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Perceptions Of the Impact Of Project-Based Learning Within An Urban Alternative Education Center

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PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF PROJECT-BASED
LEARNING WI1HIN AN URBAN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION
CENTER

BY

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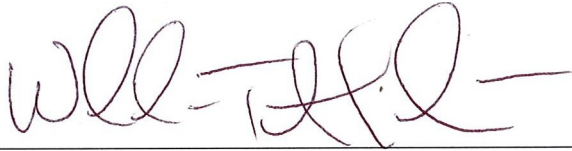
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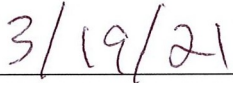
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PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

WITHIN AN URBAN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION CENTER

BY

WILLIAM TRENT HAMLIN

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

Eastern Kentucky University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my amazing family for the support and guidance throughout this process. My wife, Amy Chappell Hamlin, is a life-long educator who always believed in me and encouraged me to achieve more than I ever thought possible. My daughter, Katherine Chappell Hamlin, is the single greatest achievement of my life, and my faith in humankind is reaffirmed through the observations of her daily interactions with those she loves. Lastly, I want to dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my best friend, Matthew Clyde Jones. Though he was taken from us far too soon, my memories of him motivated me to continue pushing forward in pursuit of this seemingly impossible goal. I miss you every day, Jonesy; thank you for continuing to push me forward.

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I am blessed to have lived a life filled with excellent educators who helped to inspire me in continuing my education further than I ever thought I would (or could). I must first thank my wife, a career teacher, for the inspiration and support to complete this dissertation. Her dedication toward educating children is immeasurable and she serves as a role-model for who I want to be as an educator for my students.

My in-laws, Hazel and the late Dr. Guy Lee Monty Chappell, served as role models throughout my adult life of what it means to dedicate one's life to serving students, and their dedication served as an inspiration for my pursuing a doctorate in the first place.

The greatest teacher I ever had the honor of learning under was Dr. Hal Blythe, my Creative Writing professor at Eastern Kentucky University. He told me a seemingly simple phrase that has served as my mantra ever since: "writers write." Simple, yes, but very much true. Writers do write, and it is through this process that one hones their craft and becomes more skilled, confident, and successful. Thank you, Dr. Blythe, for inspiring me to become a teacher and for dedicating my life to helping young writers find their voice.

Finally, I must thank my parents, Rod and Dorothy Strickland, for their upbringing and never-ending belief in me throughout my entire life. My home was one filled with love and the blessings of a comfortable life, and for that I am eternally grateful.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of success regarding project-based learning implementation into classes in an urban Alternative Education Center. Specifically, how do current teachers describe project-based learning instruction within their classrooms at an urban alternative education center?

My perspective was influenced by my own wondering if project-based learning was the best model of instruction for alternative school students. The decision to pursue this topic is based upon my experience working in alternative education and witnessing concerted efforts to implement PBL into my daily practices.

I chose a grade 7-12 alternative education center located in Kentucky and data was collected through one-on-one interviews with school faculty, staff, and leadership. Classroom observations were employed, field notes were taken, and anecdotal evidence was collected and included in the findings of my study. Data was collected from school documentation such as the school website, the state's school report card, employee and student handbooks, and weekly email communication.

The findings of my study present three themes impacting the perception of success in implementing project-based learning: 1) the impact of teacher's past experience on their ongoing self-evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses; 2) the role confidence (or lack thereof) plays in the participants ability to maneuver through new instructional models; 3) the importance of school environment when designing a school-wide teaching methodology. These themes work hand-in-hand to influence the ability to successfully implement project-based learning into an alternative education center.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Project-Based Learning

There has been a move in education toward more "hands on" activities in an effort to engage students and make them more invested in their learning. This move has resulted in many schools adapting a project-based learning instructional methodology that has students produce a final project that demonstrates their mastery of standards and depth of knowledge. As Thomas (2000) observes, project-based learning produces significant gains in academic achievement when successfully implemented at the "whole-school" level (p. 34-35).

Background of the Study

Cantrell et al. (2017) showed the importance of purposeful instructional efforts across curriculum, regardless of subject area or teaching environment. Research indicates that even in alternative settings, it is important to plan and implement purposeful teaching strategies into daily instruction. However, there continues to be trepidation and reluctance for teachers in alternative schools to implement effective instructional strategies into their classroom, due in large part to a lack of confidence in effectively doing so (Kline et al. 2015).

In many alternative settings teachers rely upon a model of credit recovery that depends primarily upon online learning, with students logging into their classes online and completing their work on laptops or Chromebooks. As Robbins (2011) noted when discussing the implementation of technology into instructional practice, "Although it strays from what is considered traditional classroom instruction, it may be the key to re-

engaging and making these select students feel comfortable in an environment that they otherwise would not" (p. 4). However, there has been a push of late to move toward more project-based learning (PBL) in order to motivate students and promote accelerated learning that results in a speedier recovery of missing credits needed for graduation. My study examined the level of "buy in" of project-based learning instructional strategies across subject areas, and whether or not teacher dynamics impacted the perceived success (or lack thereof) of the program itself. The qualitative study used qualitative research (in the form of personal interviews) to research the instructional efforts and perceptions of success within the project-based learning methodology.

As Maykut and Morehouse (1994) acknowledged, I was cognizant of inherent biases when entering into my study (p. 123). I attempted to avoid rash assumptions and examine the issues that arise out of study participants' responses through a clear lens. To fully understand the implementation of project-based learning within this environment, I interviewed teachers of core-academic classes within the school to see what types of project-based learning instructional efforts are being implemented into their classes, and how often this implementation takes place.

Given my experience teaching in a similar school setting, it was of vital importance that I not allow this experience to cloud my judgment and negatively influence my research. In a case study it is necessary for the researcher to work to separate their previous knowledge and experience away from the study and its participants as much as possible. Phenomenologists thus believe that "human experience can be understood only by ignoring or setting aside prior explanations of phenomena found in literature and acknowledging and bracketing off researchers' values and

assumptions regarding phenomena" (Hays and Singh, 2012, p. 50). Therefore, I was careful to reduce the impact of my preconceived beliefs in regard to project-based learning and its impact on teacher planning and preparation.

In the end, I balanced between what Dwyer and Buckle (2009) called, "insider" and "outsider" (p. 61). There exists in many schools a hierarchy wherein some staff are held with more esteem than other teachers; my experience teaching within a similar setting (as both an "academic" teacher teaching English and Social Studies and as an intervention teacher assigned to improve overall academic performance) gives me both "insider" and "outsider" status. I straddled the line between these two in order to thoroughly examine the perceived impact of project-based learning instructional strategies within the school.

Statement of the Problem

We know from the literature that project-based learning has been highly impactful in engaging previously disengaged students in academic settings. As Robertson (2013) noted, "PBL has the potential to transform the teaching and learning process by re-engaging students in school through the use of authentic, meaningful learning tasks that enhance their social, emotional and academic development" (p. 49). We do not yet know how impactful project-based learning strategies are for students at a higher risk of dropping out of school before they graduate, and how project-based learning fits into a setting focused on accelerated learning and credit recovery. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceived impact of project-based learning on students in an alternative educational setting in order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of teacher resistance and perceptions of student performance. The study

also examined the staff's perception of successful integration of these new instructional strategies by comparing and contrasting teachers varying levels of PBL implementation into their classes.

To effectively examine the issue of project-based learning instruction in an alternative education setting, it was crucial to develop an understanding of how the phenomenon of teacher apathy might be negatively impacting student enthusiasm and self-perceived levels of classroom performance. Therefore, the purpose of the qualitative study was to examine the methods of project-based learning instruction being implemented into classes in an urban Alternative Education Center, and how these efforts are impacting perceptions of both student performance in class and student "buy in" to these new strategies.

Research Questions

In order to pursue this research, there is one essential question, directed toward teachers, which guided these efforts. Cantrell et al. (2017) examined student expectations in secondary instruction and showed the importance of speaking with students in order to gain a richer understanding of what does and does not work for students deciding to attend Alternative Education Centers. However, interviewing students currently within the school presented issues in terms of my role as a teacher and the students' vulnerability as a student at-risk of not graduating. Interviewing these students might put undue pressure on the students and their responses might be skewed by a desire to appease me and not be truthful about their school, the environment and culture, and the teachers and leaders.

Walker (2013) examines the importance of teacher attitude in effective instructions, so questions were directed toward the teachers. Some questions included why the teacher chose to teach at this particular school, what their expectations were when they accepted the position, whether or not these expectations have been met, and what can be done to improve their self-reported performance and level of job satisfaction. Ultimately, interviewing the teachers examined the following key research question: what role does the teacher's enthusiasm (or lack thereof) influence their instructional efforts and perceptions of their performance?

Beyond these specific phenomenology interview questions directed toward teachers, there was one overarching research questions which guided the study:

1. How do current teachers describe Project-Based Learning instruction within their academic classrooms at an urban Alternative Education Center?

Park et al. (2010) argue that it is of crucial importance to implement specific instructional strategies into classes in order to meet the challenges of the 21st-century workforce. Because many students attending Alternative Education Centers intend to enter directly into the workforce post-graduation, closely examining instructional efforts in core-academic classes will better prepare these students (as well as those matriculating onto college) for future success.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review provides the rationale for conducting this study while identifying the major authors who have written about the topic and what they have to say about it as well. This chapter will examine alternative education centers, the teachers and administrative leaders who populate these centers, the students at-risk of not graduating who often attend Alternative Education Centers (AEC's), and the instructional models often employed within these locations (online credit recovery versus project-based learning). The review will identify the main theories and concepts related to new instructional strategies in core-academic classrooms and how this instruction can influence perceptions of student performance.

Theoretical Framework

My study is grounded in Dewey's constructivist theory which states that students learn more effectively when they are placed in real world scenarios and are asked to "demonstrate their knowledge through creativity and collaboration" (University College of Dublin, 2020). As Jonassen (1994) noted, "Constructivist learning environments provide learning environments such as real-world settings or case-based learning instead of predetermined sequences of instruction." This is the very essence of Project-Based Learning, in that it is not dependent on repetitive, rote memorization and instead offers students the opportunity to think for themselves, demonstrate their knowledge, and present their findings.

Alternative Education Center's Purpose

AEC's offer students who might struggle in traditional academic classes an opportunity to pursue their academic requirements in a setting that prepares them for career pursuits post-graduation (Johnson and Hendricks, 2019, p. 53). In my experience, these students' struggles in traditional academic classes are reflected in their self-reported performance on standardized tests, which reflects negatively on the district overall. In an effort to improve these results, researchers have examined instructional strategies across subject areas, including both elective and core-academic classes such as those offered at Alternative Education Centers (Kline et al. 2015). This literature review will identify some of those researchers and what conclusions they have come to in terms of effective instruction in such an environment.

Research shows that the implementation of some level of literacy instruction into the AEC teacher's curriculum can result in success in the students' careers after they graduate. As Park et al. (2010) state:

> The use of disciplinary literacy strategies…has a more positive effect on students' reading comprehension and vocabulary development than a control condition where teachers did not implement reading strategies… Therefore, it is important for…teachers and administrators to integrate authentic literacy skills into their curriculums so that students can benefit and find success in their future careers. (p. 44)

So where does the need for more literacy instruction fit within this environment, particularly one that is focused on implementing project-based learning into their daily practices? The need for purposeful, effective instructional strategies becomes even more important in this environment, and crucial to this implementation is overcoming teacher

apathy toward these new strategies, and a stubborn unwillingness to attempt anything new, through increased confidence strategies.

Alternative Education Center's Teachers

Alternative education teachers have chosen their profession for a reason: they desired to not teach in a traditional school setting. Therefore, trying to get them to implement new strategies being used in traditional schools into their curriculum is likely to be met with trepidation and resistance. At the heart of this reluctance is a lack of confidence in delivering confident, new instructional strategies in an effective manner. Santamaria et al. (2010) argue instead that trying these new things, resulting in stronger confidence in their practices, results in positive results on multiple levels:

> When teachers have the confidence to confront a new strategy by themselves, everyone wins. Students gain valuable tools that will help them develop skills for lifelong learning. Teachers feel the satisfaction of successful learning. Administrators experience enthusiasm toward program implementation. When students feel confident regarding literacy, not only can they learn more effectively in their discipline, but they can use those skills to expand their knowledge to tangent subjects and boost success in their careers. (p. 47)

It is imperative that AEC teachers welcome this challenge with open arms in order to better serve their students and thus prepare them for the demands of the 21st-century workplace, one "dominated by robotics and artificial intelligence, (where) new entrants to the workforce will require very strong social, employability, and work-readiness skills that reflect the behavioral, attitudinal, and character traits highly valued in the workplace and in society" (Schneider and Foot, 2013, p.32). Implementing PBL instructional strategies into their classrooms can help AEC core-academic content teachers promote learning through newfound excitement and a more hands-on approach to instruction.

The main theories and concepts related to careful self-analysis and effective instructional strategies on the part of teachers will be highly beneficial to the students and their overall success (Armstrong et al. 2015; Bragg et al. 2006; Cantrell et al. 2017). In terms of those classes offered at Alternative Education Centers, researchers in the past have focused on the benefits post-graduation in helping students pursue their career choice and secure employment, and on the difficulties of overcoming preconceptions regarding AEC classes overall. However, as Conrath (2001) states, the many benefits of alternative education programs are far-reaching and could have a foundational impact on the American education system:

> Alternative education can become a catalyst for America's surrealized hopes. Alternative schools can help many of our young people overcome their most debilitating handicaps: the rampant pessimism, the failure to trust in effort, and the lack of confidence in our institutions caused by generational poverty. (p. 585)

Professional Development

In order for AEC teachers to overcome their lack of confidence in implementing new instructional strategies, it is crucial that they seek and attend professional development (PD) opportunities focused on Project-Based Learning. These PD's should be provided by both the district and sought independently by the teachers themselves. As Guo and Yang (2012) observe, professional development is key to not only teacher preparation, but also to student success:

> Teacher professional development affects student achievement through three steps. First, professional development enhances teacher knowledge, skills, and motivation. Second, better knowledge, skills, and motivation improve classroom teaching. Third, improved teaching raises student achievement. (p. 41)

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Project-Based Learning PD's should provide teachers with the opportunity to engage in inquiry about the very foundation of their teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection. As Borko, Jacobs, & Koellner (2010) note, these professional development opportunities will provide teachers with the opportunity to make connections between their learning and their classroom instruction (p. 552). Therefore, if Project-Based Learning is to be effectively implemented into a school's daily instructional practices, it is crucial that the district and school leadership provide the faculty with relevant, informative professional development opportunities.

Alternative Education Center Leadership

Leaders within alternative educational settings need to be highly skilled, flexible advocates for their students in order to see real success. They must be able to motivate their faculty and staff and promote a culture of learning within the school regardless of resistance, apathy, or frustration (on the part of both the students and adults in the building). These demands are great, as they ask the leader to build upon their previous training and skill set and focus on building strong relationships as well. They must be able to recognize their students' talents and determine the best method of developing this talent further. The key to this is being able to build genuine, authentic, invested relationships with the student population through research, meetings, frequent communication, and flexibility. As Price et al. (2010) state, "an alternative school leader must be a clear communicator who builds upon his/her strengths in order to communicate to others what a positive, productive school environment that supports teachers and enables students' looks and feels like" (p. 307).

Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning has several different definitions depending upon which academic field the phrase is being applied. For the purposes of my study, the most appropriate definition is one implemented by Ravitz (2008) that includes at least the following: "1) extended student investigation, 2) in-depth inquiry into a topic, 3) some degree of student self-direction or choice, and 4) presentation by students of their findings, results or conclusions" (p. 2). While my research examines the perceived need for effective instruction in order to help students not only gain hands-on experience and meet the demands of an ever-changing workforce, but also for those students to feel accepted, wanted, and cared for by highly skilled teachers devoid of apathy and filled with enthusiasm. Little has been written examining the connection between project-based learning strategies in core-academic classes and the resulting influence it has on perceptions of student performance in class. Is there a direct relationship between student happiness and student performance overall? If so, does this happiness promote accelerated learning that results in credit recovery and eventual graduation? For example, does instruction in these classes result in higher feelings of acceptance and happiness? If so, do these feelings result in higher levels of school "buy in" that leads to improved perceptions of student performance in class? Instead, much of this past research focused on the teacher side of this engagement rather than the students. As Kline et al. (2015) state:

> Teacher participants realize that their own challenges as learners reflect
> the challenges their students face: sharing their writing with their peers,
> generating reflective responses and using online tools for discussion. By
> reflecting on how they overcome these challenges, witnessing models of
> how to use writing as a tool for learning, and learning how to assess

> student learning rather than correct grammar…participants learn how to teach—not just assign—reading and writing in their subject areas. (p. 29)

While this research is certainly important in terms of teacher preparation, engagement, and buy-in, more research needs to be done focusing on student happiness overall and their subsequent success across various subject areas and curriculum (Bragg et al. 2006, p. 19). My study will examine the teachers' ability and willingness to "step back" and allow students the freedom to explore their topic using the aforementioned definition of project-based learning provided by Ravitz (2008).

An issue that is likely to arise in this study is a reluctance for teachers to appropriately relinquish control of the classroom and allow the students to drive their own instruction. Many teachers are micro-managers who appreciate a more dictatorial approach to their instruction and are prone to planning activities down to the very last minute of class. Project-based learning does not lend itself to this approach and requires teachers to develop a more flexible approach to instruction. As Wurdinger et al. (2007) observe:

> Teachers must relinquish some control with this approach and allow students to work independently for periods of time. Teachers may be uncomfortable with this approach, especially when students make mistakes and flounder during the process. However, in this valuable aspect of the learning process students learn from their mistakes and realize they must re-evaluate their plans and implement them in different ways until they find a solution. With this process teachers must act as guides to the process as opposed to a giver of knowledge. (p. 159)

Teachers willing to accept this new philosophy and approach may find that they are better preparing these students to succeed in life after high school, which requires them to recognize that "all high school graduates may not want to attend college so they (need to) attempt to teach students the importance of self-directed learning and the value of

lifelong learning. Success is about helping all students achieve their own personal goals and helping them become productive, happy members of society" (Wurdinger and Rudolph, 2009, p. 124).

Students At-Risk of Not Graduating

It is extremely important that my study focus on the specific needs of at-risk students within the school. For my study, "at-risk" is defined not only by the risk of not graduating from high school, but also by the risk factors that traditionally impede student success. These factors, for the purpose of my study, are race, socio-economic conditions, and learning difficulties. The multitude of risk factors inhibiting students from achieving their goals are great and are often based upon the situations they have been placed in by the adults in their life. As the *Great Schools Partnership* (2013) noted:

> In most cases, "risk factors" are situational rather than innate. With the exception of certain characteristics such as learning disabilities, a student's perceived risk status is rarely related to his or her ability to learn or succeed academically, and largely or entirely related to a student's life circumstances. For example, attending a low-performing school could be considered a risk factor. If a school is underfunded and cannot provide essential services, or if its teaching quality and performance record are poor, the school could conceivably contribute to higher rates of student absenteeism, course failures, and attrition. (p. 1)

Socio-Economic Status, Race and Class

The most impactful element to placing students at-risk of not graduating are socio-economic factors such as income and housing. Research has demonstrated that class has become even more impactful than race in presenting academic difficulties for students, as Lambie (2005) stated, academic struggle "derive(s) more from the environmental influences of socioeconomic status than from ethnic background" (p. 2).

Further complicating this matter is the fact that race and class are inexorably linked in the United States. Society perpetuates a myth that all people of color are poor, and thus all poor people are of color. People then equate poverty with criminality and believe that all poor people are criminals. Therefore, many people deduct that if all poor people are minorities, and all poor people are criminals, then all minorities are thus criminals. The prejudices and pre-conceived biases have a negative impact on minority students, resulting in increases in aggression, behavioral incidents, and academic struggles in school (Smith, 1978, p. 379). It is imperative that school personnel are aware of these societal biases and are prepared to meet the challenges of students dealing with these issues. As Lambie (2005) observes:

> School professionals must also be aware of the world view and self-image of economically disadvantaged students. Most children growing up in a poor environment experience prejudice on a daily basis. In addition, poverty has an impact upon where the family will live, because fewer and fewer living options are available when income is lower the family is dependent upon welfare programs. All of these factors influence the growth and development of children within the family and how they approach the demands of growing up, including the demands of the educational system. (p. 4)

Ultimately, it is these socio-economic factors that negatively impact students and their ability to succeed in the classroom. When combined with their frequent attempts at self-sabotage, it is difficult for these students to understand what it takes to succeed, not only in school, but in life. When serving these at-risk students, it is important for teachers to recognize these difficulties and welcome the opportunity that they have been given. They must think on a more foundational level and try to erase the negative connotation that comes with school, as O'Leary (2012) stated, the goal is to, "improve the school experience and life prospects for our students" (p. 49).

Teacher Efficacy

It is crucial that I consider the concept of teacher efficacy when conducting my study. As defined by Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, and Zellman (1977) teacher efficacy is, "the extent to which the teacher believes he or she has the capacity to affect student performance" (p. 137), Teacher efficacy even takes into account the willingness of the student to learn, given issues like a lack of motivation or significant learning and behavioral issues, and how this impacts (but does not defeat) the teacher's belief that they can effectively influence student learning.

As Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy (1998) note, "teacher efficacy was first conceived by the RAND researchers as the extent to which teachers believed that they could control the reinforcement of their actions, that is, whether control of reinforcement lay within themselves or in the environment" (p. 202). Therefore, it was believed that student performance could be an impactful factor on teacher performance as well. This belief would thus mean that high performing students would result in higher performing teachers but would also mean the opposite—that lower performing students would subsequently result in lower performing teachers. If true, this would be quite troubling considering the site of my study being located within an urban alternative program. Students in this population have traditionally struggled academically and often lack the required motivation to successfully navigate the academic demands of high school. As Bandura (1997) observed, "low teacher efficacy leads to low student efficacy and low academic achievement, which in turn leads to further declines in teacher efficacy."

Are there other factors that can influence teacher efficacy, and if so, what are these factors? While a teacher in this environment with low efficacy (meaning they

lacked belief and conviction in their innate abilities) might be unable to help their students succeed, a teacher with a high level of efficacy, meaning they believed in themselves and their abilities to impact student success, would, "believe(…) that they could control, or at least strongly influence, student achievement and motivation" (p. 202), thus resulting in student success. Therefore, I must consider the impact that environment, experience, and training have on teacher efficacy, and thus on student success.

Environment

The environment in which a teacher works can greatly impact the teacher's sense of efficacy and confidence in their abilities. Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy (1998) observe that "Teachers' sense of efficacy is related to a number of school-level variables, such as climate of the school, behavior of the principal, sense of school community, and decision-making structures" (p. 220). Therefore, the type of school (traditional or alternative; elementary or secondary), the type of leader (heavy-handed or more hands-off), and the overall morale of the faculty and staff can either positively or negatively influence teacher performance and subsequently student achievement.

It is important to recognize the powerful influence the school leader has in creating the culture of the overall school environment and in developing teacher efficacy. As Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy (1998) note, "Principals who used their leadership to provide resources for teachers and to buffer them from disruptive factors, but allowed teachers flexibility over classroom affairs, created a context that allowed efficacy to develop." (p. 220). Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy (1998) observe that "When the principal displayed strong leadership (Fuller & Izu, 1986), encouraged innovation, and

was responsive to teachers' concerns (Newmann et al., 1989), teachers' collective sense of efficacy was greater" (p. 222).

Experience

A teacher's previous experience can also impact their development of efficacy, thus impacting their performance in delivering effective instruction to their students. Interestingly, when considering teacher efficacy in an urban environment (like that of the site of my study), Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy (1998) observe that experienced teachers are more likely to lack a sense of efficacy than newly hired teachers:

> In examining the efficacy beliefs of both novice and experienced teachers beginning work in an urban context, Chester and Beaudin (1996) found that experienced teachers generally saw a decrease in their sense of efficacy in their first year of teaching in an urban district. However, certain school practices apparently contributed to increased efficacy among the newly hired teachers. The greater the opportunity for collaboration with other adults and the more observations that were made, the greater was the teachers' sense of efficacy. Surprisingly, the availability and quality of resources did not have a significant independent relationship to efficacy. Chester and Beaudin speculated that there may be a decision-overload effect when new teachers are presented with a large number of resources in the absence of guidance and support to make instructional choices. (p. 221)

Therefore, it appears that experienced teachers lose confidence in their abilities when placed in this new environment, whereas newer teachers (as long as they are provided opportunities for observations and human interaction) see an increase in their sense of efficacy.

New teachers thus seem more flexible and capable of increasing efficacy than experienced teachers. As Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy (1998) observe, "it seems that efficacy beliefs of first-year teachers are related to stress and commitment to

teaching, as well as satisfaction with support and preparation" (p. 236), while changes in efficacy beliefs amongst more experienced teachers "seem to be more difficult to produce and sustain" (p.236). Regardless, as Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy (1998) note, "helping teachers develop strong efficacy beliefs early in their career will pay lasting dividends" (p. 234).

Training

A culture of low efficacy can be overcome through proper training on content, curriculum, and instructional strategies, thus positively impacting student performance. Overcoming poor efficacy is essential to teacher and school success, as Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy (1998) note:

> A low sense of efficacy can be contagious among a staff of teachers, creating a self-defeating and demoralizing cycle of failure. Low teacher efficacy leads to low student efficacy and low academic achievement, which in turn leads to further declines in teacher efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Organizational features that create a cohesive culture-one that is orderly, with a strong press for academic achievement, where administrators are responsive to teachers' concerns and encourage them to try new ideas, and where teachers encourage one another in their attempts to address student needs-may reverse this cycle. (p. 222)

Increased teacher efficacy can only be achieved through the access and application of adequate training for the faculty. These trainings should include content-specific information as well as instruction on best practices and new strategies for student success. When providing this training, one must also account for the teachers' experience level and how this might impact their receptivity of new information. Generally, the newer a teacher is, the more receptive they are of new information and how it can impact their abilities and performance. Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy (1998) observe:

With experience, teachers develop a relatively stable set of core beliefs about their abilities. New challenges, however, such as having to teach a new grade, work in a new setting, or adopt a reformed curriculum, can elicit a reevaluation of efficacy. When the task is seen as routine, one that has been handled successfully many times, there is little active analysis of the task, and efficacy is based on memories of how well the task has been handled in the past. Prospective or inexperienced teachers, however, rely more heavily on their analysis of the task and on vicarious experience (what they believe other teachers could do) to gauge their own likely success, that is, their efficacy in the given situation. (p. 234)

Therefore, while experienced teachers might be initially more resistant to implementing new instructional strategies (such as Project-Based Learning) than newer teachers, through proper training and subsequent experience, ALL teachers (new and experienced alike) should become more comfortable implementing these factors into their daily practice.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Researcher's Perspective

Having worked as an English teacher for 19 years and having taught at an alternative education center for much of that time, I have witnessed firsthand the reluctance of teachers to implement new instructional strategies into their classrooms. Students at alternative schools are there because they struggle in a traditional school environment, and thus are not at all enthused about the prospect of taking Math, Science, or English classes. These students have struggled in academic classes in the past and these struggles are reflected in their reading level (often 2-3 grade-levels below where they should be) and performance on standardized tests.

Of late, there has been a concentrated effort within my district to enact new instructional strategies in an attempt to engage students in their learning in a more impactful way. These efforts have included many schools across the district implementing more project-based learning (PBL) into their students' instruction, with varied results. Some students have expressed excitement at these new methods, preferring to engage in a more "hands on" approach to their learning. In my observations I have seen these students enjoy producing a product and enjoying the freedom that is an integral part of the PBL methodology. On the other hand, I have also witnessed students who expressed frustration and a lack of trust in this process; students who prefer instead the more traditional approach of instruction that they are used to from their past.

My concern with project-based learning as a foundational element of instruction within a school is the ability, and willingness, of the teachers to trust the process, even

when it appears to not be working for every student. My perspective is influenced by my own trepidation and reluctance to change my teaching methods and to trust the process for effective project-based learning, particularly the amount of independent time that must be allowed within these practices. I also wonder if project-based learning is the best model of instruction for various alternative school students, including those with social anxiety, learning disabilities, behavior issues, or any other myriad of varied learning styles. My decision to pursue this topic for my study is based upon my experience working in alternative education and witnessing concerted efforts to implement PBL into our daily practices.

Site Selection

I chose an alternative education center located in Kentucky as the primary site for this case study. My chosen school site is a school available to district students in grades 7-12 who have trouble focusing in larger classrooms and have a need for more differentiated, individualized instruction. Students can either apply (see APPENDIX H) or be recommended for placement (see APPENDIX E). The focus of the program is to provide students the ability to complete their requirements for graduation and thus earn a high school diploma in a timely manner, free of the distractions that inhibit their success in larger, traditional classrooms. The school recognizes the individual needs of each student and focuses on the unique learning styles each of these students possess. The faculty and staff adhere to the following philosophy in meeting the needs and demands of their student population:

1. Provide a positive, student-centered, supportive and highly structured environment that includes an innovative curriculum, counseling and social skills that are integral parts of everyday learning

2. Ensure that every student develops the necessary academic and social skills they need to return to their home school or graduate and be successful

3. Provide a program which encourages high expectations for all students

The school warns students, families, and the public in general to "not be discouraged by the negative rhetoric or stigma often associated with an alternative program," as these biases are often unfounded and inaccurate portrayals of the students within such programs. Therefore, "the goal of this school is to promote high quality and rigorous academics and safety programs through the development of student's strengths, talents and interests" (Lynn, personal interview, 2021). For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that all participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. In order to meet these goals, the school adheres to the following seven principles:

- Clear Mission,
- Leadership,
- Culture and Climate,
- Professional Development,
- Parent/Community Involvement,
- Curriculum and Instruction,
- And Monitoring and Assessment. (Lynn, personal interview, 2021)

In addition to the general student population, there is also a "school within the school" designed to serve students whose previous behavior issues have resulted in their placement into this highly structured environment (see APPENDIX F). Students are placed in this alternative program based on previous behavior within the district, and there are seven violations that result in placement into this alternative program:

1. Distribution or sale of drugs at school or an event;
2. assault;
3. possession of a weapon at school or event;

4. second offense — under the influence of drugs or alcohol;
5. second fight in a single school year (student starts the fight, or premediates the fight at school);
6. second threat of harm made in a school year;
7. or coming from a current placement in alternative setting in another district. (Lynn, personal interview, 2021)

Subject/Participant Selection

Any willing members of the teaching faculty and staff (of whom there are approximately 29 in total) were interviewed for my study. It was important to interview staff and academic teachers alike to understand their perceptions of their abilities, instruction, and happiness, while also gaining an understanding of their thoughts regarding leadership, morale, and school culture (see APPENDIX A). I hoped to interview at least one faculty member from each core content class, one teacher from an elective subject, and the principal in order to collect valuable data regarding the implementation of project-based learning and will pursue these participants through school announcements (see APPENDIX B) and email communication (see APPENDIX C).

Faculty, Staff and Leadership

The teaching faculty consisted of three English, two Math, two Science, two Social Studies, two Special Education, one Jobs for Americas Graduates (JAG), and one Technology teachers. The staff included three social workers, one Administrative Assistant, one Paraprofessional, and one Family Resource Coordinator. These individuals are supervised by a school principal and an assistant principal.

Data Collection Strategies

Data was collected through one-on-one interviews with school faculty, staff, and leadership. These initial interview questions provided some background information regarding the participants' perceptions of their performance within the school. Walker, D. L. (2013) examined the importance of teacher attitude in effectively delivering instruction, so these questions are directed toward the teachers:

1. How would you describe your past experience in school, both in your personal life as a student, and your professional life as a teacher?
2. What do you consider your greatest struggle as a teacher?
3. What is your level of confidence delivering instruction in your classroom?
4. How confident are you in trying new teaching strategies? What is this level of confidence based upon?
5. What efforts could be made to increase student performance in your classes?
6. How would you describe the mood amongst staff at your school? Are most staff happy to be here? What factors influence this mood?
7. What are the best and worst things about your school?
8. What would you change about your school and why?
9. What did you enjoy about the project-based learning methodology implemented at AEC?
10. What was least enjoyable about the project-based learning methodology implemented at AEC?
11. How did an emphasis on project-based learning differ from instructional models at your previous schools?
12. As a teacher, what were the greatest challenges of project-based learning?
13. Would you suggest more schools adopt a project-based learning model for their instructional practices? Why or why not?

Classroom observations were employed in order to witness firsthand the instructional strategies of the teachers and the level of participation of the students. Field notes were also taken to record interactions between staff and students and the level of engagement with the class in general. Anecdotal evidence was collected from the teachers and transcribed into the findings of my case study.

Data was also collected from the review and analysis of school documentation such as the school website, the state's school report card, employee and student handbooks, and weekly and/or monthly communication between the school and the community (i.e. newsletters, email blasts, etc.).

Given the current Coronavirus impacting the ability to meet with individuals in person, I prepared for the possibility of a continued quarantine and the inability to meet with teachers, leaders and staff in person. As COVID-19 continued, I arranged ZOOM meetings in order to obtain data necessary for my study. Multiple classroom observations were not possible due to the pandemic, so observation of non-traditional instruction (NTI) efforts on the part of faculty were necessary. This was in the form of ZOOM meetings and/or Google Classroom.

Data Analysis Techniques

I analyzed data from the one-on-one interviews, making sure to record the interviews and then transcribe the recorded interviews. I then carefully reviewed the data to obtain a general sense of the collected information. I coded the data for descriptions to be used to help identify themes that exist in regard to instruction within classrooms at an urban career/technical education center. This data provided a thorough understanding of the perceptions of instructional strategies being employed within the school from both the student and staff perspectives.

Field notes from the classroom observations were transcribed and coded to further gain an understanding of teacher apathy and perceptions of student success.

Trustworthiness

In order to confirm the trustworthiness of the research, I had to demonstrate that the research was credible. In speaking with current staff I tried to assure data was true and accurate. By including current staff, I avoided any bias that might be present if I had chosen to interview former staff who no longer taught at the school. I used triangulation (one-on-one interviews with staff, data from observations, archival research, and interviews of school administration) to confirm the credibility of this data and the research itself.

I attempted to provide enough thick, rich description that readers may determine for themselves how this research is applicable to other Alternative Education Centers in similar settings. I made sure to be as detailed and specific as possible in relaying the information collected, with as little of my bias or pre-determined narrative as possible. To further establish confirmability, I provided an audit trail highlighting every step of data analysis in order to provide a rationale for my decisions.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of my qualitative study in which I explored the overarching research question: "How do current teachers describe Project-Based Learning instruction within their academic classrooms at an urban Alternative Education Center?" The findings from this study were drawn from the participants who engaged in personal one-on-one interviews, written responses to specific interview questions, and classroom observations/school visits. One of the personal interviews was conducted via ZOOM software, while three were done face-to-face and two were done by email The objective of asking participants to examine their experiences with project-based learning is because there has been a push in secondary education to move instruction toward accommodating more PBL opportunities and I wondered if doing so would be conducive in an alternative educational setting. As a result of these past experiences, future administrators and educational leaders could determine whether a move toward a project-based learning methodology would work for their particular school.

Regardless of the findings, I want to emphasize that the findings of my study are not indicative of all schools and should not be deemed tried and true for any academic setting. The findings may not be valid for traditional high schools and it may not necessarily work for another alternative school located in a more rural area. However, although the results are not generalizable, the results of my study may apply to another alternative school situated in a similar urban setting that is staffed similarly and consists of comparable student populations. Please remember, the sample for my study was composed of teachers working at an alternative education center located in Kentucky in

what would be deemed an urban school district. Specific participant demographic information is presented later in this chapter.

My presentation of findings includes direct quotes from participants, in an effort to deliver their words directly in order to convey their particular voices. These direct quotes came from the ZOOM interview, three personal interviews and two were from their written responses to emailed interview questions and identified several emerging themes to be examined in detail later in this chapter. I also conducted follow-up interviews with each of the participants to examine the data more thoroughly and confirm the participants responses. I deemed each of the data collection efforts to be equally meaningful and deserving of mention in my study.

As a result of my data collection efforts and the confirmation with my participants regarding their responses, three major themes emerged from my study. Each major theme also presented some sub-themes; these and a detailed discussion of the analytic process (including direct quotes from participants) will be examined more fully later in this chapter. The three major themes that impact perception of successful PBL implementation that arose from my study are: 1) the impact of teacher's past experience, both as a student and educator, on their ongoing self-evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses as an educator; 2) the role confidence (or lack thereof) plays in the participants ability to maneuver through new instructional models; 3) the importance of school environment when designing a school-wide teaching methodology. As noted previously each of these themes will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Participant Backgrounds

There were 6 staff members who participated in my study. This consisted of 2 participants who identified as male and 4 who identified as female. All participants were employed at the same alternative education center chosen for this study and all were actively engaged in the interview and observation process. The participants ages ranged from 30 to 44 years old. In order to protect the participants' anonymity, each was given a pseudonym by myself.

Amy was 44 years of age, was the Jobs for America's Graduates teacher and was in her 7th year at the study site. Judy was 30 years of age, was an English and Social Studies teacher and was in her second year at the site (9 years total in education). Karen was 30 years of age, was the Math and Science teacher, and was also in her second year at the site (8th in education). . Lynn was 41 years of age, serving as the school principal for 5 of her 6 years at the site (16 years total in education). Roger was 44 years of age, was the Math teacher, and was in year 12 at the site (22 total in education). Finally, Steve was 36 years of age, was a Social Studies teacher in his 9th year at the site (14 years total in education). All of the participants identified as White (or Caucasian).

Table 1. Participants

NAME	ROLE	CONTENT AREA	YRS. IN ED	YRS. AT CURRENT SCHOOL	INTERVIEW METHOD	FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW
Amy	Teacher	JAG	7	7	Email (2021)	Yes; Email (2021)
Judy	Teacher	English; Social Studies	9	2	ZOOM (2020)	Yes; Email (2021)
Karen	Teacher	Math; Science	8	2	Email (2020)	Yes; Email (2021)
Lynn	Admin	School Principal	16	6	In-person (2021)	No
Roger	Teacher	Math	22	12	In-person (2021)	Yes; Email (2021)
Steve	Teacher	Social Studies	14	9	In-person (2020)	Yes; Email (2021)

Document Analysis

Classroom observations of Roger and Steve were utilized in order to witness firsthand the instructional strategies of the teachers and the level of participation of the students. I also attended a school visit where I was led through the school by Lynn to become familiar with the layout of the entire school. Field notes were taken to record interactions between staff and students and the level of engagement during class and in common areas. Anecdotal evidence in the form of voluntary and involuntary placement forms, project-based learning assignment sheets, admissions applications, and student self-evaluation documents was also gathered and included in the appendices of this study.

I attended a ZOOM session in Steve's class during the fall of 2020 semester that occurred as a result of the pandemic. Attendance was low, with only 3 out of 10 students in attendance. There was very low engagement on the student's behalf, with students leaving the camera turned off unless directed to do otherwise (which did occur twice during my observation). Steve stated that this was normal during the pandemic, with most students not attending the virtual class sessions and those that did offering little to

no interaction or engagement with the teacher. Steve stated that he suspected part of the problem negatively impacting attendance was a lack of internet service by much of his student population, but that the main culprits were a general apathy toward the virtual learning environment and "not waking up in time because guardians weren't home to wake them up" (Steve, personal interview, 2020). During this observation there was no effort to implement project-based learning strategies on the teacher's behalf, likely due to the low attendance and lack of engagement by students. Steve explained that virtual instruction was as ineffective as the Spring 2020 semester's use of "packets" of schoolwork that were sent home to students, in which he received roughly 10% of students' overall work.

Data was also collected from the review and analysis of school documentation such as the school website, the state's school report card, employee and student handbooks, and weekly communication between the school and the community in the form of emails. While the school website provided predominantly contact information for staff not in the building during my site visits, the school report card (found online at https://www.kyschoolreportcard.com/organization/154868?year=2020) provided important demographic information regarding the student population within the school site (see Table 2 below). This document showed that the school site was primarily female (64 to 55) and predominantly white (83 out of 119), statistics that were similar to the makeup of the participants of my study (see Table 1). Though not broken down by gender or race, this document also provided data regarding the number of economically disadvantaged students attending the school site, with 83 of the total 119 students falling

into this category (69.747%). This rate is greater than the district average of 45.397%

and somewhat higher than the state average of 60.752%.

Table 2. Student Population at Study Site

Student Population	Number
All Students	119
Female	64
Male	55
African American	10
American Indian or Alaska Native	1
Asian	0
Hispanic or Latino	18
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0
Two or More Races	7
White (Non-Hispanic)	83

Source: Kentucky Department of Education. *School Report Card*. Retrieved from
https://www.kyschoolreportcard.com/organization/154868?year=2020.

The employee handbook was reviewed to gain an understanding of the

expectations of certified staff within the district and included a copy of the Code of

Ethics for Certified School Personnel. This code clearly identifies the moral expectations

that certified staff are to adhere to in order to achieve and retain employment in the

district. Weekly email communication between the school principal and members of the

school community (including staff, students, and families) were also analyzed and show

to be primarily logistical information regarding upcoming events, schedules, and past

performance (student acknowledgements).

Data Analysis

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the personal interviews were conducted via

ZOOM (n=1), email (n=2), and in-person (n=3) with participants responding to a pre-

determined set of questions related to their experience in education, at their school, and

with project-based learning (see APPENDIX A). Once these interviews were completed,

I used my notes and their emails to transcribe their responses manually into individual

Word documents for each participant. I then copied each participants' responses into an

excel spreadsheet that allowed me to combine all their responses into one document.

During each of these processes I would BOLD words or phrases that I found relevant,

powerful or compelling. Doing so provided me with some of my initial open codes, but

not all of them. Once I had completely transcribed the 6 separate interviews, I then sent a

series of three follow-up questions via email to 5 of the 6 participants (I felt there was no

need to include the principal for these questions as they were more directly related to the

participants teaching practices). I then reviewed closely each participants' responses to

the initial and follow-up questions. Typing out the participants' responses (rather than

merely copy and paste) allowed me to engage with the participants' responses in a more

engaging manner. Doing so allowed me to become even more familiar with the data, but

also allowed me to organize responses in a method that permitted for easier coding of

data as they related to the specific questions. When referenced below, the year indicates

when the response was given, with some responses occurring in 2020 and others in 2021.

The interview method (ZOOM, email or in-person) is noted in Table 1 on p. 31 of this

chapter.

Once this data was transcribed, I began open coding. This consisted of me

reading the personal interview transcripts and identifying words and phrases that really

stood out to me. This process included me printing out hard copies of the Word

documents for each participant and manually highlighting and taking notes on the page.

This would include underlining, circling, one-word responses, symbols and highlighting

using a marker. I would also use different color ink in an attempt to notice repetition and thus identify themes arising from the data. I also did a similar process electronically within the Word documents themselves and would then transfer this information to the Excel spreadsheet combining all the participants' responses. After completing this open coding for the personal interviews, I then did the same for the follow-up interviews (also combing them with the responses on the Excel spreadsheet).

After open coding these documents I began analytical coding. During analytical coding I looked to categorize open codes by attempting to interpret the meaning of these codes. Doing so allowed me to identify similarities in experiences and responses. I then created categorical names to groups of codes that I determined to be interconnected by using the constant comparison method during analytical coding. I returned to the responses routinely throughout this process to assess for similarities and differences throughout.

Upon completing the analytical coding process, I then began the third round of coding, which was theme construction. This is when I reviewed the list of analytical categories several times to examine more closely how they related to one another and to see what themes began to appear and what sub-themes might also exist. This process resulted in the creation and deletion of some themes, the nuancing and editing of some themes, and the combining of some other themes. For example, I initially did not see how the theme of efficacy was present in the participants' responses but as I examined the data more thoroughly I noticed that teachers past experience and the number of years teaching impacted how confident they were in their abilities and willingness to deliver new instructional methodologies. This resulted in identifying efficacy as an emerging

theme that warranted further interpretation and inclusion as a separate theme rather than an element of experience. Ultimately, by the end of this coding process I was able to arrive at the existence of three emerging themes as it relates to the perception of successful PBL implementation: 1) the impact of teacher's past experience, both as a student and educator, on their ongoing self-evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses as an educator; 2) the role confidence (or lack thereof) plays in the participants ability to maneuver through new instructional models; 3) the importance of school environment when designing a school-wide teaching methodology.

Once these themes had been identified I checked with my participants to assess their opinions by sending them a google form that included the three identified themes mentioned previously. I emailed each of the participants and encouraged them to examine the themes and indicate whether or not they felt these themes authentically represented their experiences and perceptions of success regarding PBL implementation at their school. I also encouraged them to provide an explanation of why they responded the way they did. All six participants responded to the google form and all six endorsed the three identified themes as being meaningful and relevant to their experiences with project-based learning implementation. They also provided commentary to their responses which will be presented later in this chapter.

The findings of my study are based upon the past experience with, and interpretation of, project-based learning implementation within the participants' school, as represented in their personal interviews, follow-up questions, and google form responses. The words of the participants have been recorded verbatim and thus preserve the authenticity of their experiences and perceptions therein. I have represented the

participants according to their identified gender and have recorded their age and race in order to consider the context that might impact and inform their responses. What follows is a thorough discussion of the three themes and sub-themes, complete with direct quotations from the participants responses to the personal interview, follow-up questions, and google form responses. The participants of my study identified several issues that arose out of their past experience implementing project-based learning into their school. These issues influenced their perceptions of success in their school, as well as the possibilities for success going forward. The participants acknowledged that several factors influenced their attitude toward project-based learning, including their past experience, their level of teacher efficacy, and the school environment itself.

Table 3. Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme	Sub-Theme
1. The impact of teacher's past experience, both as a student and educator, on their ongoing self-evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses as an educator	a. Teaching Struggles
	b. PBL Successes
2. The role confidence (or lack thereof) plays in the participants ability to maneuver through new instructional models	a. Introducing New Strategies.
	b. Increasing Student Performance
3. The importance of school environment when designing a school-wide teaching methodology.	a. Good and Bad
	b. Changes

Theme 1: The impact of teacher's past experience, both as a student and educator, on their ongoing self-evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses as an educator

My study asked participants (see Table 1) to examine their past experience with school, both as a student and as an educator, and the findings revealed a split between doing quite well at school and just doing enough to succeed. Karen, a Math teacher, was

an adequate student but did not assess her achievements in outwardly glowing terms. She stated:

> As a student, I was okay with going to school. I was not a very good test taker. I really enjoyed Science because it was hands on. I also really liked band and my English classes (most of the time) because I got to play my instrument or read. I am currently enrolled in an ESL and Teacher Leader Program to earn my Rank 1. It is all virtual which fits my schedule, but I do not feel like I get the feedback that I need to complete assignments. (Karen, personal interview, 2020)

Karen also acknowledges some struggles in her professional life as well:

> My professional life as a teacher can be described as chaotic. This is year 8 of teaching. I have worked in 4 districts and 5 schools. In each school, the expectations have been different. I have been in schools that want students in seats and not really moving around or schools where the lessons had to be "cookie cutter"... basically every science teacher had to be teaching the same thing in the same way. Professionally, teaching has gotten a bit more difficult over the years with new guidelines and expectations being passed down from the Superintendent. (Karen, personal interview, 2020)

Similar to Karen, Roger (also a Math teacher) felt he did just enough to get by when he was a student, "I did well, but just did what I was supposed to do" (Roger, personal interview, 2021) while also acknowledging some struggles as a teacher. When examining his professional life, Roger states, "Teaching has been mostly positive. The biggest challenge early on was that most kids didn't think like I did at all. I had to explain things how they thought, and it was usually different than how I thought about it" (Roger, personal interview, 2021).

Amy, a Jobs for America's Graduates teacher acknowledged that she "enjoyed school for the most part" but did struggle in some classes in which she had little interest (Amy, personal interview, 2021). On the other hand, Judy (an English and Social Studies

teacher), "always loved school as a student" but admits that her first couple of years teaching were difficult (Judy, personal interview, 2020). Steve (Social Studies) acknowledges his previous success while also admitting to later struggles, stating, "High school was very easy for me. When I got to college I quickly learned this was going to be much different. It took a few years to really learn how to be a student and teach myself to study" (Steve, personal interview, 2020). Professionally, Steve found himself serving as a 1:1 aide for an autistic student, a role no one else wanted, for four years as he struggled to gain a certified position within the district.

Sub-Theme. Teaching Struggles. When asked to assess their greatest struggles as teachers, Judy and Roger were succinct in identifying engagement and behavior management as their primary areas of concern. However, Karen offered a bit more explanation in presenting her areas of improvement:

> My greatest struggle as a teacher is finding ways to use the community around me to support lessons. I have reached out before, but I feel that I can do more to make science and math come to life for my students. Another struggle is that I teach math and am not certified but being in an alternative setting somehow makes this okay. (Karen, personal interview, 2020)

Amy worries about letting students "slip through the cracks" and struggles to ensure that every student gain "equal opportunities to succeed" (Amy, personal interview, 2021). Similarly, Steve felt that he has struggled to meet the diverse needs of his students. He notes that it is a struggle to "Meet the various needs of students as individuals, while still teaching all of the requirements of covering all of the content" (Steve, personal interview, 2020). Combining this with showing that students have achieved mastery of the standards has been particularly difficult, as has designing

effective formative assessments. Attempts to overcome these difficulties resulted in the creation of detailed project overview sheets to help teachers guide instruction throughout the process (see APPENDIX J).

The participants noted that their perceptions of success are influenced by their past teaching experience and their willingness and ability to relinquish control while still covering academic content. Karen confirms that this is difficult for some teachers, stating that there needs to be a more concerted effort to explain how to adapt PBL activities into the curriculum:

> A better explanation of how to fit the PBL in with content. Some teachers do not see how it fits in with the content they are teaching. Also, maybe have a list of community members or businesses that are willing to work with the schools. (Karen, personal interview, 2020)

Several participants also acknowledged the need for more training and professional development opportunities in order to successfully implement project-based learning into their school. Judy states that there needs to be more "resources and examples of different projects" (Personal interview, 2020) in order to prepare teachers more fully, while Karen focuses on increasing teacher knowledge and preparedness:

> A better explanation of how to fit the PBL in with content. Some teachers do not see how it fits in with the content they are teaching. Also, maybe have a list of community members or businesses that are willing to work with the schools. (Karen, personal interview, 2020)

Karen mentions the need for strong community outreach in order to successfully implement project-based learning into the school, and forming these relationships require years of experience, outreach, and development. Having more experience as a teacher is linked directly to teachers developing confidence and a stronger belief in their abilities as an educator.

Sub-Theme: PBL Successes. Participants revealed several success stories when it came to implementing project-based learning into their instructional methodology. Some mentioned the "hands on" aspect of PBL as being engaging and impactful on students' learning. Judy notes, "I love that it increases student engagement and helps to build their confidence to see how they can put their knowledge/skills into practice" (Judy, personal interview, 2020). Karen agreed with Judy's assertion, stating that PBL, "is so hands-on for the students and helps them to see how computers work. I love how it gets the students to think and be creative" (Karen, personal interview, 2020). Roger's response mentioned the "fun activities, high engagement" (Roger, personal interview, 2021) of his students, while Steve appreciated, "the cross-curricular aspect and notion of student engagement (that) was a refreshing thought" (Steve, personal interview, 2020). Finally, Amy enjoys "watching the students lead the projects," thus further developing their leadership skills while also providing them with a sense of ownership over their learning (Amy, personal interview, 2021). To help guide this team-building aspect of project-based learning assignments, the teachers created a self-evaluation document that allows the students to monitor their participation efforts (see APPENDIX K).

All the participants stated that they would recommend project-based learning as a foundational element of instructional practice for other schools, but most included some caveats before doing so. Judy stated that she would definitely recommend PBL for other schools because of the direct impact it can have on student's learning, "Students don't care about what they're learning if they don't know why they're learning it, and good projects really help with that" (Judy, personal interview, 2020). Karen agreed, stating

that PBL, "gets students more involved in what they are doing in class and gives the students more responsibility" (Karen, personal interview, 2020).

Amy recommends project-based learning because of the leadership skills it develops:

> I like the project-based learning because students feel like they are a part of the lessons, instead of just being told this is what you do. They tend to participate more when they are given the responsibility of leading the project. I believe all schools should implement project-based learning into their schools, but to do it in a way that is easier and smoother. If the actual process of the paperwork was allowed to be simplified, the teachers and students would not be as intimidated by project-based learning. (Amy, personal interview, 2021)

Despite these success stories, there were some negative aspects to PBL implementation in the study site that are discussed later in this chapter. Teachers past experience and years in education impacted their perceptions of successful implementation and was directly tied to the next theme of teacher efficacy—the level of confidence and belief in their ability to deliver effective instruction.

Theme 2: The role confidence (or lack thereof) plays in the participants ability to maneuver through new instructional models

My study found that participants were confident in their ability to deliver effective instruction. One participant responded that this confidence was based largely on their amount of time spent in the classroom and their familiarity with subject matter and content (Judy, personal interview, 2020). Karen also expressed confidence, noting:

> Depending on the content, I am usually super confident in my instruction. I try to always make my lessons relate to my students and show real-world examples. After a while, you learn to just roll with things even if they aren't working so the confidence comes from knowing I can create

something on the fly if the original lesson isn't working. (Karen, personal interview, 2020)

Roger and Amy also felt confident, particularly in their ability to break concepts down to understandable, manageable pieces (Roger, personal interview, 2021) and adapt their instruction to the needs of individual students (Amy, personal interview, 2021).

Meanwhile, Steve expressed confidence, while also recognizing his inherent shortcomings when compared to more experienced, knowledgeable teachers in his field:

> Very confident. I enjoy history, and my knowledge of my content in my delivery reflects that. Though, I do not possess the depth that other history teachers possess. Mine has been shaped to give my students more of a "main themes/concepts/big ideas" of history. (Steve, personal interview, 2020)

Sub-Theme: Introducing New Strategies. The participants confidence lagged, however, when it came to the concept of introducing new instructional strategies. When asked to explain what impacted this level of confidence, Judy and Amy both explained that they try "different things all the time," with Judy stating she is *marginally* comfortable doing so (Judy, personal interview, 2020) and Amy claiming to "always find(…) new ways to deliver material to (…) students" (Amy, personal interview, 2021). Similarly, Karen views her current teaching situation as having an impact on her level of comfort with trying new strategies:

> I would say that I am *decently* confident in trying new teaching strategies. As a science teacher, we have moved more towards project-based teaching and this was a bit new to me. I try to learn new things so that my students have changes too and aren't stuck with me using the same strategies. I base my confidence on the fact that I have implemented new teaching strategies throughout my 8 years of teaching. This year, I have used way more strategies due to teaching virtually. (Karen, personal interview, 2020)

The other participants were not as confident as she, with Roger placing his comfortability as a "5 out of 10" (Roger, personal interview, 2021) and Steve stating that he feels:

> Not very confident. New strategies and especially technology often seem exciting and revolutionary, but I don't always find them to be practical in the everyday sense. For me, this stems from the fact I find myself hard pressed to use new strategies because of all of the content and standards I have to teach. I often feel I don't have enough time—just barely enough to cover the content itself, along with formal assessments, and some activities. (Steve, personal interview, 2020)

Sub-Theme: Increasing Student Performance. The participants all felt that they need to find better means of engaging students in their learning. They state a desire to find ways to make the content more interesting to the students in order to help them succeed. Roger also states that there should be more accountability for the students to put forth effort and work harder (Roger, personal interview, 2021), but Steve offers a more substantive analysis of this issue when he states:

> Working in an alternative environment, this is a difficult concept. For the majority of my time, my students were historically lower achieving— hence the reason they were in an alternative setting. Many were taking a class for the second time. So I found it easier to give them the big ideas in their classes, while giving an overview of the unit, and adding in juicy tidbits of information that would pique their interest—often drug or sex related. History is full of sexual scandals and such, and it definitely worked. Over the past two years, our population has shifted some. Now we have a few very intelligent students who have emotional/mental health issues. I am finding it difficult to push them to the next level while still meeting the needs of my lower achievers. That being said, I have had numerous students tell me they enjoy my history classes and actually learned in them, where they have not enjoyed/learned in social students' classes before. (Personal interview, 2020)

Steve offers an analysis that considers location, past performance, mental health and behavior issues, and classroom demographics in examining how he could confidently improve his students' academic performance.

Amy acknowledges the need to increase student "buy-in," particularly given the current impact COVID-19 is having on instruction (Amy, personal interview, 2021). She states that the on again/off again nature of instruction this year has made reaching students and engaging them in class even more difficult than normal.

The participants also recognized the need for teachers with a strong sense of efficacy in order to successfully implement project-based learning into a school. Teachers who believe in their abilities and have the confidence to try new things are the ones who will see more success with project-based learning since doing so requires teachers to relinquish some level of control over the classroom. As Amy notes:

> I think teachers need to be more open to the students leading the classroom, rather than the teacher lecturing and leading the students. This is scary at first, because you have to give some control over to the students. Most teachers are taught to go by a certain curriculum and to stay on course. If teachers can be more open to what the students are capable of doing on their own, they would see the creative and innovative minds that students truly have and what they are capable of doing. I feel that more training on trusting the students and being open to change is needed. They also need to learn that failure is an option, without failure you can't grow. (Amy, personal interview, 2021)

One way to increase efficacy amongst the teachers is through professional development and training opportunities. Steve suggests, "spending time at a school who has successfully implemented PBL for a few years and has had proven track record of success with it. Ongoing training and PD with other PBL teachers and schools would helpful as well" (Personal interview, 2020). Roger concurs, stating that "Training and

time allotted during school hours to plan for PBL, ideally with a coach/mentor to help in the process" would greatly impact teacher efficacy and their belief in their abilities to deliver successful instruction (Personal interview, 2021). Providing teachers with the time and training to successfully implement new strategies is identified by participants as vital to future success, and anything less will surely result in failure.

Theme 3: The importance of school environment when designing a school-wide teaching methodology.

The participants state that the overall mood of their school is positive and that most employees seem happy to be there. Judy notes that she has, "never heard one staff member express unhappiness with our school! Everyone genuinely seems happy here, and like a family. When we don't like something, we're always able to be open about it and work out solutions" (Judy, personal interview, 2020).

Karen agrees with Judy's analysis, but adds that factors such as student population can impact the school's mood:

> I would say that we are a decently happy bunch. There are times when we are all very stressed, but I think that comes with the population we work with. For the most part, we are all happy to be there because we are doing what we love. Our moods are influenced by changes in the district, lack of communication etc." (Karen, personal interview, 2020)

Steve concurs, observing that the overall mood of the school is:

> Good for the most part. We had a bad patch a few years ago. Morale was very low. We had some very difficult students who were a detriment to the program and very little was being done by administration to alleviate the issue or get them out of the building. There were a lot of inconsistencies by teachers, staff, and admin that contributed to this and resulted in several staff leaving that year. It is much better now, and we have options for students who are a cancer to the culture or try and undermine the system. For the most part, everyone at this school enjoys working with this

population and enjoys working at this school. It is a much more laid-back type of atmosphere, but there is a sense of community. (Steve, personal interview, 2020)

Roger adds that "Everyone seems to be pretty happy being here. Principal is really good to work for, not a micro-manager, she cares deeply about the kids, but also supports us and cares about us" (Roger, personal interview, 2021). Amy acknowledges that the mood of the school was stronger last year due to the staff's ability to get more opportunities for the students to seek employment and other academic endeavors (Amy, personal interview, 2021).

The participants were asked whether or not project-based learning could be successfully implemented into any school environment and most believed it could, but with some exceptions. For example, Judy stated PBL could work in any environment, but is particularly impactful in alternative settings where, "students haven't otherwise been successful in traditional classrooms" (Personal interview, 2020). Judy also stated that PBL may work in any environment, but "not necessarily every single unit in every class" (Personal interview, 2020).

Karen also believes in the possibility of PBL implementation in any school but acknowledges the importance of funding when doing so. She states, "some schools (are) better suited for PBL implementation; I do think that this is true. Schools that have more money in the district can sometimes do more than other schools who have to raise money to complete projects" (Karen, personal interview, 2020).

Amy is a bit more skeptical, stating:

> I believe the environment is a huge problem. In the alternative setting, I have more opportunities because we are more like a family. We can get everyone on board with any project the students come up with. However,

in the regular school environment, it is hard to get all teachers, staff, and administrators on board. They like to have the standards and know exactly what they are doing at all times and rely on standardized testing. With PBL, you do not truly know what each day will hold, this is why I like PBL. I enjoy watching the students have that "lightbulb moment" I believe all students like the hands-on approach, even the students that don't like the physical "doing" part of the projects. However, they enjoy being the leader and voice of the project, they get their public speaking and leadership skills fine-tuned with having a voice, while the hands-on students get the inventive, building, and manufacturing skills from the project. While everyone gets the knowledge and skills of working in a high functioning team. PBL is a win-win for everyone, it is building the future of the world. PBL is difficult to understand at first and you need to have patience and an open mind. The students and I both had a rough start with PBL because it was new to all of us. However, once we did our first project, everyone felt a little easier. The students enjoyed knowing they contributed and that they helped others in the process.

Amy thus acknowledges the importance of the environment on the perceptions of successful PBL implementation. She recognizes that PBL might be more successful in a smaller, more controlled environment than a "regular" school due to the ability to promote teacher buy-in more successfully with a smaller staff.

Steve expands on this concept of teacher buy-in by examining a key element of any school environment: the leadership and administration:

> You HAVE to have full buy in from all stakeholders. I think for our situation a few years ago, we didn't have that--from staff or students. It seemed like the principal at the time just said, "do this," but didn't offer any guidance or much support. Students really didn't seem on board either. For it to be successful, I think there has to be some flexibility with the standards and the curriculum as well. I found it very overwhelming to implement PBL in a cross-curricular manner, but still cover the standards. (Steve, personal interview, 2020)

Roger agrees, specifically identifying the school culture as a key element of successful PBL implementation, "Teachers need to be comfortable with it, and the school

culture (especially with student conduct) must be strong enough that students can work

independently" (Personal interview, 2021). Since school culture, especially as it relates

to discipline, is dictated by school leadership, then it is of vital importance to promote a

school environment that acknowledges and respects these specific needs.

Roger was also reluctant to suggest implementing PBL "universally" (Roger,

personal interview, 2021) for fear of push back from teachers and students alike, and

Steve concurred:

> The concept (of PBL) is definitely cool. And it certainly works to improve
> student engagement and understanding—provided all stakeholders are
> motivated and have a vested interest in it. If you can successfully implement
> it, and get a few years of practice with it, then it can be an amazing tool for
> learning. But when it is kind of forced on you with very little guidance and
> support, and neither students nor teachers seem motivated to actually use
> it—it is doomed to fail. Even some PBL web searches with history did not
> turn up many results a few years ago—perhaps that has changed. I came
> across a few teachers who did some 'deep dives' with a landmark SCOTUS
> case, and were able to implement a little cross- curricular concepts, but it
> did not appear to really be PBL. (Steve, personal interview, 2020)

Sub-Theme: Good and Bad. Findings indicate that there are things that are good

and going well at the school, but there are also some things that are not going well and

need to be improved. Participants acknowledged the dedication, caring, and commitment

of the school staff as some of their greatest strengths, as are the small class sizes,

flexibility, and family atmosphere. Several mentioned that the staff works well together

and has a genuine caring and sense of empathy for the student population.

The participants also identified several factors that could be improved upon

within the school, many of which come from outside sources negatively impacting their

environment. Judy noted, "as an alternative school, we often don't have the

resources/connections that a lot of other schools do and have to find other ways or jump

through more hoops to get things done and make sure our students have everything they

need at school and at home" (Judy, personal interview, 2020). Amy expressed

disappointment that the alternative students are not afforded the same extra-curricular

opportunities made available to the "regular" high school students (prom, athletics, etc.)

(Amy, personal interview, 2021). Steve identified biases held by outside parties toward

the students and staff as being one of the worst things impacting his school:

> Perceptions from outside students, teachers, and community about the
> "bad kids" that attend my school. Other outside teachers often think the
> alternative school is also for teachers who cannot cut it at a "normal"
> school. The transient nature of our students is also difficult as getting
> ahold of them or their parents at home is frustrating. They move
> frequently and get a new cell phone number several times during the
> school year. Some parents are supportive, while other parents/guardians
> are practically non-existent. (Steve, personal interview, 2020)

Roger acknowledged the social and emotional needs of his students as being a

hindrance to success for students and staff alike, stating that it is extremely difficult

"breaking through walls that kids have built up toward school and teachers before ever

coming here" (Roger, personal interview, 2021).

Judy mentioned the amount of time available to work on a project as a negative

factor in implementing project-based learning in her school. Working in an alternative

environment further compounded these difficulties, as she observed, "The time

constraints (were difficult). It can be hard to make sure they learn all the content they

should, and also complete so many time-intensive projects" (Judy, personal interview,

2020). The lack of adequate time was made more difficult given the student population

of the school site. As Roger noted, there was, "Difficulty managing it, for unmotivated

kids, the decreased structure makes it even harder to hold them accountable" (Roger, personal interview, 2021).

Karen mentioned the lack of proper training as negative aspect of PBL implementation at her school, stating that she was the only teacher on staff to have undergone any sort of training or professional development in project-based learning (Karen, personal interview, 2020). Amy expressed some displeasure with the administrative requirements of project-based learning, noting, "The least enjoyable (part) was just the process of how it was to be planned out, the paperwork. If we could just do the projects and write just a summary of what we did that would be less confusing for everyone. Our paperwork is complicated and confusing sometimes" (Amy, personal interview, 2021). Amy shared that as a result of the cumbersome and confusing paperwork that was previously required, she has recently simplified the process to make it more accommodating (see APPENDIX I).

However, it was Steve who offered the most detail in regard to his school's struggles to make project-based learning a foundational methodology within his school:

> The implementation itself was not successful. A year before we had formal training on it, our then principal explained the concept and said she wanted us to implement it. We each chose a topic and then students joined us based on what topic they wanted to explore. I did a physical fitness one. It was more hands-on learning than PBL. That summer we did formal PBL training, but we struggled with it. We designed a unit that centered on a concept we wanted to teach students using a movie. Then we added cross-curricular components. For whatever reason, we did not use it. Once the school year started the principal said she wanted to see PBL but did not hold anyone accountable for actually using it. I personally found it very difficult to implement it while still covering all of the standards of my curriculum and ensuring students mastered those standards. So, I kind of gave up on it. During the training, we saw examples from schools who did a phenomenal job of using PBL, and it worked well. But I do not feel our

teachers were really motivated to actually use it. (Steve, personal interview, 2020)

Steve continued, noting that "The emphasis from our principal at the time was more of a 'this is what I want to you do, now go figure it out.' There really was not much guidance at all on the topic. It was such a broad concept, that I struggled with it, so I fell back into my 'old' traditional instructional methods/models" (Steve, personal interview, 2020).

Sub-Theme: Changes. The participants identified proper funding as one of the changes they would like to see implemented into their school. As Judy observed, more money is needed to properly provide for the students' educational needs within the school (Judy, personal interview, 2020). Steve expanded on this belief, arguing that they "are lacking in technology and general materials compared to other schools, so having enough computers/Chromebooks for all students would be very nice to have" (Steve, personal interview, 2020).

Steve acknowledges the need for more skilled, better prepared teachers to meet the difficulties that arise within the alternative school environment:

> Over the years, we have had some very unqualified teachers who have come through our building. We have tried to get good people, but sometimes we have to take "what's left." An incentivized pay scale may make an alternative school more of an attractive option for teachers. Our school is not a traditional alternative school in the sense that our students are violent or dangerous, so hazard pay is not needed. But getting quality educators who care about students and want to work with the population can be hard, so figuring out a way to get good teachers would be nice. (Steve, personal interview, 2020)

Karen builds upon Steve's sentiment by adding that there are teachers (like herself) teaching content in which they are not certified nor familiar (Karen, personal interview, 2020).

Amy, on the other hand, expressed a desire to change the way outsiders perceive the school and its students:

> I would change the way people look at our school. Most people hear or see our school and immediately think "oh that is the school for the bad kids", this always upsets me. I explain to people every chance I get, that we are not that kind of school. We have some of the most bright, amazing, well rounded, young individuals with a heart of servants I have ever met. (Amy personal interview, 2021)

Amy conveys a sentiment common in many alternative school teachers in terms of the way those outside the program view the students and teachers within. Labeling students as "bad kids" and teachers as incompetent or inept robs both of their complex, individualized identity and instead offers a generalization based on stereotyped cliches and biased assumptions. Doing so diminishes students and teachers alike and allows those outsiders to never fully understand the complexities of those within the alternative school setting, thus serving to only further perpetuate a deep misunderstanding of stakeholders who deserve a well-informed, compassionate understanding.

Summary

Based upon the responses from my participants, the findings of my study present three themes impacting the perception of success in implementing project-based learning into a learning environment:

- the impact of teacher's past experience, both as a student and educator, on their ongoing self-evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses as an educator,

- the role confidence (or lack thereof) plays in the participants ability to maneuver through new instructional models,
- the importance of school environment when designing a school-wide teaching methodology.

These themes are tied together and work hand-in-hand to influence the ability to successfully implement project-based learning into an alternative education center. The complex makeup of this environment and those who reside within it, students and teachers alike, demand close study and thorough analysis before determining whether or not to tackle an instructional methodology as complex as project-based learning.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of my study was to examine and analyze the experiences of participant's implementation of project-based learning into an urban alternative education center in order to understand the perceptions of pedagogical success in doing so. The findings of my study are qualitative and should therefore are they necessarily relevant to a different environment than that of my site location. However, these results may apply to educational environments with similar staffing and student population. Readers can analyze the detailed descriptions of data collection and participant responses to determine relevance to their educational environments. The themes that presented themselves re-affirmed some existing literature regarding the implementation of project-based learning while also exposing new avenues that have yet to be explored and incorporated into the existing literature. In this chapter I will present my interpretations of the themes detailed in chapter 4. I will then provide a discussion of the limitations of my study and explore areas for future research.

Interpretation of Findings

Using strategies of reflexivity, I actively monitored the influence that my own beliefs and positions had on my research process and how I constructed my findings. In order to allow participants' voices to be conveyed clearly and to lessen the influence of my interpretations, I purposely saved my interpretations of the data for this section. In doing so, I have allowed the participants to present their responses in their original context and with less of the influence of my own perspective. What follows are my interpretations of each of the themes that resulted from my study.

Participants suggested their past experience, both as a student and educator, and their ongoing self-evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses as an educator, impacted the success of PBL implementation in their school.

As detailed in the findings section, participants stated that their perceptions of successful PBL implementation were influenced by their years as a student and as a teacher. While most expressed a level of enjoyment with school as a student, some described their time as a teacher as chaotic, demanding and ever changing. Never has this been truer than this year when all teachers were expected to take on new challenges in an environment that was largely unfamiliar to most. Some individuals are more comfortable with change and actually embrace the opportunity to try new things. However, others are hesitant to change and prefer things to stay the way they are.

Sub-theme: Teaching struggles. The findings demonstrated that participants with more years of teaching experience are more likely to resist change because they have been successful thus far doing what they do. To them, the old adage holds true. "if it isn't broken, don't fix it," so they continue to hold on to lean on their previous experience rather than opening up to the possibility of trying something new. This is troubling because these more experienced teachers have more confidence in their abilities yet have less willingness to adapt and try new things due in large part to this very confidence in their inherent abilities (Rogers, Cross and Grisalfi, 2011, p. 912).

The findings indicate that professional development and proper training, regardless of past experience with project-based learning or years of service, are of vital importance to successful PBL implementation. This requires not only time but also funding, which is troublesome when considering an alternative educational setting.

Students placed in alternative programs are often there as a last resort before dropping out. They have been placed there because of previous academic struggles, serious attendance issues, or significant and/or frequent behavioral incidents and they are rarely the focus of the larger district in which they reside. Too often these students are disproportionately students of color who reside in poorer urban communities and evidence shows that:

> Not only do funding systems allocate fewer resources to poor urban districts than to their suburban neighbors, but studies consistently show that, *within* these districts, schools with high concentrations of low-income and "minority" students receive fewer instructional resources than others in the same district. (Darling-Hammond, 2001, p. 208)

This results in a lack of funding that does not exist at the other schools in the district.

Unfortunately, professional development opportunities and training are expensive, so finding the funds to properly train school staff in project-based learning will be a challenge for any alternative school choosing to embrace this methodology. Combined with the time and effort these training opportunities would require, administrators and school leaders should consider the experience of their staff when determining if project-based learning is the most effective teaching methodology for their school.

Sub-theme: PBL successes. Participants acknowledged the positive aspects of project-based learning and the elements of PBL that they really enjoyed in their past experiences. The primary benefit of project-based learning that participants recognized was the "hands on" aspect of the learning. Students are much more engaged in their schoolwork when they have opportunities to take ownership of their learning. Doing so instills a sense of pride that resonates through the students and school alike.

Project-based learning promotes teamwork and fosters strong leadership skills within the students that they are able to apply to not only school but their personal life as well. This will equip students with the tools to succeed in life after high school, whether that be college or pursuing a career. In order to further enhance these leadership skills and teamwork methods, teachers should pursue as many opportunities for community outreach as possible.

Community outreach is crucial to project-based learning success. These projects should culminate with a finished product that is shared with the public and the best way of doing that is to reach out to the local community and encourage their involvement and support. Teachers can then compile a list of local businesses and community leaders that are willing to work with students to pursue their academic goals. This helps the school promote their students hard work and increase their profile in the local community. This is of vital importance for alternative schools since most community members either have no knowledge that the school even exists, or they have a false understanding of what the school is and who the students are, often mislabeling it as a school for "bad kids." **Participants suggested confidence (or lack thereof) played a role in their ability to maneuver through new instructional models such as those required of successful PBL implementation.**

The findings demonstrate an overall lack of confidence when it came to the concept of introducing new instructional strategies. Their confidence was expressed in terms such as "marginally" comfortable or "decently" confident in trying new strategies and they stated that this level was influenced by their content, their experience with it, and the demands of the environment in which they teach. Some even noted that the

current COVID-19 pandemic has forced them to try new things and has as a result made them even more confident in their abilities to try new instructional methods.

Some participants were even less positive in expressing their confidence level, stating that the ever-changing nature of education often seems to be self-defeating in that as soon as they are familiar with one new instructional method, things then change and everyone is moving on to the next best thing. This results in hindering the participants' confidence in their abilities and willingness to embrace change. This reluctance is compounded when participants consider the content and standards that that they are tasked with teaching. This results in participants feeling rushed and with no time to try new things so they again fall back on what they are familiar with and have done in the past.

Sub-theme: Introducing new strategies. Student engagement is of vital importance in reaching students and making them interested and invested in their own learning. Unfortunately, engagement is also a source of considerable concern for most teachers as they often doubt their abilities to make the content relevant and interesting for students. Disengaged students are often disruptive students, so increasing the teacher's belief in their ability to make the curriculum engaging which will in turn decrease behavior incidents and increase student knowledge.

Amy discussed the need for teachers to learn how to relinquish control over the classroom as a key to successful project-based learning implementation and doing so goes against the very nature of many (if not most) teachers. Allowing teachers to observe fellow teachers (both in their school and the district overall) would allow them to see different ways teachers relinquish this control. Some classrooms are highly structured

while others are much more organic and free flowing. Often this is determined by content, but more often it is a result of the teacher and their individual personality. Providing teachers with the opportunities for observation would not only show them new methods but would also re-affirm many of their own daily practices and increase their sense of efficacy in their abilities. .

Sub-theme: Increasing student performance. Again, professional development and proper training in project-based learning could directly impact teacher efficacy and provide them with the confidence to deliver effective instruction. Providing teachers with these professional development and training opportunities during school hours would increase the teacher's belief system without increasing their demands outside of the workday. Planning trips to nearby school sites that are successfully implementing PBL into their daily activities would allow teachers to build relationships with more experienced educators while seeing firsthand how impactful PBL can be. Fostering these mentorships would allow the teachers to mentor new teachers when they join the staff and would continually increase teacher efficacy and their belief in their abilities to deliver successful project-based learning instruction. Providing teachers with the time and training to successfully implement new strategies is identified by participants as vital to increasing teacher confidence in their abilities, which will ultimately result in future success.

Participants suggested the school environment plays an important role when implementing a schoolwide PBL teaching methodology.

Participant responses indicate that the environment of the school itself must be taken into consideration when determining whether or not to implement a move toward

project-based learning, and that doing so in a universal manner (meaning school-wide requirement free of teacher choice) is not suggested. Responses also indicate that while the overall mood of the school is important, the type of administrator leading the school is of more importance.

Sub-theme: Good and bad. Based upon past experiences with previous administrators, participants felt they were not given the proper support to successfully implement project-based learning. These past administrators dictated to staff that they were going to do project-based learning and that they had no say so in the matter. They were provided with an initial training opportunity and then set loose to their own devices to implement PBL into their instructional practices. There was no follow up or checks for understanding (or implementation for that matter) and the teachers were left floundering like a rudderless ship, with no idea of where exactly they were going or how was best to get there.

This dictatorial approach is not what is needed to successfully implement project-based learning into an alternative school setting. A leader who is more focused on best practices and the means of achieving success is crucial to PBL success. While a. micro-manager is not needed, there is a need for someone focused on results and determined to not only follow through but also be willing to listen to suggestions from the staff and to provide the tools for success that they so desperately need. This leader must be one who is willing to encourage the teachers to use their voice to thoroughly analyze and explain what is and isn't working. They must also be allowed the freedom of choosing when and where to implement project-based learning into their instruction.

Sub-theme: Changes. PBL should not be used as the one and only method of instruction available to teachers; they must be allowed to decide when project-based learning works for their academic content and when it's best to use some other methodology. Therefore, teacher voice and teacher choice are crucial to the school environment and whether or not PBL will work in this environment.

Participants also expressed concern over time constraints of implementing project-based learning, so an environment that is accepting and open to flexibility would be best suited for implementing PBL. In this regard, alternative education centers would appear to be a perfect fit, as things often change and adaptations are continually made to students' daily schedule. However, there is an emphasis on credit recovery and helping students matriculate toward graduation that exists in most alternative education settings, so it is hard to justify accommodating the time demands inherent in most project-based learning. In order to do so, teachers must be willing to constantly assess and adapt assignments to help the students fulfill the mastery requirement of academic standards built into their curriculum. Therefore, the school environment must be one that is flexible and open to change in order to successfully implement project-based learning into their daily instruction.

Limitations

My study was designed using a qualitative research model. As mentioned previously, the results of my study are not expected to be generalizable to a drastically different educational environment. However, the findings might be relatable to comparable environments with similar staffing and student population, but in doing so one should carefully consider the following limitations.

The location of my study site is located in the state of Kentucky, considered by most to be a southern state that adheres to many of the cultural and societal norms of that geographic region. The site is technically an "urban" setting based upon the size of the school district and its location within the community. While this delineation itself is not a limitation, it must be noted that the urban setting means that the study is not generalizable to other environments. A site in a more rural area might have less exposure to diversity and might present a different set of societal problems than those experienced by the participants of my study. The demographics of the participants themselves also play a role in the transferability of my study. Using a purposeful sample that was limited due to COVID-19 meant that my participant pool was limited by the small size of the school staff and resulted in a fairly homogenous group of participants that is not necessarily representative of the school itself. My sample consisted of mostly female (4 females; 2 males) participants, ad all six identified as White or Caucasian. A more diverse participant pool with various racial identities and cultural backgrounds would likely present a richer discussion full of more insightful perceptions of the school environment and attempted project-based learning implementation.

Another limitation to consider is the fact that the participants all volunteered for my study. This willingness to participate in the study could be indicative of a belief system that allowed them to perceive the study as either relevant to their experience and understanding, or somehow beneficial to their personal or professional growth. Their open attitude toward participating in my study might indicate an interest in project-based learning that could be either positive or negative. In volunteering for my study they may have thought that doing so could either encourage administration to pursue a more

concerted effort toward project-based learning implementation or discourage them from ever doing so in the future.

Another limitation of my study is the role that I played in the study itself. While it is crucial that I not be a member of their school community in order to conduct un-biased research, being an outsider in such a small, tight knit school environment hinders my ability to establish a genuine rapport with the participants themselves. School staff is very protective of their environment and often view outsiders as unwelcome intruders looking to expose their shortcomings or uncover some hidden truth about their abilities as educators. Therefore, it is essential to develop a cordial relationship with participants that puts them at ease and makes them feel comfortable with who I am and why I am there. Developing this relationship takes time and effort, both of which were hindered by issues outside my control.

My role was further hindered by the global COVID-19 pandemic impacting access to the school and staff in a face-to-face manner. While I was still able to conduct school visits and meet with teachers in their classrooms, when I did there were limited students in the building. At one point an entire portion of the school was under quarantine, with teachers and students working virtually from home. Surely my interactions with the school and its staff would have been different were it not under the throws of this pandemic, thus my role within the overall study was impacted and must be deemed a limiting factor in my study.

A final consideration would be how my appearance and position might influence participant responses. As the researcher, I considered how participants' perceptions of me might impact their responses. First, I am a teacher in the adjacent school district to

that of my site location. My district is larger, more diverse, and pays significantly higher wages than the site of my study. Could the close proximity and familiarity with my district have influenced not only the participants' responses, but also the field with which I was able to choose participants? Did some potential participants choose not to do so based upon some negative connotation associated with my employment in the neighboring school district? The professional positionalities must be considered as a possible limitation of the study itself.

Suggestions for Future Research

The research on project-based learning implementation within alternative education are somewhat limited, as evidenced in my literature review chapter. This indicates that there are limitless opportunities for future research and increased knowledge. What follows is a proposal of how others can expand upon my study to expand their knowledge and understanding of PBL implementation, as well as how to further research the pedagogy of teaching in alternative education settings.

Future researchers could design studies that consist of opportunities for more diverse participant samples. As mentioned previously, my participants were predominantly female and all White/Caucasian. A richer, fuller understanding of PBL implementation could be produced through a participant pool that included non-White and gender non-conforming individuals. Doing so would present a more well-rounded approach that presents a greater comprehension of PBL implementation that might also allow for an increase in transferability for other studies.

Another avenue of future research would be to conduct a similar study but in a different location and then compare and contrast the two in order to identify similarities

and differences between the two. This would provide the researcher with evidence of the foundational strategies of success regardless of environment. For instance, identify a site located in a rural location and compare it to my urban site location. Or choose an alternative education center serving a much larger student population and compare it with one in a much smaller environment. The similarities and differences that would present themselves through such a study would provide invaluable information on what does and does not work in each environment and would thus open up opportunities for transferability and increased successful PBL implementation.

Lastly, my study elicited findings that presented themes that could be further explored or could lead to different themes altogether. Future researchers could employ a quantitative or mixed methods approach in order to validate the themes presented in my study. Specifically, future researchers could produce a study that explores a quantified understanding of how project-based learning is deemed successful (or not) by specifically measuring responses based on a numerical scale.

Conclusion

An examination of the implementation of project-based learning into an alternative educational environment remains quite limited and is largely non-existent. The findings of my qualitative study provide valuable insights into the factors that influence perceptions of success and presents several themes that need to be addressed when determining the viability of project-based learning within an alternative educational setting. Project-based learning is an exciting, engaging, interesting methodology that offers dynamic opportunities for students and teachers alike. However, teachers must

consider their past experience, their level of efficacy, and the school environment when determining whether or not project-based learning is appropriate for them.

In order to successfully implement project-based learning teachers must first consider whether they should even attempt to do so in the first place. Teachers whose past experience has presented a negative impression of PBL will be less likely to fully engage in the process required for successful implementation. Students are highly perceptive, and if they deem a teacher is not excited about something they are likely to not be excited as well. Teachers experience also impacts their willingness to try new instructional methods. Therefore, if a teacher has been doing the same thing for 20 years they are more likely to be unwilling to try something new for fear of failure or a lack of desire to engage in new processes.

Teacher efficacy also influences the successful implementation of project-based learning into an alternative setting. A teacher's sense of confidence and belief in their abilities is often impacted by their level of experience in education. As a result, teachers with more experience are likely to be more confident than a newer teacher with less experience, so one would think that through this confidence they would be more willing to "put in the work" required of successfully implementing PBL. Unfortunately, the teachers with more experience, who are more confident, are often less likely to see the true value of project-based learning in an alternative setting.

Finally, the school environment plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of project-based learning into an alternative setting. Steve addressed this fact clearly when he stated:

> I believe PBL works best in a school environment where students are
> highly motivated to learn, and there is a high degree of buy-in from all

stakeholders. Often, in alternative environments, buy-in from students is non-existent. And per PBL, students are supposed to come up with their own "problem" to solve? Not happening. It is also difficult to execute when advanced training isn't available or teachers struggle with cross curricular implementation. In my school, we were expected to utilize PBL, make it cross curricular, and still teach all standards for our classes--this is an insurmountable task. I also felt we did not have full support from our administrator, she told us PBL is what she wanted us to use, set us up with a training, then turned us loose. On-going support wasn't there and there was not anyone to turn to for guidance and/or assistance. (Steve, personal interview, 2020)

Unfortunately, highly motivated students and stakeholders with a "high degree of buy-in" are not often found in alternative school settings. Often the students are placed into these settings *because* of their lack of motivation, and the teaching applicants for alternative positions are often teachers who have bounced around or who could not obtain positions at the "regular" school. This is the opposite of what Steve identifies as crucial to PBL success. Beyond these limitations, school leadership must also be firmly devoted to PBL implementation and must be willing to provide the time and training required of effectively doing so. Fortunately for my study site, they have such a leader in place at present, which should afford them opportunities to pursue project-based learning more in the future.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Teacher Questions

TITLE OF STUDY: <u>Perceptions of the Impact of Project-Based Learning Within an Urban Alternative Education Center</u>

RESEARCHER: <u>William Trent Hamlin</u>

INTRODUCTION: This study will focus on teachers and the level of PBL implementation teachers are using in their daily classroom activities and instruction. In conducting this study, the researcher will look at your perceptions of the impact of PBL practices in this setting. The study will not examine the students in any way whatsoever and will focus exclusively on the faculty and administration. The data derived from this interview will then be coded to examine trends in terms of implementation and perceived impact on instruction. The interviews and data collected will be strictly confidential and will not include your name or specific position within the school.

Participation is strictly voluntary and entirely confidential. Participation will require no extra work on your part, other than agreeing to this, and any additional interviews deemed necessary. The researcher will also conduct classroom visits to observe instruction and activities but agrees to not disturb your planning or instruction in any way whatsoever.

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. How would you describe your past experience in school, both in your personal life as a student, and your professional life as a teacher?
2. What do you consider your greatest struggle as a teacher?
3. What is your level of confidence delivering instruction in your classroom?
4. How confident are you in trying new teaching strategies? What is this level of confidence based upon?
5. What efforts could be made to increase student performance in your classes?
6. How would you describe the mood amongst staff at your school? Are most staff happy to be here? What factors influence this mood?
7. What are the best and worst things about your school?
8. What would you change about your school and why?
9. What did you enjoy about the project-based learning methodology implemented at your school?
10. What was least enjoyable about the project-based learning methodology implemented at your school?
11. How did an emphasis on project-based learning differ from instructional models at your previous schools?
12. As a teacher, what were the greatest challenges of project-based learning?

Would you suggest more schools adopt a project-based learning model for their instructional practices? Why or why not?

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Announcement

Hello, my name is Trent Hamlin and I am a doctoral student at Eastern Kentucky University studying Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. I am also a teacher at an alternative school in Fayette County and am intrigued by the good work you are doing here at your school. I wanted to make you aware of my presence in your school this semester and ask for your help in a study I am conducting.

Your director has been so kind as to allow me to use your school as the site location for a study I am conducting regarding Project-Based Learning (PBL) in an alternative school setting. This study will focus on teachers and the level of PBL implementation teachers are using in their daily classroom activities and instruction. In conducting this study, I want to look at the teachers and administrator's perceptions of the impact of these practices in this setting. The study will not examine the students in any way whatsoever and will focus exclusively on the faculty and administration. Data will be collected via in-person, one-on-one interviews between the researcher (myself) and the staff. This data will then be coded to examine trends in terms of implementation and perceived impact on instruction. The interviews and data collected will be strictly confidential and will not include your name or specific position within the school.

I am reaching out to you to see if you would be interested in participating in my study. Participation is strictly voluntary and entirely confidential. Participation will require no extra work on your part, other than agreeing to be interviewed by me as needed. I would conduct classroom visits to observe instruction and activities, but I agree to not disturb your planning or instruction in any way whatsoever.

Please reach out to me by email at william_hamlin@mymail.eku.edu, trent.hamlin@fayette.kyschools.us or by phone at (859) 806-2085. I thank you for your time and consideration and look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,
William Trent Hamlin

APPENDIX C

Recruitment Email

Good afternoon,

My name is Trent Hamlin and I am the English instructor at Success Academy in Lexington. I am also working on my dissertation in Educational Leadership at EKU and after speaking with -------- at ---------- I have been granted approval to use your school as the site location for my study. This is the reason I am writing you today: I wondered if you would be willing to participate in my study.

My study looks at teachers integrating project-based learning into an alternative school setting. Specifically, I want to look at whether this popular practice is being implemented, to what extent it is (or isn't) being implemented, and the perceptions of success of such implementation in an alternative school environment (as opposed to a traditional school setting).

Your participation would just include a questionnaire, interviews with me, and classroom observations (once students return). I would not include students in the study, so there are no possibilities of privacy issues or the like. The study is strictly from a teacher's perspective.

------------ told me you have been on campus and that I could come visit one day so I wanted to reach out to you and see if that would be okay.

Please reply to this email and let me know if you are willing to help me out by participating in my study. I look forward to hearing from you and (hopefully) working with you on my dissertation.

Thank you so very much!
Trent Hamlin
(859) 806-2085

APPENDIX D

Consent Form
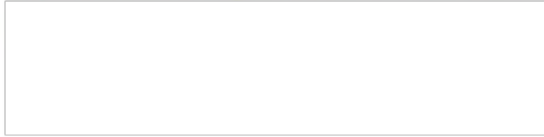
July 9, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

I, ██████ principal at ████████████████ grant permission for William Trent Hamlin to use the school as the site of his study for his dissertation. Mr. Hamlin will be granted access to faculty, staff and administration, as well as the ability to visit and observe classroom instruction. Mr. Hamlin will also be granted access to student and employee handbooks and other school communication related to his topic of study.

Sincerely,

Laura Rice

Stree
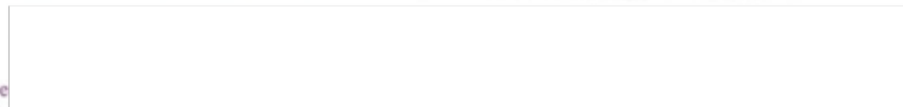
APPENDIX E

Voluntary Placement

Alternative Education Placement

PROTOCOL FOR MAKING VOLUNTARY PLACEMENTS PER POLICY 09.4341.

This form will accompany an alternative placement application.

Student:

School:

Placement Request: ___ (MS/HS)Day Program ____ Modified Schedule ____ Involuntary

Date of Request:

Completed Application: ___Yes _____No

*The District Referral Committee will NOT evaluate incomplete applications per Policy 09.4341.

IEP/504/ELL: Circle all that apply

Referral Committee Ruling:

Director of Secondary Education: _____ Yes _____ No

Director of Student Services: _____ Yes _____ No

Director of Special Education: _____ Yes _____No

Alternative School Principal/Designee: _____ Yes _____ No

Superintendent Designee: (if needed) _____ Yes _____ No

Placement Ruling/Next Steps:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Review/Revised:8/29/2019

APPENDIX F

Involuntary Placement

Alternative School Involuntary Placement Referral

Student Name _____

School _____ **Current Grade** _____

Check the following reason(s) for referring the student for an involuntary placement at ━━━ ━━━━━━.

☐ Distribution or sale of drugs at school or school-sponsored event.

☐ Assault (as defined by Student Code of Conduct, Board Policy, and/or state law)

☐ Possession of a weapon (as defined by Student Code of Conduct, Board Policy, and/or state law) at school or school-sponsored event.

☐ Second Offense – under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

☐ Second Offense—starts or premeditates a fight.

☐ Terroristic Threatening

☐ Enrolling in the District from another alternative school setting.

Describe the incident leading to the student's recommendation for an involuntary alternative placement.. (Please make sure all information is updated in IC.)

_____

_____

_____

Date Received by Placement Committee

Committee Decision: Approved _____ *Denied _____

*Reason for denial: _____

Committee Member Signature_____ Date_____

Committee Member Signature _____ Date_____

Committee Member Signature_____ Date_____

Committee Member Signature_____ Date_____

Committee Member Signature_____ Date_____

Home School Principal Signature _____ Date_9/15/20_____

Review/Revised:9/26/2019

Page 1 of 1

APPENDIX G

Transition Form

PROTOCOL FOR TRANSITIONS WITHIN ▇▇ OR TO DISTRICTED SCHOOL
This form will accompany the ILPA

Student:

Current Placement: ____ Day Program ____ Modified Schedule ___ Ignition
____ Involuntary ____ Night School

Districted School:

Circle all that apply: IEP   504   ELL

Consent to Proceed:

Assistant Superintendent/Designee: _____ Date: _____

Date of ILPA Transition Meeting or ARC/504: _____

ILPA Committee Placement Ruling:

If a student has an IEP or 504 Plan, the ILPA must be an ARC/504 team and convene an ARC/504 meeting to make placement decisions.

___ Transition to Districted School   ___ Continue at ▇▇   ___ Transition to New ▇▇ Program

_____ Day Program

_____ Modified Schedule

_____ Involuntary

_____ Night School

ILPA Committee's Recommendation:

_____
_____
_____

What interventions and resources are needed to help with student's successful transition?

_____
_____
_____

ILPA (ARC/504) Committee Member Signatures:

Alternative Education Principal/Designee: _____

Districted School Principal/Designee (if applicable) _____

Parent: _____

Other Member(s): _____

Completed form must be submitted to Director of Secondary Education

APPENDIX H

Voluntary Application

Alternative Placement Voluntary Application Form

STEP 1: APPLICATIONS AND LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

A. ██████████████ Placement Application: All students interested in joining ███████ must complete the Student Application form. Be sure to respond to ALL parts of the application and have a parent/guardian complete their portion of the application. **Parent signature is required. Applications and recommendations are to be given to the appropriate guidance counselor no later than March 1 of each year.**

B. **Letter of Recommendation:** Students must have a staff member from their home high school complete the recommendation form. Give the staff member enough time to respond to all sections of the recommendation form.

C. **Parent/Guardian Recommendation Form:** A parent/guardian must respond to all questions on this form. **Parent signature is required.**

STEP 2: INTERVIEW AND VISIT All applicants will receive an interview from an alternative program staff member and a possible invitation for a school visit.

STEP 3: STUDENT NOTIFICATION AND SCHEDULING Students will be notified if they have been accepted to the alternative program before the end of the current school year.

For more information, please contact the school Principal.

██████████

**██████████ ALTERNATIVE PLACEMENT IS A COMMUNITY OF CHOICE. THERE ARE LIMITED SPOTS AND ARE BASED ON THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS AS WELL AS WHICH STUDENTS CAN BE BEST SERVED THROUGH ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION.

Page 1 of 4

APPENDIX H (contd.)

Voluntary Application (contd.)

Alternative Placement Voluntary Application Form

STAFF RECOMMENDATION FORM

Student Name   **Current Grade**
Recommending Staff Member

How long have you known the applicant?

What are the reasons you are recommending this student for Alternative Placement?

_____ **Grades**   _____ **Behavior**   _____ **Other**

_____
_____
_____

Tier 2 strategies used (attach documentation):

(Please Note: There must be evidence-based strategies related to the reason for recommending the student.)

_____
_____
_____

Tier 3 strategies used (attach documentation):

(Please Note: There must be evidence-based strategies related to the reason for recommending the student.)

_____
_____
_____

Does the student receive counseling/therapy?   □ **Yes**   □ **No**

Types of Counseling (check all that apply):   □ **School Based**   □ **Outside Agency**
□ **Other**

Does the student have a mentor?   □ **Yes** □ **No**

Mentor Meeting Frequency: □ **Daily** □ **Weekly** □ **Bi-weekly** □ **Monthly** □ **Other:**
_____

Name of Counselors/Therapists: _____

Please attach the following related documents:
_____ Transcript
_____ Current Grades
_____ Academic and behavior interventions (include mentoring, counseling both in and out of school)
_____ Signature of Case Manager (if applicable) _____
_____ Completed Student application
_____ Completed Parent/Guardian and School Recommendation forms

HOME SCHOOL PRINCIPAL'S SIGNATURE_____ DATE_____

APPENDIX H (contd.)

Voluntary Application (contd.)

Alternative Placement Voluntary Application Form

STUDENT APPLICATION

Student Name ▰▰▰▰▰   **Current Grade**

Parent/Guardian Info: Name

Email_____**Work Phone**_____ **Cell Phone**_____

QUESTIONS FOR THE STUDENT

1.   **In which program are you interested?**

Daytime: Grades 7-12 Regular school day schedule Use of Discovery	▰▰▰▰▰ Typically for juniors and seniors Dual Credit Flexible scheduling	*Modified* : Typically for students in need of 4 credits or less to graduate

2.   **How would you benefit by attending the alternative program?**

_____
_____
_____
_____

3.   **What are some of your personal strengths and educational interests? In what areas would you like to improve?**

_____
_____
_____

4.   **What are some goals that you have for your future? Where do you see yourself after graduation from high school?**

_____
_____
_____

Page 3 of 4

APPENDIX H (contd.)

Voluntary Application (contd.)

Alternative Placement Voluntary Application Form

PARENT/GUARDIAN/MENTOR RECOMMENDATION FORM

Student Name_____   Current Grade_____

As a parent/guardian, you have spent more time with your child than school staff. Therefore, you are asked to share your insights on this form.

Evaluate your child's personal qualifications using the following key:

1. Outstanding 2. Above Average 3. Average 4. Below Average

_____ Dependability: Ability to get results, reliability, promptness, attendance.

_____ Maturity: Poise, emotional stability.

_____ Personality: Congenial, considerate, likeable.

_____ Behavior: Well-mannered, sincere, and able to follow rules.

_____ Work Habits: Industrious, self-reliant, sets priorities, goes above and beyond.

_____ Basic Attitude: Positive thinking, open-minded, likes people.

_____ Leadership: Decisive, dynamic, self-confident.

1. In which program are you interested in for your student?

Daytime: Grades 7-12 Regular school day schedule Use of Discovery	~~Scott County Middle College~~ Typically for juniors and seniors Dual Credit Flexible scheduling	*Modified :* Typically for students in need of 4 credits or less to graduate

2. Have there been any personal circumstances affect your child's educational experiences or personal development? Please explain (use added sheets if needed).

_____
_____
_____

Parent's/Guardian's Name (Printed)_____

Parent's/Guardian's Signature _____   Date_____

Review/Revised:7/25/2019

Page 4 of 4

APPENDIX I

PBL Worksheet

P R O J E C T O V E R V I E W		
Name of Project: Click here to enter text.	**Duration (days):** Click here to enter text.	**Written For:** ☐Period Schedule ☐Trimester ☐Block Schedule ☐Semester
Subject/Course: JAG	**Teacher(s):** Click here to enter text.	**State:** Click here to enter text.	**Grade Level(s):** ☐7/8 ☐11/12 ☐Any ☐9/10 ☐Alternative Ed. ☐Out of school

Other Subject Areas to Be Included: Click here to enter text.	

Project Summary What will the students be doing? What challenges will they face? What is the purpose?	Click here to enter text.
Driving Question What problems/questions will students be learning about?	Click here to enter text.
Entry Event How will you introduce the topic in an engaging way?	Click here to enter text.

Public Product				
Public Product How will students be able to demonstrate what they have learned?	**Team:**	Click here to enter text.	How will students demonstrate competency attainment as a team? Click here to enter text.	**Presentation Audience** ☐Class ☐School ☐Community
	Individual:	Click here to enter text.	How will students demonstrate competency attainment individually? Click here to enter text.	☐Experts ☐Web ☐Other:Click here to enter text.

95

APPENDIX I (contd.)

PBL Worksheet (contd.)

PROJECT OVERVIEW		
Competency Attainment What competencies should students understand, know and be able to do as a result of the PBL?	What competencies will you introduce? **(Level 1):** Click here to enter text. What competencies will be in progress during this project? **(Level 2):** Click here to enter text. Which competencies will students be able to demonstrate mastery by the end of this project? **(Level 3):** Click here to enter text.	

Formative Assessments (Check all that apply) How will you assess student learning throughout the PBL?	☐Checklists	☐Notes	☐Preliminary Plans/Outlines/Prototypes
	☐Concept Maps	☐Online Tests/Exams	☐Quizzes/Tests
	☐Journal/Learning Log	☐Practice Presentation	☐Rough Drafts
	☐Other (see PBL Library for ideas): Click here to enter text.		

Summative Assessments (Check all that apply) How will you assess student learning at the completion of the project?	☐Essay	☐Peer Evaluation	
	☐Multiple Choice/Short Answer Test	☐Self-Evaluation	
	☐Oral Presentation, with rubric	☐Written Final, with rubric	
	☐Other (see PBL Library for ideas): Click here to enter text.		

Reflection Methods How will you provide intentional opportunities for students to reflect on learning throughout the PBL?	**(Individual, Group, and/or Whole Class)**	☐Journal/Learning Log	☐Focus Group
		☐Whole-Class Discussion	☐Fishbowl Discussion
		☐Survey	☐Other (see PBL Library for ideas): Click here to enter text.

APPENDIX I (contd.)

PBL Worksheet (contd.)

PROJECT CALENDAR				
MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
PROJECT WEEK ONE				
Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.
PROJECT WEEK TWO				
Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.

APPENDIX J

PBL Overview

Project Name Senior Celebrations	**Teacher(s)**	**Subject(s)** Project Dependent

1. Project Summary

Students will plan and implement some event that will honor the seniors.

2. Essential Questions

How does our society honor major rites of passages in life?

3. Products

Products will vary.

4. Learning Goals

Identify the curriculum content that students will learn in this project.
SL.11-12.1 – Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
SL.11-12.2 – Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g. visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions solve problems, evaluation the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.
SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

Identify key skills students will learn in this project. List only those skills you plan to assess.
Communication
Collaboration
Project Planning
Speaking Skills
Time Management

5. Timeline/milestones

List the key dates and important milestones for this project (e.g. check-ins, critique sessions, deadlines for drafts and specific product components).

1. Mini-Presentation – Due April 18
   a. Introduce Project on April 4 (Power Point)

APPENDIX J (contd.)

PBL Overview (contd.)

      b.   Small groups of students will present a personal rite of passage or research and present a rite of passage from another culture
           i.   April 4-5, ------ students will brainstorm a list of rites of passage and then pick their projects. The rest of the brainstormed list will then be shared with ------, -----, ------, and ------ assigned to their students
          ii.   Students will research their rite of passage and design a digital presentation. Presentation must have at least five slides and no more than 10. Minimum requirements include a description of the rite of passage, the history behind the rite of passage, and why is it significant to the culture. Appropriate pictures should be included as well.
         iii.   On presentation day, the group must stand up on the stage and make a brief introduction.

2. Entry Event – April 18
    a.   Immediately following Gallery Walk
    b.   Teachers dress in caps/gowns
    c.   Each teach presents a short speech about why graduation was a rite of passage for them.
    d.   Power Point – Pictures of teachers as high school seniors; explanation of rite of passage; essential question; introduction of project

3. Project Idea Development – Start week of April 18
    a.   Form Groups in 4th hour classes
    b.   Brainstorm project ideas (Power Point)
    c.   Critical Friend Protocol
    d.   Fine tune plan

4. Panel Presentations
    a.   Each group will meet with a panel (composed of teachers) to present and discuss project for the purpose of improving the idea
    b.   Fine tune plan

5. Project Work Time
    a.   Scheduled as needed by 4th hour teachers

6. Mid-Point – Critical Friend Protocol

7. Event
    a.   Date or Dates TBD

8. Presentations
    a.   TBD

APPENDIX K

Self-Evaluation Document

I helped my team.

still learning   sometimes   almost always

I listened to the ideas of my teammates.

still learning   sometimes   almost always

I shared my ideas with my team.

still learning   sometimes   almost always

I treated my teammates with respect.

still learning   sometimes   almost always

I stayed on task and did my best work today.

still learning   sometimes   almost always

List what you contributed to your team today and add any comments you feel are necessary to explain your performance.