't have older kids to really lead the way you want in a really thriving high school." Knowing how to utilize the flexible learning spaces efficiently and effectively was difficult for Teacher H, "We have to schedule our rooms a month out, and that's not me as a planner." Another teacher shared, "... everything was a first. Trying to figure out like, 'How are we going to address things as they're coming up?'."

**Daily experience.** The daily experience of educators presented in School A created unexpected challenges.

You're moving classrooms every period, depending upon what lesson you teach. At [former school], I would go in, and I would sit in my classroom, and I'd get ready for the day, and I'd have all my stuff there. [At School A], I have to think about, 'Alright, what am I doing first hour? I'm off second hour, but what am I doing third hour? What do I need to get ready? What do I need to prep, and where am I going to be?' So there is a lot more planning Teacher I shared.

Another teacher shared a big difference from their previous school to School A,

The structure of the building, having open classrooms and those sort of things, you get out to just walk to the office and those sort of things, and you can visibly see teachers and say hello . . .there's just more interaction in general.

Teacher D is candid about the experience,

It was very hectic, I'm not going to lie. . . I don't know how much longer I can keep up the pace. . . I'm back and forth, so I schedule my sophomore classes in the sophomore community. And then I have to run down to the freshmen community to go to that class. And then go back down to sophomore, and they're every other one.

As teachers are constantly moving throughout the building, Administrator A added, "We opened, this is a brand-new high school. The first year, a lot of [the daily experience] was just about building protocols, trying to build culture, trying to build a climate". Teacher H had many questions to answer to prepare for the daily experience at School A,

Oh my gosh, how are we going to do this? How are we going to move rooms all the time? How will I get my supplies? How will I use my MacBooks? And then you introduce 400 freshmen to that, and yeah, it got exciting quick.

**Overview.** Future leaders should consider the possible challenges that may arise when establishing a non-traditional secondary school. Once challenges arise, a process should be in place to address the issue. Staff should be trained on best practices to address the inevitable challenges. The experiences of participants in School A were highlighted by the collegiality and leadership within the building.

Research Question 2. How was working in a non-traditional school different than working in a traditional secondary school?

#### Theme 1: Similarities

Exploring the differences between a non-traditional secondary school and a traditional secondary school resulted in a few similarities. Eight of the 10 participant responses drew on the similarities between School A and their previous school.

Schedules. Schedules were similar to the previous schools of where participants worked prior to School A. When asked to explain their daily schedule at their previous school, participant responses were similar to Teacher H, "[The previous school] the same thing. All [high schools in the district] run on the exact same schedule. So it's Monday, Tuesday, Friday is a seven hour day, or seven classes day. And Wednesday, Thursday are block." To clarify, block days include odd hours on Wednesday and even hours on Thursday. When asked to be more specific about the schedule and collaboration, "Right now we have built in PLC time in the mornings on Thursdays within our content area." The Professional Learning Communities (PLC) is the formal collaboration time the school district created for teachers at the secondary level.

Leadership. Participants were asked what they liked about their previous school and the school they work in currently, School A, leading to the last emerging category; similar expectations of their school administration, regardless of the type of secondary school. Teacher H answered one of the two things they liked most about School A was "the support I receive from my colleagues and administration." Teacher G shared more specifically, "I think our administration is the perfect blend of pushing us into things that are outside of our comfort zones." Teacher F highlighted how amazing their principal and athletic director were at their previous school, "[I wanted to] make those guys proud and do a job that they would like." Teacher F continued when responding about School A, "I have been blown away by the administrators, how hard they work." Teacher E added, "I feel like my voice is heard, and I'm supported by my administration, so that's huge." Teacher D shared the same sentiment as Teacher F did of their previous school of the leadership in School A, "The administration is very supportive of you trying new things." "We have one of the best administrative teams I've

probably ever seen" shared Teacher B when asked about the benefits of working at School A. When Teacher B was asked about what they liked at their previous school, they spoke of leadership: "[They were] passionate about the students and the staff. [They were] wonderful. . . [they] had extremely high expectations" (personal communication, May 15, 2018). Teacher C added to the emphasis of leadership when asked about what they liked and the benefits of School A and their previous school, "Our administration is awesome [at School A]" and "I really liked our administration at the other school."

Overview. The similarities between School A and the previous traditional secondary schools participants worked in prior showed future leaders not everything has to be different. For future leaders in a district with more than one secondary school, the schedule does not have to be radically changed and can stay the same as other traditional secondary schools. Also, leadership is crucial to the culture and success of a building regardless of being non-traditional or traditional. Therefore, future leaders must choose the right building leaders to lead a non-traditional school.

# Theme 2: Pedagogy Philosophy

Participants were asked to describe their teaching methods at School A and 8 of the 10 participant responses resulted in similar pedagogy philosophy at School A and their previous school.

**Project based learning.** Administrator A highlighted the one-to-one technology environment students are in, "[School A] really dove pretty deep into project-based learning. In most classes, they're much more student-centered." Describing their teaching methods as fairly project-based, Teacher E shared, "I believe in authentic assessments. I really work hard at giving kids individualized learning opportunities based on their interests and abilities." Teacher D

assigns rigorous and relevant projects promoting students to utilize 21<sup>st</sup> century skills [see Appendix C]. Teacher B shared the transition from a traditional secondary school to the non-traditional secondary school was easy "because I already engaged in a lot of activities that we are looking to get going, like project-based learning, working on the soft skills." Teacher D was fortunate to get trained in project-based learning before the school year began, consistent with the mindset of teachers in the secondary non-traditional school. Teacher D described project-based learning in their classroom, "Spatially I think it's a different type of learning. Where they're doing kinesthetic stuff where they're actually putting their hands and feeling what is a rift and what is a basin, and a plateau" Teacher B described their project-based learning environment.

I am fairly project-based. I believe in authentic assessments. I really work hard at giving kids individualized learning opportunities based on their interests and abilities. I do very little direct-instruction. I really encourage students to find answers for themselves and really just support them in finding them. (Teacher B, 2018)

Teacher F shares an example of how they utilize project-based learning, "In Health [class] we actually had the kids make a meal from a standpoint of, make it as unhealthy as possible and find ways that you can make it as healthy as possible" (personal communication, July 2, 2018).

Student-centered instruction. Participants discussed their student-centered instructional approach to be effective. Teacher A excitedly shared their students are reading more books due to the element of choice in the classroom; "Reading instruction is really what changed moving to [School A], giving kids more choice and time in class." Teacher H lectures very little and establishes an environment where students are in groups to collaborate on ideas and interact with each other more than the students interact with their teacher. Teacher I described their teaching

methods as student-centered. "I've gotten more comfortable with kind of letting them control [student learning] a little bit." Teacher D explains the setup of School A fosters an environment where students can work at an individual pace. "Rarely would you see teachers just up in front of a class for 50 minutes teaching. . .you'd see a lot more student-centered classrooms." In the classroom, Teacher G focuses on student collaboration. Teacher G creates a student-centered classroom by fostering an environment where students have to talk to each other daily.

**Overview.** In a building substantially different than other buildings in the same school district, future leaders need to ensure an expectation is set on the pedagogy philosophy. The pedagogy philosophy should be one that fits the environment and facility and the teacher has the skill to execute. Future leaders should not hire teachers with traditional teaching methods in a non-traditional secondary school. Lastly, professional development should be well-funded to provide the training for teachers in a non-traditional secondary school as their options may be limited compared to their traditional teacher counterparts.

# **Summary**

Ten educators from School A were interviewed for this qualitative study. The data collected and analyzed from the interviews produced insights for future leaders to consider should they create and establish a non-traditional secondary school. The four themes that emerged from the data analysis were explained in this chapter. Interview participants shared more about the collegiality and leadership rather then the innovative architecture and engineering of the building. Unexpected challenges were revealed in which educators did not anticipate. However, according to the participants, some challenges could have been avoided. Similarities were highlighted between the traditional secondary schools the participants worked at prior to School A. Lastly, participants unknowingly revealed they all have similar pedagogical

philosophies when preparing to educate the countries future. The next chapter recommends further research, makes connections from this research study to relevant literature, and discusses the implications of the research results.

## Chapter 5

# **Interpretation and Recommendations**

The goal of the study was to explore the experiences of educators working in a non-traditional secondary school. Also, differences of working in a non-traditional secondary school as opposed to a traditional secondary school were explored. A qualitative approach was utilized and ten individual interviews from School A were conducted. The initial section of chapter 5 is the summary of the study, followed by the review of the problem, purpose statement and research questions, methodology, with the summary of major findings, and lastly includes suggestions for further research.

# **Study Summary**

This section provides a summary of the research conducted for this study. The summary contains an overview of the problem regarding the limited knowledge of first-year experiences of educators working in a non-traditional school. Following this section, the purpose of study and the research questions are stated. The summary section concludes with the overview of the methodology and major findings of the study.

Overview of the problem. School districts in the USA need to provide an environment for students where teachers are guided to create innovate lesson designs that require students to produce evidence of mastering essential 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. A non-traditional approach to education remains an outlier in the country and the research of the experiences of non-traditional secondary school educators is exposing the students being let down by the public education system. The 21<sup>st</sup> century society and the current educational system is misaligned; district leaders and building leaders need to know what to expect for teachers teaching in a non-traditional school in their first year.

Purpose statement and research questions. Exploring the experiences of educators working in a non-traditional secondary school was the purpose of the study. Additionally, differences were explored between working in a non-traditional secondary school and working in a traditional secondary school. The two research questions guiding the study were, "What were the experiences of educator's in a non-traditional secondary school?" and "How was working in a non-traditional secondary school?"

For each of the research questions, twelve specific questions were asked to the participants of the study during the interview.

Review of the methodology. The research was qualitative, specifically, a phenomenological approach was the research design of the study. The researcher's approach allowed for the participants lived experience to come alive and be investigated. To ensure clarity and depth, continuation and elaboration probes were used by the researcher during the individual interviews. The research participants met the following criteria: be employed and work in School A, and have prior experience working in a traditional secondary school. Nine participants were teachers and one participant was an administrator; the participants were purposefully sampled. Additional data gathered by the researcher included documents published on School A's website: the disposition of the physical building, the organization of human resources, mission and vision statement, and celebrations revealing the beliefs and values of School A. Also, educator documents were shared with the researcher to strengthen the qualitative study.

**Major findings.** Four major themes were discovered in the study. Within each theme, multiple categories emerged. Collegiality and leadership and unexpected challenges were the first and second major theme related to the first research question regarding the experiences of

educator's working in School A after working in a traditional secondary school. Educator's having a growth-mindset, administrator support, and colleague support are the categories emerged from the first theme. The unexpected challenges of opening a brand-new school was the second theme to emerge from the first research question. No participant, nor colleagues of the participants, had worked in a non-traditional secondary school before. Additionally, School A was in its first year of existence presenting many challenges inherited by the birth of a new school. Learning from scratch, technology issues, establishing norms, and daily experience were the categories emerging from the unexpected challenges. A teaching community and culture was established with like-minds in teaching and learning.

The two themes emerging from the second research question were similarities between School A and the educator's previous traditional school and the pedagogy philosophy. Of the similarities, two categories were discovered: schedules and leadership. Regardless of the type of building, what educators like and benefit from in their building is the leadership, or lack thereof. The schedules experienced by the participants was not substantially different than their traditional school counterparts. Project-based learning (PBL) and student-centered instruction were the categories emerging from the pedagogy and philosophy theme. Participants shared their philosophy of their approach to lesson plan designing and how participants delivered the lessons. The research clearly showed School A hired teachers with a certain skill set and philosophy, resulting in teachers in School A not being new to the progressive and innovative approaches to teaching.

## **Findings Related to the Literature**

Non-traditional schools have one similarity: non-traditional schools are different than traditional schools. Each non-traditional school will inherent and adopt the values, culture, beliefs, and vision of their local community. Relating the findings of the study connect to the human element of non-traditional schools. Ramirez (2017) discovered six themes that helped narrow the achievement gap and sustain success for minority groups. Of those six themes, two of those themes were consistent with emerging trends in this study: student-centered mindset and support from the administration. These two trends do not require a new building with new resources. Administrative support and a student-centered mindset are within the circle of influence for educators and building leaders.

In a study conducted by Northup (2011), three non-traditional high schools explored the relationship of teachers and students and the impact those relationships had on academic engagement and achievement. The study highlighted evidence suggesting a positive relationship between teacher and student relationships and student academic engagement (Northup, 2011). In other words, if students are comfortable with their teacher then students are more likely to engage and learn. Similar teaching philosophy was an emerging trend in this study. What may be outliers in a traditional school setting, is the expected in School A. The teaching methods present in School A is student-centered pedagogy, emphasizing the learner. Therefore, relationships between students and teachers is essential, transcending a traditional or non-traditional secondary school model.

School A's non-traditional approach to learning incorporates PBL to better prepare students for their future. Bright (2015) studied the impact PBL had on the self-direction and the overall success of high school students. Self-efficacy and student motivation results were

statistically significant for students learning in an environment incorporating PBL (Bright, 2015). School A's attempt to meet the needs of all students begins with supportive administration encouraging teachers to take risks in their teaching, similar to Bright's (2011) study. Additionally, Cibulka and Nakayama (2000) illustrate one of three elements that create an effective school culture – teachers are continually improving their skills. One-way teachers improve their skills are to take-risks.

In 2013, Law conducted a study in which the findings parallel with findings in this research study. The perception of experienced teachers and novice teachers did not align when determining if the principal increases the teachers' expertise and the implementation of school improvement initiatives (Law, 2013). In this study, novice teachers were not interviewed. All teachers interviewed in this study were experienced but experiencing teaching in a non-traditional school for the first time. Therefore, the researcher could determine the teachers interviewed were novice. The relation to novice teaching is important because of the high remarks School A teachers gave their building leadership. As teachers in School A strive to meet the needs of all students, the primary finding emerging in the research was the trust and confidence in the leadership of School A, inferring teachers believe the principal increases the teachers' expertise and the school improvement initiatives will be implemented effectively.

To meet the needs of all students nation-wide, districts looking to establish non-traditional secondary schools will need effective leadership. In 2011, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) reported principal openings lacked qualified applicants. Non-traditional secondary schools organized physically and organizationally differently than traditional secondary schools will not be enough to meet the needs of all students. Leadership is the key and Ike (2012) identifies the two skills principals will need to

sustain student success: collaboration and decision-making. These two skills were perceived amongst principals as the most difficult of skills to acquire in a non-traditional secondary school (Ike, 2012). Leadership was the primary finding in what educators liked or benefited from in their initial year at a non-traditional secondary school suggesting districts place qualified leaders to help a non-traditional secondary school flourish.

#### **Conclusions**

Ever since Horace Mann introduced the Prussian state-sponsored education model to the USA in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the effectiveness of state-sponsored education for all students remains elusive. Humanizing the primary and secondary schooling by individualizing the experience has existed since John Dewey in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately, students are still dropping out of school every day, not prepared for their future. This study glances into a school district's attempt to create an environment and culture that meets the needs of all students through the lens of educators. School A will only be as effective as the educators; therefore, the explored experiences revealed information relevant for current and future building and district leaders to consider when creating and establishing a non-traditional secondary school.

Implications for action. The findings and trends from the study suggests district, state and national leaders consider a few elements if they are to create non-traditional secondary schools to meet the needs of all students. A plan needs to be in place for teachers who have never taught in a non-traditional secondary school. Teachers teaching in a non-traditional secondary school for the first time ever will be presented with first-time situations in which they will not know how to respond. Therefore, training and resources need to be provided to connect teachers to support them in being effective. Educator collegiality was a trend emerging in the study, suggesting leaders ensure a clear criterion is established to hire collaborative educators.

Many unknowns occur throughout the initial school year and collegiality is essential for educators to meet the needs of all learners. School A's schedule and teacher collaboration time did not differ from the other high schools in the same district. The results from the study suggest this did not impact the function of the school or the performance of the educators. Therefore, in a large school district with multiple high schools, district leaders should keep schedules consistent in all secondary schools.

The study suggests the physical environment and building-wide pedagogy establishes the building as non-traditional. School A's teachers do not have their own classroom because the rooms in the building are designed for different type of learning experiences. Additionally, this requires educators to design their lessons that are different than the typical classroom (i.e. students sit in row, teacher lectures, paper and pencil tasks, etc.). Lastly, the research conducted suggests leadership is the primary focus of educators, regardless of the building being traditional or non-traditional. Educators reiterated their desire to feel supported in taking risks and having building leaders who instill structure and high expectations for all students and all staff. Future leaders in positions to create and establish non-traditional secondary schools are recommended to identify leaders that will outshine the new building. What educators like or benefit from the most is the leadership, not the environment, the study suggests.

Recommendations for future research. Future research for this topic can be expanded in a variety of ways: interview more educators, add a quantitative component, incorporate students into the research, and research the perspective of building and district leaders who work closely with School A or a non-traditional secondary school. Interviewing more educators would allow the research to illustrate a more accurate depiction of the experiences occurring in School A. Also, the differences and similarities between traditional secondary schools and non-

traditional secondary schools could be more distinguished. Adding a quantitative component to the research would enrich the data to tease out inconsistencies between interviews and surveys. Surveys would provide Likert scale results to guide leadership on future decision making. Next, incorporating students into the research would be important to gain insight into their experience at a non-traditional secondary school. Lastly, utilizing a quantitative method, a qualitative method, or a mixed method, researching the perspectives and experiences of leaders in a non-traditional secondary school and/or researching the perspective and experience of district level leaders who created and established the non-traditional school. The purpose of those participants would provide suggestions and recommendations for future leaders interested in establishing and creating a non-traditional secondary school in their district.

Concluding remarks. In the USA, the number of students dropping out every day is unacceptable, indicating the traditional model of schooling the USA has had for a century is not working for all students. All students deserve an education and future that helps them thrive – some students need more than the traditional model of schooling. The data compiled from ten responsive interviews conducted amongst educators in one, midwestern county, non-traditional secondary school led the researcher to suggest building leadership is one element that is essential to empower educators to teach students the necessary 21<sup>st</sup> century skills to be successful beyond high school.

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# Appendices

# **Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter**

## Baker University Institutional Review Board

May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Dear John Johnson and Harold Frye,

The Baker University IRB has reviewed your project application and approved this project under Expedited Status Review. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

#### Please be aware of the following:

- 1. Any significant change in the research protocol as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
- 2. Notify the IRB about any new investigators not named in original application.
- 3. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents of the research activity.
- 4. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.
- 5. If the results of the research are used to prepare papers for publication or oral presentation at professional conferences, manuscripts or abstracts are requested for IRB as part of the project record.

Please inform this Committee or myself when this project is terminated or completed. As noted above, you must also provide IRB with an annual status report and receive approval for maintaining your status. If you have any questions, please contact me at npoell@bakeru.edu or 785.594.4582.

Sincerely,

Nathan Poell, MA

Nathan D. Par

Chair, Baker University IRB

Baker University IRB Committee Scott Crenshaw Jamin Perry, PhD Susan Rogers, PhD Joe Watson, PhD

# **Appendix B: School District Approval**

November 10, 2017

Dear Jack: I am pleased to inform you that your request to do research in the has been approved. Thank you for your Letter of Support from Baker University and Dr. Frye. In any of your work, please do not make any reference to any individual teachers, the School District or High School- please reference as a "large suburban district in the mid-west" or a "suburban high school in the state of Kansas" - or some other reference name of your choice, but do not use the name or any school names. Additionally, please work through me to secure the teachers you wish to interview for your research. has the great challenge of not only learning to teach in an alternative way, but of opening a large high school that is required to reach all of the same standards as the other high schools...in year 1. If you email me, I will help you secure some teachers. When your research if completed, we would love to see your results. Good luck with your research!

Sincerely,

Rich Wilson

Director of Assessment and Research

REWISON

rwilsonirc@

# Appendix C: PBL Assignment

# Change Starts With You!

NAME:

## **Driving Question:**

How can we advocate for social change in the community?

## Social Movement Unit / PBL Standards:

G1/G2: Compares and contrasts the various types of collective behavior and describes the group dynamics.

Social Movement PBL

G3: Discusses the theories that have been developed to explain social movements.

G4: Compares and contrasts the various types of social movements.

## **Project Task:**

Students will advocate for a social movement of their choice by creating a product that propels that movement forward in our community. Students will learn what it takes to begin social change, identify a need, research a movement and take action by creating a product. You will be creating a blog, a Google Slides presentation and a product of sorts. You will have a person in charge of communications who will be proofreading and checking the format of the blog. Communications will also contact outside agencies, draft emails and invite guests to the presentation. Students may work in groups of up to four students, no more.

## **Project Timeline:**

Students will begin their project research in class on **Monday, October 1st**. Final projects presentations will be on **Monday November 19th**. Students will have one class period/week to work in class on their projects. Every block day will be PBL work time.

## **Project Requirements:**

## **Class Requirements:**

- Idea Pitch Your group will pitch their concept idea to the class on Wednesday October 3rd / Thursday October 4th during class. Your group will only have 60 seconds to explain your concept idea to the class.
- **Gallery Walk and Class Feedback** You will participate in a gallery walk to provide both positive comments and appropriate constructive criticism. The gallery walk will be on **Monday October 8th**. You will be provided butcher paper for the gallery walk and will be expected to read other's project ideas and provide appropriate feedback.
- Individual and Group Weekly Reflections & Conferences You will be required to submit a self-reflection of your weekly progress as an individual via Weekly Reflection form on Google Classroom. You will also write weekly goals and reflect as a group. As a part of your group's weekly goal, you will conference every week with Mrs. Fishburn to help monitor your progress & guide your work.
- **Interview** You will be required to conduct two interviews for the purpose of identifying a need, conducting research and validating your project. Interview questions will be written by the person in charge of communications with the help of the group.

- **Invitations/Correspondence** You should invite two people to your presentation. The person in charge of communications should communication the details of the date and time of your presentation.
- **Peer Review Feedback** You will participate in peer reviews in class to gain feedback and suggestions for the final presentation. You will present your project to a peer on **Tuesday Nov. 13th.**

#### **Project Requirements:**

- Research Your project MUST contain research to validate your findings & product. This research will be collected throughout the project, documented in your blog and presented in your final presentation. You must have a minimum of FIVE sources (if you are working alone or with one other person) which are listed on a Works Cited Page. If you are working with a group of three or four, each person must have two different sources for a minimum of SIX to EIGHT sources.
- **Blog** Throughout your project you will be required to create & update a blog about your project. You must have 3 blog posts by the end of the project not all of which are entered on the same day or span of a week. Your blog posts should be entered as a reflection and chronicle of work completed. Not all blog entries must be entirely writing as some may also include charts, pictures, data, etc. Your blog address is DUE on **Friday October 5th** during class via Google Classroom submission. Your final blog post is DUE on **Tuesday November 20th.** Your blog should be written by the blogger and proofread by the person in charge of communications.
- Project Presentation Your project will be presented to the class during final
  presentations which will begin on Monday November 19th. For your presentation, you
  will create a Google Slides Presentation showcasing your research and project.
  Students are encouraged to dress in nice clothes for the final presentation. You should
  expect outside guests for your presentation. Your project MUST BE proofread by
  someone in the writing center before its submission. This should be done by the person
  in charge of the Google Slides AND Communications.
- Project Visual Aide (Google Slides Presentation) You will compose and share
  a Google Slides presentation during the final presentation. Your slide show should
  contain your research and background of your chosen project. You will also need to
  show what the "need" is for your social movement and why you created your
  product. Your Google Slides presentation is DUE Monday November 19th.

**Project Product (Prototype) -** You will construct a prototype of your product to be shown and displayed during final presentations. Much time and consideration to effort to this should be given. Do not make something just because it is "cool," but be sure to be able to justify a need. Potential for 3D print. Your product is DUE **Monday November 19th**.

# **Appendix D: Interview Questions**

#### **Interview Questions**

RQ1. What are the experiences of education personnel in a non-traditional school setting?

- 1. How long have you been teaching at the secondary level?
- 2. What subject or subjects do you teach?
- 3. How else do you get involved in your profession? Could you give an example of what you shared?
- 4. After one year, what do you like about teaching in your current school? Could you tell me more?
- 5. After one year, what do you dislike about teaching in your current school? Could you tell me more?
- 6. How do you collaborate with your colleagues at your current school? Could you give an example?
- 7. What was, in your first year, the daily teacher experience at your current school?
- 8. What was the daily teacher experience at your previous school?
- 9. What are the benefits of working at your current school?
- 10. What are the drawbacks of working at your current school?
- 11. What were the benefits of working at your previous school?
- 12. What were the drawbacks of working at your previous school?

RQ2. How is working in a non-traditional school setting different than working in a traditional school setting?

- 1. What did the passing periods look like for your previous school?
- 2. What do the passing periods look like for your current school? Could you give me an example?
- 3. Describe the daily schedule at your previous school?
- 4. Describe the daily schedule at your current school? Could you give an example?
- 5. Describe your teaching methods in your previous school?
- 6. Describe your teaching methods in your current school?

- 7. Describe the physical structure of the building in your previous school? Please address classrooms, hallways, outdoor campus, offices, and anything else you may find relevant.
- 8. Describe the physical structure of the building in your current school? Please address classrooms, hallways, outdoor campus, offices, and anything else you may find relevant.
- 9. What is one or two things you like most about working in your current school?
- 10. What is one or two things you dislike most about working in your current school?
- 11. What was one or two things you liked most about working in your previous school?
- 12. What was one or two things you disliked most about working in your previous school?

# **Appendix E: Consent to Participate Form**

#### **Consent to Participate**

**Research Title:** An Exploration of Education Personnel Transitioning from a Traditional Secondary School to a Non-Traditional Secondary School

Researcher: John "Jack" Johnson

**Advisor:** Dr. Harold Frye

School of Education Baker University 8001 College Blvd.

Overland Park, KS 66210

(913) 344-1220 <u>hfrye@bakeru.edu</u>

My name is Jack Johnson and I am a doctoral student at Baker University in Kansas. I am conducting research on the experiences of education personnel in the first year working at a non-traditional secondary school.

You will be asked to answer approximately 25-30 questions exploring your experience working in a non-traditional secondary school. You may decline to answer any question at any time. Moreover, you may discontinue your participation at any time for any reason.

All personally identifiable information will be kept confidential. Interview transcripts will be password protected and only the research advisor and analyst will have access to the raw data.

#### **Consent to Participate:**

I understand that my participation in this research study is completely voluntary. I also understand that I can discontinue my participation within this study at any time for any reason. I understand that the principal investigator can be contacted at jackjohnson@smsd.org should I have questions or wish to discontinue my participation. I have read and understand the above statement. By signing, I agree to participate in the research study. The Baker University Institutional Review Board approved this study on May 14, 2018, unless renewal is obtained by the review board

the review board.	
Participant Signature:	Date: