

CROSS-CURRICULAR LITERACY AND LIFE SKILLS: QUALITATIVE PERSPECTIVES
OF MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS

by

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(Under the Direction of Elaine Adams and Sally J. Zepeda)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how middle school teachers perceived, expressed, and described their experiences with teaching via a cross-curricular literacy project. A secondary purpose was to explore how teachers perceived middle school students experienced life skills such as responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty which may have emerged during the cross-curricular literacy project. A qualitative approach, constructivist epistemology, and case study design were used to discover the perspectives of teachers who participated in the project.

Data collection involved information obtained through face-to-face retrospective interviews of seven teachers. Thematic analysis illustrated themes related to the study and included communications regarding implementation of the project, outcomes of the project, and emergence of life skills through the project. Thus, thematic analysis targeted literacy, cross-curricular instruction, and life skills.

Analysis of teacher perspectives resulted in three findings of this study. First, participants viewed instructional time as compromised by a focus on assessment/testing. In addition, participants expressed the need for teacher buy-in before and during the

implementation of projects. Last, participants perceived literacy and life skills as credible targets of cross-curricular instruction. As teachers participated through the interviews they were able to reflect on the implications of literacy, cross-curricular instruction, and life skills in their professions.

INDEX WORDS: Literacy Initiatives; Life Skills; Middle School; Schoolwide Cross-Curricular Project; Instructional Time

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DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Zeb Hargrove and Olga Durham, who not only loved and valued reading, but who embraced and promoted learning opportunities the entire span of their lifetimes. Together they shaped my perspective of literacy, encouraged my curiosity, and genuinely enjoyed sharing their knowledge and personal philosophies with me. In addition, my dissertation and PhD would have never transpired without the showering of unconditional love, thoughts, wisdom, and prayers from my brother, John Hargrove, and my cousin, Elaine Bankey. My heart just overflows with gratitude that their life paths intertwined with my own.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

No longer does anyone doubt the crucial and integral role of literacy and literacy's place as a foundation of academic success. The National Center for Literacy Education (2013), a confederation uniting policy makers, educational groups, and supporters of literacy learning, engineered a nationwide survey of 2400 educators to ascertain the disposition of literacy. A compelling finding of that study was the realization that literacy instruction can no longer belong solely to Language Arts and Reading teachers. Thus, all educators have a stake in promoting literacy. According to the National Reading Panel (2000), more than 100,000 research studies have been conducted to examine the complexities of literacy. Tasked by Congress to create a research base to further scientific understanding of literacy, the National Reading Panel identified, reviewed, and collected studies of reading development and instruction. The result of the study provided summaries of eight sub-areas of literacy and identified strategies, methods, and approaches which were found to possess exemplary or noteworthy components. These sub-areas included phonemic awareness instruction, phonics instruction, fluency instruction, vocabulary instruction, and text comprehension instruction, as well as independent reading, computer assisted instruction, and professional development for teachers. Further, the Panel concluded practice and guided oral reading improve fluency, and comprehension increases when students are taught to use specific cognitive strategies.

Literacy is defined as the successful understanding and use of reading in everyday life (United Nations Educational, Scientific, & Cultural Organization, 2012). Literacy creates

contributing members of the American society by building self-esteem and empowerment. Further, literacy heightens cultural knowledge. However, students require repeated and continued exposure to literacy skills to improve in literacy (Goldman, 2012; Morgan, 2012; United Nations Educational, Scientific, & Cultural Organization, 2005). Unfortunately, Forget and Bottoms (2000) argued once out of elementary school, students may not actually receive class time to practice reading, even within subject disciplines or content classes. Despite the decreased amount of instructional time dedicated for literacy skill development as students move into higher grades, literacy still saturates other disciplines and subjects. Literacy as it was presented through a schoolwide cross-curricular project served as a focal point of this study.

As stated by Applebee, Adler, and Flihan (2007), there is no agreement on a single universal term for cross-curricular instruction. Rather, cross-curricular falls under such designations as integrated curriculum (Hall-Kenyon & Smith, 2013), integrative teaching (Sychterz, 2015), integration across the curriculum (Hinde, Popp, Jiminez-Silva, & Dorn, 2011), skills-content integration (Ackerman & Perkins, 1989), interdisciplinary curriculum (Reidel & Draper, 2013), multidisciplinary curriculum (Jaleel & Verghis, 2015), cross-disciplinary curriculum (Applebee et.al., 2007), and meta-disciplinary curriculum (Applebee et al., 2007). In this study, cross-curricular was defined as targeted instruction across grade levels and subject disciplines.

Cross-curricular instruction and learning inevitably lead to connections among grade levels and disciplines not normally encountered in the nation's classrooms. Often cross-curricular approaches link material from one particular subject in a school to another, such as when math classes scaffold learning objectives from one grade to the next

(Applebee et al., 2007). In one grade students may learn multiplication tables and later in another grade apply that knowledge to multiplying fractions. The cross-curricular method of instruction works well also by focusing on one concept and then creating a multi-disciplinary analysis of that concept (Robinson, 2015). For example, a history class might study the reasons leading to the creation of *The Declaration of Independence* while students in a Language Arts class read the document as an illustration of prose.

Informally, elementary school teachers employ cross-curricular elements because they often teach several subjects each day and usually link these together (Robinson, 2015). However, middle schools and high schools tend to remain more insular because teachers typically provide instruction solely within their certified areas (Robinson, 2015). Based on Robinson's conclusions, teachers who promote cross-curricular instruction do so by finding ways to align objectives horizontally across subject areas and vertically across grade levels. Therefore, a horizontal approach in middle school might connect all subject disciplines across one grade level while a vertical focus could link all three middle school grade levels within the same subject.

Further, increasing teacher participation in cross-curricular endeavors strengthens the faculty (Johnson, 2013). Murphy and Lick (2005) reiterated that teamwork, context, and culture wield power in academic settings; thus, collaboration encourages effectiveness among school members. By implementing whole-faculty study groups, for example, Murphy and Lick documented beneficial outcomes such as collegiality, shared vision, and professional engagement; all gained through collaborative working climates. Thereby, a need exists to embrace cross-curricular teaching opportunities in middle schools.

In addition to literacy and cross-curricular instruction, life skills were a component of this study. The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills Report, or SCANS Report (United States Department of Labor, 1991), identified life skills important to this study. Life skills designated from SCANS were responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty. Life skills have already been the subject of research. In fact, in one study of life skills, the Department of Health and Human Services asked Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, and Hawkins (2004) to evaluate 25 youth programs. In that study, the researchers referred to both social skills and moral skills. Social skills predominantly work with interpersonal skills since they contribute to social and interpersonal goals, while moral skills focus mainly on ethical, affective, or social justice aspects of an event or occurrence. Though these researchers referred to the skills as social and moral, in this study social and moral skills were termed life skills.

Designated life skills from SCANS integral to this study included responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty. These skills are the very traits or virtues expected from students in the school environment. Other entities have conceptualized life skills along the same lines. Salpeter (2012) explained that soft skills, or skills synonymous to emotional intelligence, actually function as traits which make individuals more socially acceptable. The Education for All Global Monitoring Report (2015), a summary report prepared for the global United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, conceptualized life skills as socio-emotional soft skills which reap positive benefits in the career world.

Background of the Study

Literacy serves as the foundation of learning objectives and instructional approaches since literacy permeates other subject disciplines. Thus, because of their literacy base, Language

Arts and Reading have the ability to benefit, enrich, and augment other disciplines (Applebee et al., 2007; Daniels & Steres, 2011; Hall-Kenyon & Smith, 2013; Hinde et al., 2011; International Reading Association & National Council of Teachers of English, 1996). In my study, teacher perspectives of a cross-curricular literacy project were explored. Though literacy is complex, research has identified and simplified components necessary to ensure successful literacy projects. Teachers with confidence in their own literacy backgrounds are more likely to include and prioritize literacy in their own classrooms (Daniels & Steres, 2011; Morgan, 2012; Ness, 2007). Therefore, teachers need the training to gain backgrounds in subject specific literacies and the myriad literacy formats.

Moreover, Carlisle (2011) believed that bonding through a textually based learning experience with focus on a text may provide future advantages for both students and teachers. Experiencing associations with a text provides emotional attachments and emphasizes commonalities among people. Thus, students need textual connections which make sense to them (Ivey & Fisher, 2005; Sanacore, 2012). In this study, that emotional and textual linking was accomplished through the implementation of the schoolwide literacy project. Tapping into prior knowledge benefits students by incorporating reading strategies and providing positive textual experiences (Billmeyer, 2010; Morgan, 2012; Pittman & Honchell, 2014). Also, practice and guided oral reading promote fluency while comprehension improves when students are taught to use cognitive strategies (Klecker & Pollock, 2004; Morgan, 2012; National Reading Panel, 2000). As students increase the amount of text they read, their chances to connect inter-textually across other subject areas intensifies (Neuman & Roskos, 2012).

Cross-curricular instruction proves beneficial by enriching vision, curriculum, and collaboration (Aiken, 1942; Hall-Kenyon & Smith, 2013; Hinde et al., 2011). Akos, Charles,

Orthner, and Cooley (2011) linked teacher perspectives and content integration. In addition, providing exposure to life skills has positive implications (Catalano et. al, 2004; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; LaFromboise & Rowe, 1983; Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1995; United States Department of Labor, 1991). Thus, this study was designed to explore teacher perspectives of literacy, cross-curricular instruction, and a potential emergence of life skills within a single schoolwide project.

Unfortunately, too few studies examine literacy or other subjects within middle and high school interdisciplinary curriculums (Applebee et al., 2007). Still, the investigations which do target cross-curricular practice in the United States have provided some positive and thought provoking conclusions regarding perspective and collaboration (Akos et al., 2011; Hall-Kenyon & Smith, 2013). Jacobs (2010) pointed out that the more teachers network and build interdisciplinary connections, the greater their planning. Unfortunately, as it stands now, faculty members continue to work mostly in isolation (Jacobs, 2010; Johnson, 2013; Kagan, 2005). The International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English (1996) expressed support for cross-curricular teaching and learning through the publication of their joint framework of standards for English Language Arts. The intrinsic value of the approach is echoed by other researchers (Daniels & Steres, 2011; Hall-Kenyon & Smith, 2013; Hinde et al., 2011). While research by Applebee, Adler, and Flihan (2007) did not conclude that interdisciplinary work resulted in positive gains for curriculum, they maintained that the approach certainly did not hurt.

Over a decade ago, Kagan (2003) cautioned that the nation cannot continue to offer curricula which focuses solely on academics because relying on a constricted vision within an instructional plan shortchanges students. Social life skills must emerge as staple teaching

objectives in classrooms (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Yahya, 2011). Many frameworks already exist outlining and incorporating crucial life skills, and Kagan stressed that many methods and ways to present these to students have already undergone research or practice and have been published. Brown (2002) advised that life skills or values are diverse and overlap with and among cultural groups, making these crucial and desirable for interpersonal skills. Research does show that exposure to life skills produces positive results, especially when introduced in group settings such as middle schools (Catalano et al., 2004; Durlak et al., 2011; LaFromboise & Rowe, 1983; Tierney et al., 1995; United States Department of Labor, 1991).

This study targeted teachers instructing students within one particular middle school. Middle schools typically include grades 6, 7, and 8, with the approximate age range spanning from around 11 to 14 (Scales, 2005; Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005). The school used in this study matched this description. As children transition between elementary and high school they undergo transformations in social and physical development. Wigfield et al. (2005) pointed out that adolescent changes have the ability to affect academics, self-concept, motivation, and behavior. Though this study did not specifically highlight academics, self-concept, motivation, and behavior, these skills are nevertheless likened to the life skills identified in this study. Cognitive, moral, and socio-emotional developments are interconnected and middle schoolers experience changes with all of these (Scales, 2005). Thereby, this study based on a cross-curricular literacy project and life skills with middle school students addressed these inter-related concepts.

Through a cross-curricular approach of all grades and subjects, the school read *Queenie Peavy* as a literacy project before this research was conducted. Daniels and Steres (2011) posited that having faculty actively join students in reading makes reading a priority for the school.

Further, Vacca, Vacca, Gove, Burkey, Lenhart, and McKeon (2005) referred to interactive reading among teachers and students as social and collaborative learning. Throughout the project, teachers were offered instructional suggestions to link the novel to different subject areas through cross-curricular approaches, but were not required to implement activities.

Afterwards, the present research study focused on the perspectives teachers recounted concerning that cross-curricular literacy project. In addition, the study focused on whether teachers perceived any life skills emerged as a result of the cross-curricular approach used with the *Queenie Peavy* book. The decision to adopt *Queenie Peavy* (Burch, 1966) as the anchor of the cross-curricular literacy study developed because the protagonist, Queenie, is a 13 year old 8th grader with identity and socialization issues. Queenie faces personal challenges as the story progresses through each chapter. Beers (2003) pointed out that even reluctant readers gravitate to characters around their own age who confront challenges.

The study was based in one middle school of sixth through eighth graders. In *Queenie Peavy*, adolescent Queenie vacillates between maturity and immaturity throughout the novel. Scales (2005) explained that at the middle school age maturity changes often, and sometimes middle school students progress while at other times they appear to regress. Students at this stage of development want to develop their own sense of self and their relationships and experiences at school impact their identities (Wigfield et al., 2005). Low self-esteem appears as a common trait amongst underachievers and is often accompanied by low self-efficacy, or low personal control (Davis, Rimm, & Siegle, 2011). Throughout the novel Queenie works to address her own esteem issues and to establish her individual identity, as well as to confirm her place within the school's identity.

Literacy events which are authentic have value for and with students (Allen, 1995; Pitcher et al., 2007). *Queenie Peavy* offered that authenticity. Furthermore, the contention exists that students are able to solve problems by reading about how story characters solve their own problems (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006). Peer groups may or may not wield positive influences but middle schoolers often search for comparisons between themselves and their peers. Students need to feel they belong and to experience success even as they are searching to establish their own identities. They need to connect to characters in books as well as with each other (Panteleo, 2013). As Rosenblatt (1986) contended, a relationship should exist between readers and texts.

Through probes designed within the study's interview questions, teachers were asked to share their perspectives of the relevance of *Queenie Peavy* as a literacy project. Further, teacher perspectives which analyzed the project's cross-curricular role were elicited, as well as perspectives of the project's life skills aspect. Structuring the interview questions to encourage detail and description in the teacher accounts served to both strengthen and to enrich the study.

Statement of the Problem

Literature has indicated a reluctance to weave literacy through cross-curricular approaches despite the recognition that literacy permeates all subject areas (Billmeyer, 2010; Morgan, 2012; National Reading Panel, 2000). While the collaboration and teamwork demanded for successful cross-curricular literacy instruction benefits teachers, teachers often do not recognize value in incorporating literacy. Teachers may view it as problematic and thus, will not embrace literacy opportunities in their classrooms (National Reading Panel, 2000; Ness, 2007; Pittman & Honchell, 2014). If teachers analyzed and reflected on their own roles in

literacy projects through retrospective interviews, their endorsement could potentially lead to more class time devoted to literacy projects and improved literacy practices.

A literacy focus can provide a positive impact across curriculums and grades and will lead to academic success (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2015; Sanacore, 2012). Alarming, 50% of adults in the United States find it impossible to comprehend a book evaluated higher than an 8th grade lexile level, while illiteracy costs American taxpayers roughly \$20,000,000,000 per year (Literacy Project Foundation, 2014). Yet, integrating cross-curricular literacy projects throughout middle school is something some systems have done and others have not. Marzano (2003) advocated for multiple encounters with knowledge, as well as multiple interactions with knowledge. Increasing encounters with cross-curricular literacy initiatives in schools would reap future rewards, as well (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2015; Daniels & Steres, 2011; Pittman & Honchell, 2014).

Teachers collaboratively instruct by integrating subjects. This instructional approach requires regular contact among the participating faculty to plan and to share activities and ideas (Sychtertz, 2015). Collegiality, or ways in which teachers interact with each other, can impact student achievement (Johnson, 2013; Marzano, 2003). Teachers who team teach value team teaching and that is subsequently transmitted to students and to peers. Students benefit as well. Collaboration across subject areas through literacy-based methods also enhances student engagement via such strategies as questioning, discussing, and reflecting (Billmeyer, 2006). Other disciplines benefit from cross-curricular strategies and literary focuses. For example, the National Research Council (2012) formally supported cross-curricular teaching and learning through the publication of a detailed framework for science education.

In addition to focuses on literacy and cross-curricular exposure, development of life skills is important for middle school students. Though life skills are appreciated in school contexts, they are not necessarily taught. The EFA Global Monitoring Report (2015) stressed socio-emotional life skills are just as important as academic skills and can certainly be addressed through school exposure. The EFA Global Monitoring Report (2015) further maintained skills and learning arise from varied educational experiences and contended life skills will enrich futures.

Literature and research have emphasized the education of middle school students ranks as an important step in preparing these students for their futures (Cook et al., 2006; Scales, 2005). Research studies targeting reading continually stress the importance of literacy interactions (Allen & Gonzalez, 1998; Rosenblatt, 1986), along with the incorporation of cross-curricular instruction (National Research Council, 2012; Suh, 2013) and student exposure to life skills (Hyslop, 2008; United States Department of Labor, 1991). Professional literature has documented the crucial nature of literacy instruction and the value inherent in cross-curricular teaching approaches.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how middle school teachers perceived, expressed, and described their experiences with teaching via a cross-curricular literacy project. A secondary purpose was to explore how teachers perceived middle school students experienced life skills such as responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty which may have emerged during the cross-curricular literacy project. Thus, this study sought to investigate and describe how teachers viewed a cross-curricular literacy project in which social and emotional life skills were included. These skills included

responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty, and were examined in the context of the *Queenie Peavy* cross-curricular literacy project.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the research and were addressed throughout interviews with study participants:

1. What views did teachers express concerning the implementation of a schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project such as *Queenie Peavy*?
2. How did middle school teachers perceive their roles after participating in a schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project?
3. Did teachers describe an emergence of social and emotional life skills such as responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty during the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project?

Theoretical Framework

To explore perspectives of teachers concerning the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project and life skills, a qualitative approach was chosen for this study. Qualitative explorations, as defined by Johnson and Christensen (2014), work when discovery and exploration are the objectives of the research. Constructivism acted as the epistemology of the study since teachers themselves shared their views of the meanings constructed through the project (Macleod, 2009). Last, a case study design framed the theoretical foundation not only because one school acted as the context, but also to outline the knowledge of the phenomena as it was described by participants through their contributions (Yin, 2003).

The premise of constructivist theory centers on attempts of individuals to make sense of the world in which they live and work. Lincoln and Guba (1986) posited interpretation and

meaning can arise from multiple authentic events or realities which are constructed by individuals. The meanings they discover are then subjective and extremely complex. In addition, interplay and interactions occur between people, groups, or societies (Creswell, 2014). Teachers not only lead students into constructing meaning but they also monitor and assess students.

Meaning emerges when it is constructed and this is what should be emphasized (Prasad, 2005; Suter, 2011). The meanings discovered are then subjective and extremely complex because they represent constructions of reality (Creswell, 2014; Macleod, 2009). The purpose of this study was to use a cross-curricular literacy based project implemented schoolwide as a means to examine faculty perspectives. Because the teachers responded by reflecting on interactions with cross-curricular material, life skills, and literacy, constructivism provided an appropriate conceptual framework for analyzing their thoughts.

Social science has three paradigms of importance: positivism, constructivism, and critical theory (Macleod, 2009). Positivism is rooted in logic and proof, while constructivism has ties to philosophical and psychological views. Critical theory is generally associated with social science approaches. Depending on the context, constructivism may be defined philosophically, personally, socially, or educationally. Constructivism and cognitivism both view learning as a process of the mind, but constructivists perceive and take in information and then provide a reality for it. Therefore, what individuals understand of the world comes from experience with the world. Matthews (2003) explained educational constructivism emerged from work by Piaget and Vygotsky, along with that of developmental psychologists. Knowledge is created and constructed, rather than simply acquired, as well as scaffolded from experiences and interactions (Ertmer & Newby, 2013; Suter, 2011).

Vygotsky (2004) insisted that children should encounter a multitude of experiences because personal experience and observation lead to the construction of meaning. Imagination exists within all individuals and actually forms the basis of cultural life because social experience steers imaginary events. In addition, there is an emotional link with imagination and reality so that imagination can transform into reality. Vygotsky (2004) argued that education must act as a child's catalyst by stimulating and fostering inner qualities of creativity and imagination. Therefore, applying a constructivist approach by providing children with instruction that encourages active cross-curricular participation in a literacy project exemplified Vygotsky's constructivist reasoning, as did delving into the perspectives teachers expressed about cross-curricular literacy projects and life skills.

Constructivism proffers a construction of reality which ignores objectivity as the focus (Suter, 2011). Humans construct their own social realities and the concern rests within participants and their points of view. Prediction is not important, but understanding is (Macleod, 2009). Conclusions are developed from conceptual relationship and not from statistics (Suter, 2011). Further, Pickard (2007) reiterated the inherent power individuals gain through a constructivist approach. The investigator and respondent create the research while the focus stays on the participant and on how the participant perceives life (Macleod, 2009). The purpose of this study was to use a cross curricular literacy based project implemented schoolwide as a means to examine faculty perspectives. Because the educators responded by reflecting on interactions with cross-curricular material, life skills, and literacy, constructivism provided an epistemology for analyzing their thoughts. Constructivism features reality as experiential, subjective, and capable of being constructed as an individual sees fit.

Overview of the Methods

Humans construct their own realities and the focus exists within participants and their points of view (Macleod, 2009; Suter, 2011; Vygotsky, 2004). Relying on a qualitative approach refined through a case study design and interview methodology allowed teachers to describe and to express their views of the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project and life skills. Because the study was situated within the single case context of the school there was very little difficulty in establishing access to the participants. In addition, qualitative research may be further defined as a way to conduct investigations which emerge from suppositions and viewpoints and which probe understandings participants or groups hold in regards to social or human obstacles or events (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Therefore, a qualitative approach provided the rational design in which to investigate teacher perspectives.

This study adopted a single, intrinsic, case study design. The research centered on a single case context, a Title 1 middle school and seven teachers from that school. Because the majority of the school's students were demographically deemed as lower socio-economic through Title 1, the school received additional federal funding. Along with staff members and faculty, students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades had already participated in the schoolwide literacy project by reading the novel *Queenie Peavy*. By using one novel in which to encounter life skills such as responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty, teacher perspectives were explored. The study centered on faculty perspectives of the project.

Maxwell (2005) advised a qualitative interview approach may follow a structured path to establish contrasts, or an unstructured approach to center the focus on specific phenomena. Using a methodology of individual face-to-face interviews with teachers served as the source of the research because of the inherent strength of interviewing. Since the schoolwide project had

already occurred, the interview accounts were retrospective ones. As a methodology, interviews are flexible, easy to obtain, and exploratory (Creswell, 2014; Lammers & Badia, 2005). According to Patton (2002), individual biases, backgrounds, and interests will influence perspectives. Interviews allow a way to gather differing perspectives which reflect how the participants think and feel. Employing interviews can result in the creation of additional ideas and supplemental hypotheses during the process itself. Thus, interviewing wields power through its verbal communication and social interaction (Lammers & Badia, 2005).

Data generation came through two hour long interviews with six teachers, and a single hour long interview with a seventh, conducted individually with each teacher. Interview questions were designed to explore teacher views and to encourage elaboration and detail. Teachers were recorded as they participated. Those recordings were transcribed using transcription software. After all data were collected in the study, data analysis was initiated. Merriam (2009) emphasized the simultaneous nature of data collection and data analysis in qualitative research. Merriam further stressed that once the first interview is concluded, insights and ideas emerge. Analysis then works interactively with the data collection process but does not follow a step-by-step path or process (Merriam, 2009). Data analysis included thematic analysis to determine themes and that exploration was approached inductively.

Creswell (2014) justified the use of inductive data analysis to construct patterns, categories, and themes from a bottom-up approach. Thus, it was possible to seek themes among the perspectives of the teachers who participated in the study. Material was analyzed from the responses collected by coding common information into categories once interviews were completed. Categories were revised as warranted with a focus on maintaining rigor. A narrative analysis refined the findings and pointed out examples of interconnectedness to reflect the

perspectives shared by teachers (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2002). Patton (2002) cited the validity points in research as differences within perspectives. Data credibility was strengthened by incorporating different participants to act as providers of information concerning the schoolwide project. Last, participants performed member checks once transcripts were analyzed to ensure the validity of their responses, and performed member checks of the interview narratives.

Significance of the Study

Teachers interact with students on a daily basis. The lenses with which they view their roles and the roles of curriculum and instruction directly affect students (Daniels & Steres, 2011; Morgan, 2012; Ness, 2007; Robinson, 2015). Teachers who consider textual encounters valuable will subsequently provide opportunities for students to encounter text and reading strategies (Forget & Bottoms, 2000; Klecker & Pollock, 2004; Neuman & Roskos, 2012; Pittman & Honchell, 2014; Rosenblatt, 1986; Sanacore, 2012). Instructional focus should go toward applications to real life scenarios while students should work toward gaining expertise (Hinde et al., 2011; Kallioinen, 2011). Cross-curricular instruction enriches collaboration and generates constructive and favorable results (Hall-Kenyon & Smith, 2013; Reimers, 2013; Threeton, 2007). Life skills provide practical, social, and emotional advantages once students encounter them in classrooms (Costley & Harrington, 2012; Howard, Berkowitz, & Schaeffer, 2004; Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis, 2007; Mourshed, Farrell, & Barton, 2012).

This study sought to understand how teachers perceived a cross-curricular literacy study and life skills encountered via the *Queenie Peavy* text. This research also provided a picture of the ways in which teachers perceived their roles in putting into practice cross-curricular literacy projects as well as instruction in life skills. Research which takes into consideration the perspectives teachers hold about cross-curricular literacy projects and student life skills is

lacking (Applebee et al., 2007), and a need existed to add results and findings to supplement existing studies. Studies have illustrated the positive consequences of life skills (Durlak et. al, 2011; LaFromboise & Rowe, 1983; Tierney et al., 1995). Moreover, cross-curricular literacy projects and lessons targeting life skills can potentially enhance student academics and their futures (Applebee et al., 2007; Catalano et al., 2004). An expectation of the study was to determine whether a cross-curricular literacy project which focused on life skills was viewed by teachers as augmenting or supporting learning (Perie & Baker, 1997; Robinson, 2015). The findings deepened understandings of literacy-based instruction, cross-curricular instruction, and life skills as they pertained to middle school students and educators. Therefore, research which explored teacher perspectives of cross-curricular literacy projects and student exposure to life skills contributed to current studies and literature.

Assumptions

Four assumptions about middle schools, students, and teachers steered this study. The first was literacy not only matters, but is also crucial to educational objectives (Ivey & Fisher, 2005; Neuman & Roskos, 2012). As a tool, literacy improves livelihoods, families and societies (United Nations Educational, Scientific, & Cultural Organization, 2005). Students need repeated exposure to texts which they find relevant, as well. Adoption of a schoolwide novel such as *Queenie Peavy* provided opportunities to hone literacy skills in classes other than Language Arts (Pitcher et al., 2007). Second, cross-curricular teaching and instruction enriched and reinforced prior knowledge and relevant learning (Hall-Kenyon & Smith, 2013; Sychterz, 2015). Third, life skills such as integrity/ honesty, responsibility, self-management, and sociability provided positive potential inside and outside of school (Costley & Harrington, 2012; Howard et al.,

2004). Last, teachers were more likely to participate in a schoolwide cross-curricular project if they perceived the project to be beneficial.

Definitions of Key Terms

Cross-Curricular- For the purpose of this study cross-curricular was defined as targeted instruction across grade levels and subject disciplines (Applebee et al., 2007).

Life Skills-The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills or SCANS Report (United States Department of Labor, 1991) identified life skills focal to this study: responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty. Responsibility encompasses attention to standards, details, punctuality, and task completion. Self-esteem includes adequate self-worth, a positive outlook, and recognition of personal skills, abilities, and impacts on others. Sociability is described as a personal characteristic comprised of components such as adaptability, friendliness, and politeness. Self-management embodies personal goal attainment and motivation, along with self-control. Last, integrity/honesty results from trust and from choosing an ethical approach reflective of cultural values.

Limitations of the Study

The literacy project was conducted in the 2012-2013 school year, and the teachers were interviewed in 2016 and 2017. That time gap may have impacted the study. In addition, at the conclusion of the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project, students were not assessed academically over the project and no actual evaluation of the cross-curricular literacy project was undertaken by students or teachers. This study approach focused on one specific school and targeted perspectives from teachers at that middle school. Thus, generalizing the results to another population was not the primary focus. The conclusions evolved from that approach and with that population, so they may not necessarily ring true for another community or for another

school system. Since the research did not include probability sampling extrapolating the results to other populations would not be feasible (Maxwell, 2005). Though it will be impossible to generalize this study, it may serve to encourage further investigations from other researchers. In addition, what the educators interviewed had to say at times illustrated areas of educational concern or of educational confidence. Further, my role in the study carried its own limitations since I worked as a professional colleague with the participants at the same school. To strengthen the integrity and objectivity, I practiced reflexivity to address subjectivity and to maintain objectivity throughout the study. Etherington (2004) contended reflexivity involves an awareness of personal contexts, cultural contexts, and social contexts. I routinely engaged in assessing those contexts as the study progressed. Triangulation to verify results took place as member checks were made of both written interview transcripts as well as of each individual narrative analysis after all interviews were completed, along with an examination of artifacts from the project.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 provides the introduction to the study and includes the background, problem statement, purpose, and research questions, along with the methods overview, study significance, assumptions and limitations. The study's importance is established via theory, policy, practice, and through prior research studies. Chapter 2 documents a review of related literature concerning the breadth of literacy, cross-curricular teaching, and life skills.

Chapter 3 details the study's design, theoretical framework, methodology, setting, participants, data sources, data collection, and data analysis methods. Chapter 4 provides data collected and a presentation of the findings and results of the research.

Chapter 5 describes findings from teachers' perspectives of literacy, cross-curricular instruction, and life skills as they pertain to middle school. Findings are presented within a holistic case analysis of the data described in Chapter 4. Chapter 6 presents a discussion and summary of conclusions, implications, applications, and recommendations generated from the research. One implication for practice and research is a deepening understanding of literacy based instruction, cross-curricular instruction, and life skills as they pertain to middle school. Other indications include an in-depth analysis of the impact of assessment/testing on instructional time and a look into the impact of teacher buy-in within a school. More research is needed which examines a schoolwide literacy project with a single novel that emphasizes life skills and is presented with cross-curricular instruction. The potential to recommend professional development opportunities for educators with cross-curricular teaching, literacy projects, or life skills exists. Finally, findings from this research may contribute to current studies and literature.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how middle school teachers perceived, expressed, and described their experiences with teaching via a cross-curricular literacy project. A secondary purpose was to explore how teachers perceived middle school students experienced life skills such as responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty which may have emerged during the cross-curricular literacy project. Thus, this study sought to investigate and describe how teachers viewed a cross-curricular literacy project in which social and emotional life skills were included. These skills included responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty, and were examined in the context of the *Queenie Peavy* cross-curricular literacy project.

The study proved beneficial by assessing teacher perspectives of the cross-curricular literacy project and student exposure to life skills. The potential to recommend professional development opportunities for educators with cross-curricular teaching, literacy projects, or life skills existed once the study's results were evaluated. Implementation of the study enriched the school in numerous ways. First, it allowed teachers to reflect on increased opportunities for students to encounter texts through a literacy focus. Through their own views, teachers also strengthened their own pedagogical approaches by evaluating the value of incorporating a literacy focus.

Teachers who expressed positive perspectives toward cross-curricular instruction will likely incorporate cross-curricular instruction in the future (Sychterz, 2015). Thus, their students

will gain crucial skills in comprehending and practicing the transfer of learning from one curricular area to another (National Research Council, 2012; Sychterz, 2015). Those teachers in the study who explored cross-curricular connections favorably analyzed and recognized connections between and among subject disciplines. Last, fostering life skills will continue to enrich the social and emotional development of students with teachers who continue to collaborate and analyze life skills they perceive as most valuable. Besides connecting content areas as a future benefit to students, teachers will also prosper through the collegiality and collaboration with peers (Jacobs, 2010).

Research Questions

The following questions guided the research and were addressed throughout the interviews with study participants:

1. What views did teachers express concerning the implementation of a schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project such as *Queenie Peavy*?
2. How did middle school teachers perceive their roles after participating in a schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project?
3. Did teachers describe an emergence of social and emotional life skills such as responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty during the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project?

To adequately satisfy these research questions, it was necessary to undertake a review of literature which addressed areas of key importance. A synthesis of that review follows which summarizes and discusses previous research related to literacy initiatives, cross-curricular initiatives, and life skills. A review of literature relevant to the literacy component is addressed first. Then the cross-curricular aspect with representative experiential studies follows. Last, an

examination of studies highlighting life skills, the final foundational component to this study, concludes the literature review.

Literacy Initiatives

A summary of literacy and reading literature germane to this study focuses on targeted reading strategies, successful approaches, disciplinary texts, comprehension, and reading culture in six selected research studies. Further, each study provided implications and considerations apropos to work conducted for this research in examining teacher perspectives of literacy initiatives. Table 2.1 provides an overview of the literacy studies.

Table 2.1

Literacy Initiatives

Study	Purpose	Conclusions	Implications for this Study	Limitations
National Reading Panel, 2000	Research base of reading development and instruction to further scientific understanding	Reading is a series of interventions Reading is not a developmental process Reading comprehension improves through cognitive strategies/guided oral reading,/ practice	A schoolwide literacy project will benefit readings strategies and comprehension.	Focused on experimental/ quasi-experimental at the expense of qualitative Potential Bias
Pittman and Honchell, 2014	Inquiry into the ways literature discussions could affect struggling readers in middle school	Incorporating reading strategies and prior knowledge through textual discussions of the text improved understanding and allowed positive text encounters	A single novel was adopted to springboard a schoolwide literacy initiative	Difficult to generalize No consideration of teacher style/ training

Table 2.1 Continued

Literacy Initiatives

Study	Purpose	Conclusions	Implications	Limitations
Klecker and Pollock, 2004	Determine how frequently teachers incorporated research based reading strategies when teaching reading across curriculums	Differences between teachers low achieving schools (focused on one reading strategy) and teachers in high achieving schools (focused on three reading strategies)	Differences could emerge from teacher motivation, training, and experience. Differences could emerge from school climate.	No determination of causation for teaching differences
Morgan, 2012	Address literacy changes to Australia's curricular focus	Positive and beneficial: Tapping into prior knowledge Modeling reading and reading strategies Understanding literacies range from one subject to another	Teachers could improve their literacy confidence/ then influence student success/ Non- Reading teachers could view literacy instruction as Positive	Difficult to address educator bias
Daniels and Steres, 2011	Examine student engagement within a school's commitment to reading	Three components impact the desire to read: Motivating learning environments/ prioritizing reading/ reading modeled by the school's adults	Curriculum and rigor don't guarantee success School culture can influence reading/ Prioritizing reading sets the school tone	Difficult to generalize

Table 2.1 Continued

Literacy Initiatives

Study	Purpose	Conclusions	Implications	Limitations
Ness, 2007	Examine the frequency with which reading comprehension strategies were incorporated in secondary school social studies and science content classrooms	Secondary teachers did not perceive reading instruction as their responsibility/ Teachers need more literacy training / Reflection and shared collaboration could help foster literacy integration	A schoolwide project would allow teachers to share and reflect on literacy	Causation of teacher non-participation (other than time for standardized tests) was not identified

Schoolwide Literacy

Congress tasked the National Reading Panel (2000) to review, identify, and collect principled, accurate, and valid studies of reading development and instruction for the purpose of creating a research base to further scientific understanding. Participants included over 100,000 studies of reading while Efficacy Theory provided the theoretical framework. As the investigation progressed the National Reading Panel (2000) narrowed the studies to a final consensus of both experimental and quasi-experimental research studies. The methodology was evidence based. The public was invited to view the process which added to the study's integrity.

Sub-groups of the National Reading Panel's (2000) study conducted the extensive literature review and applied the evaluative criteria to locate studies which were published in English and which dealt with reading development. The Panel did not examine second language learning. Afterwards the studies were screened to ensure that participants, interventions,

methods, and outcomes were descriptive and detailed. Coding followed initially to categorize outcome and characteristics, but as the work progressed, coding for specific structures of the study, such as participants and methodology, followed. Sub-groups re-analyzed 10% of the sample studies and if any study fell below 90% of the consensus the group evaluated it again. Effect sizes were calculated for each intervention. Results provided summaries of eight sub-areas of literacy and identified strategies, methods, and approaches which were found to possess exemplary or noteworthy components.

The National Reading Panel's (2000) decision to minimize qualitative research to prioritize experimental and quasi-experimental research could usher in the possibility of too narrow a focus or biased findings. In addition, the Panel's likening of reading to a series of interventions minimized or discounted the perspectives of those who view reading as a developmental process. Nevertheless, since this study examined teacher perspectives of cross-curricular literacy projects it was important to consider and apply the findings of the Reading Panel study. For example, the National Reading Panel (2000) concluded practice and guided oral reading improve fluency. Further, reading comprehension improved through cognitive strategies and reading combined with writing improved comprehension. Thus, based on the Panel's findings, incorporating a schoolwide literacy project would result in benefits to reading strategies and comprehension.

Single Novel Initiative

In the second research example, Pittman and Honchell (2014) conducted a qualitative literature discussion study. The researchers cited the purpose of their research as an inquiry into the ways literature discussions could affect struggling readers in middle school. Sixteen struggling readers from one rural Title 1 school comprised the participants. Vygotsky's Theory

of the Social Construction of Knowledge and Rosenblatt's Reader Transaction Theory combined to create the study's theoretical framework. Pittman and Honchell (2014) were interested in the ways literature discussions could be used as learning activities to benefit struggling readers. Pittman and Honchell (2014) described their work as classroom participatory action research. Their investigation focused on 45 students from two 7th grade classes. Data included pre- and post-reading interest surveys, student booklets, recordings, and interviews.

All students read the same novel, one selected by their teacher. Students were first given the pre-survey and then introduced to literature discussions. In the subsequent three weeks they read and discussed the central novel. Pittman and Honchell's (2014) project was of particular interest to this study since the genesis of the study began with a single novel used to springboard a schoolwide literacy initiative. Pittman and Honchell (2014) began their data analysis by color coding any topics mentioned more than twice in the collected data sources. That led to coding themes to establish patterns. Survey results indicated 11 of the 16 struggling readers enjoyed reading more after they participated in the study. The study concluded that guiding students to incorporate reading strategies and prior knowledge through discussions of the text improved both understanding and enjoyment and allowed the students positive encounters with text. For this study's purpose it was important to recognize the strategies defined by Pittman and Honchell (2014) which benefitted students through textual encounters.

Still, it should be noted that a single teacher chose the text and facilitated the discussions, making generalizability of the findings not a practical choice. In addition, teacher style, teacher training, and teacher familiarity with the text may have affected student satisfaction. However, those traits were not considered in the Pittman and Honchell (2014) study.

Teacher Characteristics

Klecker and Pollock (2004) presented an argument for the use of research based literacy strategies across curriculums at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Educational Research Association. The purpose of Klecker and Pollock's (2004) quantitative comparative and exploratory study was to use middle and high school teachers in Kentucky to investigate how frequently they incorporated research based reading strategies when teaching reading across curriculums. Schools were randomly selected and participants included teachers from thirty nine schools who taught in grades eight through ten. The authors did not identify a theoretical framework.

Klecker and Pollock's (2004) report for the Midwestern Educational Research Association summarized the findings of an extensive Kentucky literacy study. Of the state's middle and high school students, 50-75% scored below the proficient level in statewide reading tests at the time of the study. Therefore, the low percentages acted as a catalyst for the research. In Kentucky all middle and high school teachers were responsible for teaching reading since literacy was considered a segment of the curricular instruction. Klecker and Pollock (2004) specifically focused on before-, during-, and after- reading strategies used with active reading occurrences. Once teachers completed surveys the research team personally visited schools and collected data on a regular basis within the time frame of the two year study. Survey data were measured through Statistical Analysis Software with means and data calculated as well as calculations of tests of statistical significance.

Klecker and Pollock (2004) concluded that differences existed between the ways teachers taught in low achieving schools and the ways teachers taught in high achieving schools. Though the differences were significant, those disparities did not follow a consistent pattern. Higher

achieving schools had teachers who used all three (before-, during-, after- reading) research proven reading strategies ($p < .05$), whereas those ranked with lower performance tended to focus on just one reading strategy. Further studies were encouraged in an attempt to address Kentucky's reading scores.

Unfortunately, Klecker and Pollock (2004) did not adequately address the causation behind the teaching methods in the lower performing schools. That aspect deserves further evaluation. An interesting follow up would be to examine whether the differences in teaching methods stemmed from internal factors of motivation, training, personality, or experience. If not, a later study could investigate if differences stemmed from external factors such as school climate, demographics, discipline, or attendance in Klecker and Pollock's work. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study, it was conducive to consider the reading strategies Klecker and Pollock (2004) found improved textual encounters.

Teacher Views of Literacy

Morgan (2012) reported on a design based research approach implemented to address Australia's curricular demands to improve literacy in middle schools. Morgan (2012) pointed out that the study's purpose was to address literacy changes to Australia's curricular focus through place based pedagogies, subject or curricular literacies, digital literacies, and youth cultures. Participants included 12 teachers who volunteered from 2 different schools and participated for an entire school year. A theoretical framework was not identified though Morgan (2012) argued that design based research uses current knowledge of theory and adds to knowledge with the data the design generates. So, using that rationale, the research paradigm was design based research implemented by teachers and based on specific data. Design based research requires the teacher to also adopt the role of researcher while designing and

implementing the interventions. According to Morgan (2012), teachers assessed their students and then developed interventions specifically constructed to address deficits shown in the assessments. Data were periodically collected and measured and ranged from informal evaluations of vocabulary to formal digital reading comprehension tests. A primary teacher and a secondary teacher who participated from the disciplines of science and English were specifically highlighted in Morgan's (2012) article.

Morgan (2012) reported the primary level teacher focused on teaching technical language in the field of science with an emphasis on how that language could transfer to specific genres and texts. The secondary teacher focused on research which used information acquired from the Internet. Several conclusions emerged in Morgan's (2012) work. First, the importance of tapping into prior knowledge was described, as well as the positive benefits which emerged from teachers modeling reading strategies with students. Then, teachers themselves should possess a firm grasp of literacy. To illustrate, teachers should understand literacy could range from subject specific literacies to literacies presented in a variety of mediums and formats. That preparatory understanding is crucial to student success. Morgan (2012) found instructors who participated in the research cited increased personal confidence and a deeper understanding of literacy after designing their literacy approaches for the research.

A concern with this study is one inherent in design based work, however, and that is the difficulty of addressing potential or real educator bias. Nevertheless, Morgan's (2012) study related to the current cross-curricular literacy study. For the purpose of this research it was important to recognize the reading strategies Morgan's (2012) study found that improved the literacy experience and cross-curricular approach. Morgan (2012) included non-Language Arts teachers who personally worked with students on literacy, which made the research included

from those teachers applicable to this study. Further, the teachers viewed those instructional encounters as positive ones.

School Culture

Daniels and Steres (2011) recounted a case study of an urban southern California middle school in which the majority of the students were demographically non-white and from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This study's purpose was to examine student engagement within that school's commitment to reading. One hundred and eight students and seventeen teachers and administrators voluntarily acted as the participants. Most of the employees comprised in the school faculty supported reading. Self Determination Theory and Expectancy Value Theory were the two theoretical frameworks identified by Daniels and Steres (2011).

At the principal's direction the school embraced a culture of reading designed and supported with classroom libraries, daily time for silent reading for staff and students, and student choice in the selection of their own reading materials. Daniels and Steres (2011) used random sampling and chose students for open ended interviews and for discussions conducted without teachers present. Teachers were also randomly selected for interviews. Then focus groups were developed in which to stage further class discussions. Daniels and Steres (2011) reported qualitative analysis techniques were used for thematic analysis once the interviews were transcribed and anecdotal reports from teachers were added.

Results of the Daniels and Steres (2011) study showed the presence of three major components which inter-connected to positively impact the desire to read and to make the school a reading community: motivating learning environments, prioritizing reading, and reading modeled by the school's adults. Daniels and Steres (2011) argued that curriculum and rigor alone do not guarantee academic success, because students must buy in to what they are learning

through motivation and engagement. Further, students must have some control over their school day activities because the desire to read is influenced by context and choice. Last, the research reflected administrators who prioritize reading set the tone for the school.

Daniels and Steres (2011) certainly had findings applicable to the literacy component of my research on a cross-curricular literacy project, especially in illustrating the power of the school culture on reading. Generalizing the findings of the Daniels and Steres (2011) study may prove problematic because of its limited focus. However, of importance was the fact that the case study was conducted for the school by the school members. Subjectivity presented another issue with the work, though again, the study was designed to serve one particular school.

Collaboration

In the final literacy initiative example, Ness (2007) explained that the purpose of her research was to examine the frequency with which reading comprehension strategies were incorporated in the secondary level school social studies and science content classrooms. Four middle school content teachers and four high school content teachers acted as the participants. No theoretical framework was identified. All participants were observed a total of five hours each through thirty minute segments. Ness (2007) acted as a non-participant observer and coded classroom instruction into comprehension and non-comprehension groupings. Teacher behavior was also observed and teachers were interviewed and recorded for qualitative material which was later transcribed and coded. Thus Ness (2007) communicated teacher perspectives and beliefs throughout her study.

Ness (2007) reported that quantitative results of her research showed that more explicit instruction towards reading occurred in middle school as opposed to secondary. Still, only

3% of the 2400 minutes of classroom observation was devoted to actually teaching reading comprehension skills. Thus, teaching students text processing or how to interact with text was virtually ignored. Ness (2007) reported analysis of the results showed secondary teachers felt obligated to use most of their instructional time to cover subject content for state tests and they did not perceive reading instruction to be their responsibility. Therefore, literacy integration was viewed negatively and described as both time consuming and as an encumbrance by participants. Findings of the Ness (2007) study also suggested teachers needed more training to increase their understanding of reading strategies and would benefit from reflection and shared collaboration to foster literacy integration. Last, Ness (2007) pointed out that literacy coaches and curriculum coaches could support teachers in literacy endeavors.

An interesting follow up to the study undertaken by Ness (2007) would be to conduct the same research in several more districts. A comparison of the results could lead to an examination of causation. Further, the comparison would also serve to strengthen the reliability and validity of the conclusions made by Ness (2007). For the purpose of my research it was important to consider the impediments Ness (2007) defined as obstacles in literacy integration.

Cross-Curricular Initiatives

The research involved educator perspectives of a cross-curricular focus and the published works which follow provided historical and foundational knowledge as well as examples of cross-curricular strategies in action. The following five research studies presented insight into both positive and negative outcomes of cross-curricular approaches, procedures towards teamwork, characteristics for curricular design, and cross-curricular practicalities. Table 2.2 provides an overview of these cross-curricular studies.

Table 2.2

Cross-Curricular Initiatives

Study	Purpose	Conclusions	Implications	Limitations
Aiken, 1942	Foster communication regarding curriculum among high schools and colleges Advance progressive student centered approaches	Modifying curriculums can lead to student success	Introducing schoolwide literacy projects into subject specific curriculums can prove beneficial	Study limited to college bound students
Akos, Charles, Orthner and Cooley, 2011	Create and assess psychometric properties of the CareerStart Teacher Perspectives Survey (CTPS)	Career education could conceivably work through a core curriculum in both advantaged and disadvantaged schools/ core teachers considered it relevant	Teacher perception impacts/ influences student engagement and motivation Teachers can influence adoption of cross-curricular projects	Additional studies are needed/ should measure teacher influence towards curriculum integration
Hinde, Popp, Jimenez-Silva, and Dorn, 2011	Examine whether the teaching of geography combined with English Language Learning (ELL) instructional techniques would improve student reading Link global geography to social studies and reading curriculums	Utilizing cross-curricular instruction for English Language Learners either improved reading achievement/ or did not cause a decline in reading achievement	Incorporating a cross-curricular literacy project will not jeopardize academics	Teachers were provided just a few lessons

Table 2.2 Continued

Cross-Curricular Initiatives

Study	Purpose	Conclusions	Implications	Limitations
Applebee, Adler, and Flihan, 2007	Examine the nature and stability of an interdisciplinary curriculum	An inter-disciplinary curricular study neither hurt curriculum nor cured it. Modifying the curriculum shortchanged subject disciplines	Cross-curricular instruction depends on the teacher/ collaboration/ the objective	More information is needed over teacher implementation of material
Hall-Kenyon and Smith, 2013	Examine individual and shared perceptions of curriculum integration and changes which resulted because of that integration	Curriculum integration must occur with subjects: authentic to the task/ which have connections to each other/ which support the objectives of each other The study used multiple conversations .	Tying one novel into the different subject areas with authentic examples and comparisons will reinforce the learning and strengthen the literacy project My research study sought several teachers to interview/ in which to gather perspectives	Generalizing the research to larger populations of students may prove problematic

Curriculum Modification

Aiken's (1942) eight year study investigated curriculum perspective, curriculum development, and curriculum integration and remains a foundationally recognized cross-curricular study decades after it was conducted. The purpose of Aiken's (1942) study was to foster communication regarding curriculum among high schools and colleges and to advance

progressive, student centered approaches. Nearly 1500 students comprised the participants, and they were matched with another group resembling them in demographics, ability, and college attendance. The study's theoretical framework was Curriculum Design, as the traditional curriculum was compared and contrasted to the progressive curriculum (Aiken, 1942). The Progressive Education Association sponsored the Eight Year Study.

Aiken (1942) served as director of the Commission on the Relation of School and College, part of the Progressive Education Association. To complete the study, 300 colleges agreed to allow 30 high schools the freedom to experiment with curriculum with the understanding that the high school graduates would be accepted into those colleges after graduation. During the 1930's and 1940's the participating students were studied throughout their eight years of high school and college.

At the case study's conclusion, Aiken (1942) found the experimental students were above average academically, were more involved in extra-curricular opportunities, and exhibited a greater interest in current issues. Afterwards the 30 high schools in the study reacted with no future changes, some changes, or very pronounced changes. Based on Aiken's (1942) conclusions, a major result of the study was in illustrating that differing curriculums, and not just one universally perceived curriculum such as a college preparatory curriculum, could prove beneficial and result in college success. Other conclusions included improved professional development for educators and enhancements to student testing. The Eight Year Study conducted by Aiken (1942) generated numerous follow up studies. For the purpose of my research, the fact that Aiken's (1942) study concluded cross-curricular approaches had positive outcomes was important and relevant.

Relevance

Akos et al. (2011) explained that the purpose of their study on teacher perspective and curriculum was to create and assess psychometric properties of the CareerStart Teacher Perspectives Survey (CTPS). That particular instrument evaluates how teachers view career education in middle schools. Participants from 14 middle schools took part in the research and 291 sixth and seventh grade teachers completed the study. The Akos et al. (2011) study used an Integrated Curriculum Theoretical Framework. Exploratory and factor analysis provided a two factor structure targeting career integration and future orientation. Over a two year period of time the 6th and 7th grade teachers were administered the CTPS. The results of the CTPS teacher administrations determined calculations of descriptive data, correlations, and reliabilities. Based on demographic and participant data Akos et al. (2011) administered OLS regression analysis to examine factors potentially associated with teacher views of career education conducted in core level classes.

That OLS regression analysis indicated results of the Akos et al. (2011) study showed statistically significant, nominal, mean differences on the two factors as they pertained to teacher perspectives. For my own study's purpose it was important to consider the conclusions Akos et al. (2011) made regarding student demographics, relevant curriculums, and teacher perspectives. Akos et al. (2011) considered that demographic difference as something which warranted additional future investigation. Results showed career education could conceivably work through a core curriculum because core teachers considered it relevant. Based on the conclusions of Akos et al. (2011), the data also reflected teacher perspectives impact how they connect content to future careers. Further, that vision was integral to economically disadvantaged schools as well as to advantaged schools. Veteran teachers proved just as

welcoming to the practice and implementation of core and career curricular integration as newer teachers. The Akos et al. (2011) study concluded with the recommendation that future studies using the CTPS should be considered, especially as an effort to measure educator influence in promoting career curriculum integration.

Academics and Cross-Curricular Approaches

Hinde et al. (2011) reported on the linking of global geography to social studies and reading curriculums through The Arizona Geo Literacy Project. The study's purpose was to examine whether the teaching of geography combined with English Language Learning (ELL) instructional techniques would improve student reading in three states. The participants, 96 teachers in grades 3 through 8, volunteered and were assigned as either intervention or comparison teachers. The theoretical framework was an Integrated Curriculum Framework while the focus of the quasi-experimental study was to evaluate the impact of a GeoLiteracy curriculum developed with reading skills enforced through social studies lessons (Hinde et al., 2011).

In the study, Hinde et al. (2011) maintained the Arizona GeoLiteracy Project illustrated cross-disciplinary instruction works well with all students and does not just benefit those in the mainstream. Struggling readers reap the rewards, as well. The Arizona GeoLiteracy Project interconnected literacy and geography by developing and presenting eighty five lessons which covered the environment, reading, and writing. Teachers, experts in geography, and people trained in assessment worked under a grant bestowed from the National Geographic Education Foundation to create lessons which involved literacy presented in tandem with social studies, or GeoLiteracy lessons.

Hinde et al. (2011) used a quantitative comparative approach with parallel pre-tests and post-tests in the design. Linear equating through a random group counterbalanced design was adopted. Qualitative data were also included which described practices of the intervention group. Teachers with interventions used the GeoLiteracy lessons while comparison teachers did not. Hinde et al. (2011) reported the major challenges proved to be with the reluctance of some teachers to participate and the limited number of lessons available for instruction, thus raising concerns about the representative population and availability of data used for the collection and analysis.

At the study's conclusion, Hinde et al. (2011) determined that utilizing GeoLiteracy for English Language Learners either improved reading achievement or did not cause a decline in reading achievement. The learners improved in geography awareness and also in reading comprehension. The focus on literacy in subject disciplines other than reading or language arts comprised a foundational portion of this investigation. Therefore, the Hinde et al. (2011) study was noteworthy in the research because it served as a reminder to take steps to foster teacher support ahead of time by addressing participation and by providing lessons.

Life Skills in Education

The purpose of my research centered on the perspectives teachers report and describe concerning life skills and cross-curricular literacy projects, as well as to relate and to share details of that exposure. This review begins with an overview of the 1991 SCANS Report which has provided the life skills included in the research: responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty. An examination of five research studies follows. Life skills education as both a learning tool and as a learning outcome deserves more consideration and

these studies provided background and detail which assisted in the focus on life skills in the proposed research. Table 2.3 provides an overview of those studies.

Table 2.3

Life Skills in Education

Study	Purpose	Conclusions	Implications	Limitations
United States Department of Labor, 1991	Examine how schools equip students for the career world Evaluate workplace needs	Defined life skills as the very traits or virtues expected from students in the school environment	Focus on five of those SCANS qualities: responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty Future success demands far more than just knowledge and expertise	Not all systems value exposure to or the teaching of life skills
Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, and Hawkins, 2004	Evaluate youth programs	Success transpired when students were allowed opportunities to practice/to apply learned social and moral life skills	Social skills impact interpersonal skills between students and peers/ students and adults	Developmental criteria acted as the only evaluative tool
Tierney, Grossman, and Resch, 1995	Investigate whether mentors aid young people in progressing/ mastering developmental needs.	Students with mentors displayed improved sociability and self-management skills	Social and emotional changes could emerge from mentoring	No information on how correlations between characteristics of the youths and the mentors affected outcomes

Table 2.3 Continued

Life Skills in Education

Study	Purpose	Conclusions	Implications	Limitations
Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger, 2011	Examine outcomes of 213 Social and Emotional learning (SEL) program objectives as well as interventions for students	SEL programs do lead to an increase of pro-social behaviors and emotional competences Theory driven research should center around the development of a standardized method to measure social and emotional components	Life skills in the proposed research study reflect Skills encountered in the SEL programs	Need for more follow up on the academic component Need more examination of the durability of the programs
LaFromboise and Rowe, 1983	Investigate an assertion training program for Native Americans to determine if positive benefits emerged from its implementation	Promoted bonding relationships and competence came through strengthening the dominant culture/ sub-group cultural encounters (role modeling/ Social Skills Training model)	Curriculum used in the study included social skills such as the life skills in the research study Situation specific scenarios are incorporated in the schoolwide novel	Difficult to generalize to other cultures

SCANS Qualities

Probably no more powerful call for reform has electrified the educational community than the one demanded from the Department of Labor in its publication of the Secretary's

Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills or SCANS Report (United States Department of Labor, 1991). Initially concerned with the ways the employment sector transformed the nation's schools and then subsequently in examining how schools equip students for the career world, the ensuing analysis evaluated workplace needs. Further, the report evaluated whether the nation's students were meeting those needs by incorporating the information gathered from schools, businesses, unions, and the government over a period of twelve months. The SCANS Report (United States Department of Labor, 1991) defined life skills as the very traits or virtues expected from students in the school environment. The SCANS Report (United States Department of Labor, 1991) further described these skills as personal qualities deemed crucial and important for the future and this research honed in on five of those SCANS qualities: responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty.

For the purpose of this study the SCANS Report (United States Department of Labor, 1991) provided relevant findings in recognizing both the need for life skills instruction and the current deficit of life skills instruction in schools. The 1991 SCANS Report solidified what had long been understood among social organizations, education, parents and students, that future success demands far more than just knowledge and expertise. Unfortunately, despite the urgency of the published findings, deficiencies exist and school students still continue to lack preparation in the life skills crucial to individual and group interactions. The majority of the country's students lack those essential bedrock life skills described in the report. Quality educations should equip students with competencies to not only further their own academic value but to increase their mastery of life skills. In my study, teachers were asked to share their own perspectives on life skills both in general and specifically as they pertained to the schoolwide novel, *Queenie Peavy*.

Interpersonal Skills

Life skills are noteworthy enough to have prompted their own research studies, one of which, the Positive Youth Development Evaluation, was carried out as a project undertaken by the Department of Health and Human Services (Catalano et al., 2004). Of interest to the Department were ways in which youth programs have developed. Another focus centered on the results the researchers noted as outcomes from the adolescent programs; therefore, the Positive Youth Development Project's purpose was to evaluate youth programs. Participants were comprised of members of 25 youth programs. Catalano et al. reported a Meta-Analysis Theoretical Framework was used. For inclusion in the study, the programs had to have been researched using acceptable measures of study designs, outcomes, research methodologies, populations, interventions, and implementations. As per guidelines for inclusion the programs should also have demonstrated behavioral effects. Over 150 programs were narrowed down to 25 with experimental or quasi-experimental designs. Catalano et al. (2004) then reviewed those 25 youth programs to determine specific components contributing to each program's success.

Catalano et al. (2004) explained that with increasing frequency over the years positive youth development programs have been established to target specific problems or competencies instead of just to support youth. Two of those competencies popular within programs are the social and moral competencies assessed through developmental criteria. Social skills predominantly work with interpersonal skills as they contribute to social and interpersonal goals, while moral skills primarily focus on ethical, affective, or social justice aspects of an event or of an occurrence.

The researchers concluded that the greatest success transpired when students were allowed opportunities to practice and apply learned social and moral life skills. Specifically, the

Positive Youth Development Evaluation (Catalano et al., 2004) cited the Big Brothers/Big Sisters study as well as the Bicultural Competence Skills study as significant in fostering the community aptitudes of bonding, competence, and positive identity. The skills Catalano et al. (2004) studied parallel the life skills of responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty which were integral to my research study.

Mentoring and Sociability

In another example of research targeting life skills, the Big Brothers/Big Sisters impact study conducted by Tierney et al. (1995) was the first nationwide study initiated with the purpose of focusing on mentoring. Thus, the study remains a foundation of mentoring research. To complete the study 950 boys and girls from geographically diverse areas across the United States took part in the 1994-1995 experimental, comparative study. Ages ranged from 10-16, while more than 60% of participants were male. Over half of the participants were considered minorities. Tierney et al. (1995) did not identify a theoretical framework for the study. Big Brothers/Big Sisters is an agency which matches young people with role models in their communities and stresses one-on-one connections and relationships. The purpose of the Tierney et al. (1995) study was to investigate whether mentors have the ability to aid young people in progressing toward the meeting of developmental needs.

Intervention and control groups were randomly selected. Then, half of the youth were assigned mentors with whom they met approximately three times a month for a year. The other half received no mentoring. All of the young people in the Tierney et al. (1995) study were surveyed three times, and all of the parents of the youth and case managers were surveyed three times as well. Those baseline contacts, assignment match time contacts, and follow up contacts

provided the data sources of the research. Six areas ranging from academics to social enrichment were quantitatively analyzed using multivariate techniques.

Results from Tierney et al. (1995) proved dramatic because those results showed students with mentors were less likely to use drugs or alcohol, had better class attendance, and displayed improved sociability and self-management skills. Conclusions of the Tierney et al. (1995) study reflected an emergence of social, behavioral, and emotional changes from the adoption of mentoring relationships. Since my study examined life skills of responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty, this mentoring conclusion was of interest to me. A recommendation of this Tierney et al. (1995) study was to expand programs to include more volunteers, though the study noted that a potential limitation existed in having enough staff and time to conduct background mentor checks. A quicker process would lead to more available mentors. In addition, the Tierney et al. (1995) research suggested that a follow up study could investigate how the characteristics of a youth, combined with the characteristics of the youth's mentor, could affect outcomes.

Emotional Competence

In the fourth example, Durlak et al. (2011) conducted the first meta-analysis of interventions used within educational settings to foster social and emotional skills. The purpose of the study was to examine outcomes of 213 Social and Emotional learning (SEL) program objectives as well as interventions for students. Participants included 275,034 kindergarten through high school students. The theoretical framework was Program Design, as students exposed to SEL programs were compared to students not exposed to SEL. Social and emotional learning encompasses interpersonal skills and relationships, positive goals, and constructive interactions. After a thorough literature search Durlak et al. (2011) decided to separately analyze

and code same-report multiple interventions. Durlak et al. (2011) categorized the intervention format with three designations: class by teacher, class by non-school personnel such as university researchers, and multi-component approaches. The coding of the interventions followed the SAFE (Sequenced, Active, Focused, Explicit) pattern of questioning.

The Durlak et al. (2011) study cited six student outcomes as dependent variables: social and emotional skills, attitudes towards self and attitudes towards others, social behaviors of a positive nature, problems with conduct, academic standing, and emotional upset. Hedge's Index of Effect adjusted the differences between the control and intervention groups. Positive values were calculated to indicate favorable results for program students. Estimation procedures were used in the absence of means and standard deviations. Results proved encouraging and Durlak et al. (2011) included some descriptive information. Of the published research findings, 75% had been produced within the past 20 years. Further, randomized designs were used in 47% of the research studies. Within the research findings, 56% targeted elementary students; 31% targeted middle; and 13% targeted high school students. Further, the classroom environment served as the setting for over half of the studies while classroom teachers delivered the greatest percentage of instruction. Of the total programs, 77% spanned the entire school year, and 11% continued a second year. Durlak et al. (2011) found all 6 means were greater than zero and ranged from 0.22 to 0.57.

Students in the programs had heightened academic performance and showed an 11% increase in scholastic achievement. Further, gains in behavior and attitude also transpired. Durlak et al. (2011) concluded that SEL programs do lead to an increase of pro-social behaviors and emotional competences and there is a place for these programs. Limitations of the study included a need for more follow up on the academic component as well as more examination of

the durability of the programs. Further, Durlak et al. (2011) posited theory driven research should center on the development of a standardized method to measure social and emotional components.

The Durlak et al. (2011) findings enriched the literature and added to the available research on social, emotional, and academic skills. In addition, the Durlak et al. (2011) study proved especially relevant to this study since the focus was to examine teacher perspective of student exposure to life skills such as responsibility, self-esteem, self- management, sociability, integrity, and honesty. My own study's targeted life skills fit within the designated social and emotional skills inherent in the social cues, interpersonal problem solving, goal setting, and conflict resolution described by Durlak et al. (2011).

Situation Specific Scenarios

Last, the purpose of LaFromboise and Rowe's (1983) study was to investigate an assertion training program for Native Americans to determine if positive benefits emerged from its implementation. Participants included 30 tribal groups and agencies involved with the year-long experimental investigation. Children were randomly assigned to the intervention and control groups. No theoretical framework was identified in LaFromboise and Rowe's (1983) study. The study's Bi-cultural tag referred to the experiencing of events through two cultures. The assertion program was investigated through the Social Skills Training model. A direct skill and competence based curriculum was used. Social expectations and social reinforcers were the focused skills and were presented through situation specific scenarios that followed Social Skills Training Model principles. Those principles included instruction, modeling, behavior rehearsal, reinforcement, feedback, skill improvement, and generalization to the natural environment. In

LaFromboise and Rowe's (1983) study those principles also were compared to the Native American emphasis on role modeling, apprenticeship training, and group consensus.

Results of LaFromboise and Rowe's (1983) study showed that the promoting of bonding relationships and competence came through strengthening the dominant culture as well as the sub-group cultural encounters. Positive results included improved self-control, improved communication, awareness of situational specific assertiveness, and learned coping behaviors (LaFromboise & Rowe, 1983). Those positive results certainly paralleled the life skills of responsibility and self-management targeted in my study as well as emphasized the strength in promoting life skills through group exposures.

Chapter Summary

In the preceding sections, research and professional literature targeting literacy, cross-curricular initiatives, and life skills was examined. Research in the literature suggested increasing exposure to text and reading strategies aids literacy, but proves problematic if teachers do not view it as valuable (National Reading Panel, 2000; Ness, 2007; Pittman & Honchell, 2014). It was reported that cross-curricular instruction has the capacity to bring about positive academic and social consequences (Aiken, 1942; Applebee et al., 2007; Hall-Kenyon & Smith, 2013; Hinde et al., 2011). Last, research showed that exposure to life skills produces positive results, especially when introduced in group settings (Catalano et al., 2004; Durlak et al., 2011; LaFromboise & Rowe, 1983; Tierney et al., 1995; United States Department of Labor, 1991).

Unfortunately, though years of research studies over reading and literacy exist, far fewer studies can be found with cross-curricular initiatives and life skills as targets (Applebee et al., 2007). Based on this review of literature, more research is needed which specifically addresses cross-curricular initiatives, literacy, and life skills individually, as well as within an

integrated study of the three. Therefore, this study targeting educator perspectives of a schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project and student exposure to life skills within a single middle school augmented the existing literature on cross-curricular literacy projects and student exposure to life skills.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how middle school teachers perceived, expressed, and described their experiences with teaching via a cross-curricular literacy project. A secondary purpose was to explore how teachers perceived middle school students experienced life skills such as responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty which may have emerged during the cross-curricular literacy project. Thus, my study sought to investigate and describe how teachers viewed a cross-curricular literacy project in which social and emotional life skills were included. These skills included responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty, and were examined in the context of the *Queenie Peavy* cross-curricular literacy project.

This chapter explores the fundamental approaches used to conduct and evaluate my study. Research questions are included first. The theoretical framework follows and provides discussion about the qualitative research paradigm, the epistemology of constructivism, and the interpretive perspective. After the discussion of the theoretical framework, an overview of the case study research design is described. In conclusion, data collection methods, data analysis, ethics, and limitations are then examined.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the research and were addressed throughout the interviews with study participants:

1. What views did teachers express concerning the implementation of a schoolwide

cross-curricular literacy project such as *Queenie Peavy*?

2. How did middle school teachers perceive their roles after participating in a schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project?
3. Did teachers describe an emergence of social and emotional life skills such as responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty during the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project?

Theoretical Framework

This research on a schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project manifested features integral to qualitative studies as specified by Stake (2010). First, the study followed an interpretive path with the focus surrounding meanings from different viewpoints. In addition, the research was situational since it was oriented to the context of the middle school. Last, it incorporated and sought to understand the individual perspectives of a group of teachers, described by Stake (2010) as personalistic. In addition to the interpretive, situational, and personalistic aspects, the study relied on a naturalistic orientation, which Stake defined as accepting reality as a human construction.

Further, this research met the qualifications also described by Merriam (2009) to designate it as a qualitative study. The outcome of the research was not the most important aspect of the study. Instead, as Merriam pointed out, the entire process of inquiry was most crucial. Further, Merriam (2009) contended qualitative work delves into the meanings people credit to their experienced events. This study's exploration lay within the ways that individuals constructed their own worlds and with their assessments of their own experiences of the cross-curricular literacy project. Those perspectives the teachers shared during the study which reflected the meanings they attached to their own personal encounters with the cross-curricular

literacy project served as the qualitative focus. Last, as Merriam (2009) cited, I acted as both the primary data collector and the primary evaluator of the data by clarifying, processing, and summarizing the data of this study. Thus, based on Merriam's (2009) conclusions, qualitative studies value the human understanding of the human perspective.

A review of the literature showed Pittman and Honchell (2014) also chose a qualitative approach for their study of middle school struggling readers. Qualitative research has many advantages as a research paradigm. For example, needs, relevance, interests, and research can intersect (Hare & Portelli, 1988). Through this research approach teachers were offered the opportunity to describe their thoughts and views as they pertained to the needs, relevance or interest concerning literacy, cross-curricular instruction, and life skills. With qualitative work insight is featured, along with flexibility and an interest in underlying factors (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2010). Qualitative research possesses an open, flexible approach which embraces the expectation that the study's design may remain emergent until the end of the study (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002).

Finally, adoption of in-depth analysis to gather detail is another trait of qualitative research (Franken & Wallen, 1996). The qualitative research approach does not base its rigor and validity on statistics, but rather on more holistic approaches in which the researcher interviews participants or possibly observes participants in their natural settings. Qualitative work is a naturalistic inquiry, and a naturalistic inquiry requires criteria that measure authenticity rather than trustworthiness. Therefore, data quality should be evaluated as it pertains to the context of the particular study (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Participating in research which is impossible to duplicate is still valuable research. Patton (2002) viewed the differences within the perspectives as the validity points in qualitative research. Using multiple participants strengthens

the validity of the work by allowing a larger pool of responses to reflect a larger population of participants.

Qualitative research does not exist free from disadvantages. Tanggard (2008) pointed out that at times those being interviewed might object to the interviewer's questioning or techniques. For example, there may be a power struggle actually occurring within the conducting of the interview or interviewees might also resist or resent some of the questions. Qualitative research may evolve into a project that is too time consuming as Walsham (2006) cautioned. Last, attempts to duplicate qualitative studies prove extremely difficult.

In addition to the qualitative perspective, constructivism was chosen for the theoretical framework because it has emerged as a philosophy based on the creation of meaning through a building or constructing of meanings. Thus, individuals create their own systems of knowing (Ertmer & Newby). This research focused on perspectives constructed by teachers, which made the constructivist view an appropriate one. Constructivists regard learning as situational, so real world contexts are encouraged for use (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). As an example, a review of the literature showed Pittman and Honchell (2014) relied on a constructivist approach to examine literature and struggling readers in a case study at a Title 1 school.

In fact, constructivist learning is an embracing of reality with importance given to personal encounters and self-seeking of knowledge (Juvova, Chudy, Neumeister, Plischke, & Kvintova, 2015). Constructivism encourages self-responsibility and personal quests toward knowledge which then lead to more complex understanding, as opposed to learning centered on imitation. Macleod (2009) stressed the lack of absolute knowledge in constructivism is actually an inherent strength. Instead of that absolute, the goal is simply to understand. Value is placed on making connections along with recognizing multiple perspectives (Brooks & Brooks, 1999).

Thus, constructivism proves an appropriate theory selection when literacy is a focus, either as the sole theoretical framework, or in combination with other approaches.

Because this research adopted a qualitative paradigm followed by a constructivist frame, this study then loosely embraced the interpretivist tradition as a theoretical perspective.

Interpretivism is characterized and defined through personal behavior and freedom of individual choice as well as an intuitive evaluation of the environment (Prasad, 2005). Within research, interpretivism concentrates on the ways in which reality is subjectively created. Further, interpretivist reality is possible because of meanings already attached to interactions, objects, and events (Prasad, 2005). Last, interpretivist perspectives work well with naturalistic methodologies such as interviews.

Research Design

This study sought to present teacher perspectives of a schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project to provide findings for future applications or research. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how middle school teachers perceived, expressed, and described their experiences with teaching via a cross-curricular literacy project. A secondary purpose was to explore how teachers perceived middle school students experienced life skills such as responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty which may have emerged during the cross-curricular literacy project.

The study was based in a middle school, and a review of the literature indicated several studies had been successfully conducted within a middle school contextual setting (Akos, 2007; Daniels & Steres, 2011; Klecker & Pollock, 2004; Ness, 2007; Pittman & Honchell, 2014).

Taking into account the qualitative approach and constructivist framework, using a case study design allowed the most appropriate way to address the study's research questions. In a simple

explanation, case study research can be defined as a means of allowing in-depth investigations of a particular setting and population (Merriam, 2009). A case study works adequately within a constructivist paradigm because it is centered on attempts to construct meaning. The research design used in this study was an intrinsic and descriptive single case study.

This research study also met guidelines suggested by Merriam (2009) to determine the practicality of a case design. Merriam (2009) explained case studies require three components: a particularistic one, a heuristic one, and a descriptive one. Case studies are particularistic because they are focused on something specific or unique. In this research study that requirement was met because the base of the study involved instruction which included all grade levels and subject areas in one school. Case studies are also heuristic by allowing confirmation or detail as ways to enrich a topic, and in this study, teachers were asked to confirm their own assessments of the literacy project. The third trait Merriam (2009) named is the descriptive nature characteristic of case studies. This was satisfied in my study through the interviewing process which occurred, the detail of describing the actual project, and the cross-curricular aspect.

Glesne (2011) maintained that the definition of what a case means varies with the research undertaken. In addition, case study is explained and defined according to the discipline in which it is employed. Case study can also help explain the how and why while allowing the investigator to tie in the context. Walsham (2006) elaborated the close involvement in a case study invites an in-depth study of people and events, and allows observation and participation. In this research, a case study approach allowed teachers to explore and share their perspectives in detail as they spoke with me. Accepting that the case study relies on a respect for more than one teacher's perspective acknowledges the strength that more than one point of view carries.

Brown (2008) pointed out that the focus of case study research is a bounded system or case, which differentiates it from other research strategies. The study's investigator sets the limits or boundaries which define each particular case to be studied. This makes case studies differ from other methods of research by providing limits, or boundaries, such as a specific setting in a specific investigation. Those boundaries aid in keeping the study target focused (Yin, 2003). In this study I limited the case to teachers who had participated in the schoolwide project, and further bound the study by restricting the participants to seven teachers.

Analysis is generally based on experiential data in qualitative studies (Stake, 2010). Thus, case studies do not have one conventional way to collect their sets of data (Merriam, 2009). To address the research questions formulated for this study, interviews served as the primary method. Later, documents such as copies of printed lesson frameworks and artifacts such as student book reviews of *Queenie Peavy* were added to aid and enrich the study's description and analysis.

Since case study research is qualitative, exactly how it is used or designed has more than one interpretation. Yin (2003) posited a case study approach is appropriate to satisfy how or why inquiries, and further categorized cases studies into explanatory, descriptive, or exploratory types. Yin (2003) also described four case study designs built for single or multi-case research which could either be viewed as holistic or embedded. The single case approaches are useful in analyzing a theory as a critical case, extreme or unique case, representative or critical case, revelatory case, or longitudinal case (Yin, 2003).

Stake (1995) had earlier contended case studies can be categorized as intrinsic, collective, or instrumental. Intrinsic case studies would serve as an appropriate selection when the case itself generated interest for the researcher. Collective case studies would focus on more than one

case or issue within the study. Then, according to Stake (1995), instrumental case studies would work to provide some type of insight on a specified inquiry.

Further, case studies may be observed through different perspectives (Merriam, 2009). For instance, a case study may be defined as particularistic when it targets a definite focus. That particularistic perspective can be applied and used if the study is replicated. The heuristic case study, on the other hand, allows for confirmation of an idea or proposal, or enhances what is already known. It can explain the why, along with the background of the study's focus.

In this study I adopted some of each approach to frame the perspectives offered by the participants. The study followed Stake's (1995) intrinsic categorization because acting as the researcher, I undertook the research to explore the benefits or disadvantages of a schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project. The focus on the retrospective interviews targeting the cross-curricular literacy project positioned the study in the particularistic perspective (Merriam, 2009). It also supported Yin's (2003) descriptive element with the in-depth approach sought through the teacher interviews. Last, this case study was an example of Yin's (2003) single case research, because it was situated and conducted in one school. By approaching the inquiry in this manner, the single case intrinsic, particularistic, and descriptive frame helped provide a robust understanding of perspectives shared by the teachers.

The case study approach was also used because the outcome was not the most important aspect of the study, but rather, the entire process was. The process of the inquiry was more significant than the conclusions (Brown, 2008; Merriam, 2009). Through case study, reality may be viewed through the many lenses of each participant's perspective. This research focused on perspectives of one particular case, the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project. In addition, the case study method is often logical when the research involves real people. Last, adopting this

approach allowed me to function as an observer of the case. Case studies can enable the undertaking of a far more thorough investigation or inquiry.

Hetherington (2013) pointed out that case studies are strong studies by virtue of their ingrained complexity. Brown (2008) added a case study's value as a research tool centers within the complexity of including many perspectives, going beyond the humanistic approach to access the holistic one. Thus, case studies have particular relevance to the research being undertaken (Hetherington, 2013). For my research, an intrinsic and descriptive single case study approach was the most appropriate and relevant design in which to investigate perspectives from teachers concerning the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project.

However, case studies have limitations in their design and scope. For example, case studies provide in-depth exploration, but are not practical for generalizations of the findings. Walford (2001) stated often incorrect generalities are made about a case study, so to find out if one finding is applicable to another situation, it is necessary to research the second site in the same way the first was. Last, the very act of placing boundaries on a case study actually restrains the natural boundaries of the study (Brown, 2008; Yin, 2003). In my study, triangulation took place as member checks were made of both written interview transcripts as well as of each individual narrative analysis after all interviews were completed, along with an examination of artifacts from the project. This was used to strengthen the case study's credibility.

The Case-Contextual Setting

The school featured in this case study opened in 1995 and remains one of four middle schools in the county. In 2016, the county provided public education to 13,633 total students, with 2,785 enrolled in middle school. The high school graduation rate was 80%. The district

employed 1152 teachers in the district. The middle school featured in this research had a total population of 677 students (Georgia Department of Education, 2013). In addition, the school was located in a moderately rural area near the county's boundary. The county's population was 120, 938. Of those, 56% of residents were White, 27.7% Black, 10.8% Latino, and 5.5% Asian or Other. Last, the poverty range encompassed 36.7% of the county's individuals, while 5% of the county's individuals were unemployed (United States Census Bureau, 2013).

The school featured in the case study had been designated as a Title I school. Thus, its population of lowered socio economic status students entitled it to additional federal funding. Within this public middle school, 95% of the student population qualified for free or reduced lunches. Whites, Asians, and other ethnicities comprised 10% of the student population, while an additional 38% were Latino and 52% were black. Of the school's 49 teachers, 74% were female and 26% were male. In addition, 35% of the teachers were Black and 65% were White (Georgia Department of Education, 2013). Further, 5 teachers were considered International (Bahamas, Ghana, Nigeria, Peru, Spain) of the total 49 (Georgia Department of Education, 2013).

The novel chosen to be read schoolwide with sixth, seventh, and eighth graders was *Queenie Peavy* by Robert Burch (1966) because of potential learning opportunities available within the book. Cook et al. (2006) contended literature acts as a tool within the emotional and social development of students. Therefore, selecting a novel with which the students could experience textual encounters and could also find relevance were primary priorities. At 160 pages and 14 chapters, the book was not too long and provided a good opportunity for all levels of readers to experience the text. Beers (2003) determined through her own work that reluctant readers react favorably to books which are not overly long and contain short chapters.

The fictitious *Queenie Peavy* is set in Georgia, and the middle school in this research study is likewise in Georgia. Also, eighth graders study Georgia history, so the book's Great Depression setting illustrated some relevant historical facts. The star of the novel, Queenie Peavy, operates in dual roles as both protagonist and antagonist as the plot unfolds. In addition, throughout the chapters Queenie acts and reacts to people and situations around her, providing real-life scenarios relevant to adolescents. Engaging in repartee over crucial issues produces differing points of view and opinion, and teaches critical listening skills and respect for others. Muth, Polizzi, and Glynn (2007) concluded that sharing and camaraderie skills are practiced as students collaborate to discover solutions through both open and closed discussions.

The protagonist, Queenie, is a middle school student as well, an eighth grader struggling with life skills and values who has earned a reputation as a bully. High interest literacy events which are authentic and have value will remain with students (Allen, 1995; Harris & Hodges, 1995; Vacca et al., 2011). Queenie regresses at various points in the book as she navigates such topics as a jailed parent, poverty, bullying, and hunger. Dealing with adults and peers proves problematic for her, and her social and emotional skills are lacking so completely that a transformation appears impossible. Thus, students witnessed her struggles as they read. To reach the minds of students, their hearts must primarily have been accessed, because children are emotional, first, and intellectual, second (Sanacore, 2012). *Queenie Peavy* worked well as the school's novel because Queenie's story authentically represents the story of adolescents the world over.

Literacy based pedagogy involves exposure to a novel or text through a teaching process (Allen, 1995; Billmeyer, 2010). Teachers at the school provided the means to actually conduct the project by working with the students and with me. It was the school's united expectation that

everyone would read *Queenie Peavy*. All students received personal copies of the novel to keep for their own libraries, purchased from a grant awarded through a collaborative effort among colleagues and me.

As *Queenie Peavy* was read schoolwide, teachers across all disciplines were encouraged to link the novel with lessons from their own classes. Jacobs (2010) contended students need additional instructional support and making curricular connections enriches learning. Though reading, discussing, and integrating novels generally remains the domain of Language Arts, utilizing literary components from a novel in other classes enriches and deepens the learning experience. Cross curricular teaching involves instruction that focuses on more than one discipline area and the project relied heavily on cross-curricular links made through the literary focus of actually reading the book. Reading the novel evolved over most of one school year.

Frameworks of lesson ideas and sample lessons were designed and provided by me to use with all subjects. In Agriculture Science, for example, I suggested lessons on pine trees and pecan trees native to the state and mentioned in the book as Queenie walked to and from school. A seventh grade math assignment required the conversion of Depression day currency to an equitable current value. Immunizations formed an eighth grade science assignment, tying it to several scenes in the book set at a doctor's office. A Family and Consumer Science class examined the food mentioned in the book and compared and contrasted it to food included in today's kitchens. Research has shown scaffolded lessons build on prior knowledge along with concepts already encountered (National Reading Panel, 2000; Vacca et al., 2011). Because the introduction of new material ties in to material already studied, students react more favorably than they would to brand new concepts.

A celebration of the schoolwide novel took place at the end of the project, and culminated in *Queenie Peavy* Literacy Night at the school. The Queenie Literacy Night involved parents, students, and school personnel. Artifacts from the novel were presented and shared. A fun highlight of the evening was the Queenie squirrel challenge led by an eighth grade science instructor. A stuffed squirrel mimicked the real squirrel Queenie killed for supper, and a bean bag worked in place of the rock Queenie used as a weapon. Students were invited to knock the squirrel from its perch in a tree just as Queenie had.

Case Study Design and Sampling

This study sample targeted teachers of students at one middle school in Georgia. Thus, the purposeful sample was drawn from the faculty population. The rationale followed guidance from Johnson and Christensen (2014). These teachers already shared the norms and criterion needed for the study and were currently employed at the school. Seven teachers were asked to participate through interviewing. Further, a review of the literature showed Daniels and Steres (2011) successfully focused on one school's commitment to reading through a case study approach.

Data Collection

Trust had been established throughout the school year between the interviewees and me since I was part of the school's faculty. That trust helped to gain an entrée into securing teacher interviews. Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, and Mattis (2007) pointed out the camaraderie developed between the participant and the researcher will affect the quality of their interaction. The procedures of this cross-curricular literacy study are listed sequentially.

1. *Queenie Peavy* was implemented as a literacy project schoolwide.

2. Sets of cross-curricular lesson ideas were developed and shared with faculty members.
3. A Literacy Night focused on *Queenie Peavy* was held for parents, students, and faculty once reading of the novel concluded.
4. A purpose statement and research questions were developed to explore teacher perspectives of the cross-curricular project and any life skills which emerged from it.
5. A decision was made to include 6-10 teachers as participants.
6. An application was submitted to the school district to obtain permission for the study.
7. An application was submitted to the University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to obtain permission for the study.
8. Procedures to ensure confidentiality were followed and later communicated to teachers both verbally and in writing (see Appendix A).
9. The theoretical framework of the study was identified.
10. Personal requests followed asking teachers to participate.
11. A protocol was established and interview questions were developed to probe interviewee perspectives of the cross-curricular literacy project and the emergence of life skills (see Appendix B).
12. Hour long face-to-face interviews were scheduled and conducted.
13. Recordings of the interviews were transcribed.
14. Teachers were asked to perform member checks of the transcriptions.
15. A protocol was established and interview questions developed for the second round of interviews (see Appendix C).
16. Second round interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed.

17. Teachers were asked to again perform member checks of the transcriptions.

18. Narratives were created from the combined interviews.

19. Teachers were asked to perform member checks of the narratives.

A request was made of each participant to review a draft of the actual interview once it had been transcribed. Those member checks served as assurance that the participants felt satisfied that they had been represented accurately. If they detected fallacious material, necessary corrections were made to maintain the study's integrity as per suggestions from Tanggard (2008). Tanggard contended that interviewees can object if there is a problem with either the questions or questioning and the interviewer needs to support those clarifications and suggestions. Not only did this step allow an opportunity to obtain feedback, but it also served to validate the credibility of the responses along with the validity of the interviews by providing triangulation through member checks of transcripts and findings, along with the examination of the project's artifacts. In light of the study's purpose, not only did the research process evolve through a series of steps, but the analysis and findings did also:

1. Data were analyzed inductively to draw conclusions from the data, first with coding, then in establishing relevance of the codes. Subsequently, codes were grouped to create categorical themes. Relationships and connections among categories were described, and categories ranked through a hierarchy.
2. Descriptions of the categories and their connections were gathered for the dissertation study and covered in Findings. Interpretations were concluded and then included in the Discussion section of the dissertation.

Before any research occurred, permission from the school district as well as from the University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained following the prescribed

guidelines. In addition, participants were asked to read and sign a copy of the project's Interview Consent Form (see Appendix A) before interviews were conducted.

Interviewing

The primary form of data gathering was through the interviewing of seven faculty members. A review of the literature indicated other researchers have employed interviews to gather teacher perspectives, as well (Akos et al., 2011; Applebee et al., 2007; Ness, 2007). The methodology was appropriate because it allowed the exploration of teacher perspectives through personal, one-on-one interactions. In addition, using that method allowed time and opportunity for teachers to describe or to elaborate as they responded to the interview questions. Protocols for interviews of the teachers were specifically created for this study and interviews contained semi-structured, open-ended questions. Fraenkel and Wallen (2002) called attention to the fact that formalized interviews which include a set list of questions ensure everyone is asked the same set of questions, thus resulting in better responses and in more comparisons of those responses. Therefore, an identical set of structured and unstructured questions was asked each participant (see Appendices B and C).

Interview and probe questions originated from the research questions developed for the study and were designed to encourage elaboration and discussion from participants. One teacher completed one interview, six teachers completed two interviews, and each interview took approximately one hour. Through a framework of overarching questions focused on perspectives of literacy projects, cross-curricular initiatives, and life skills, perspectives and responses were further investigated through several probes designed to elicit detail. In this way the focus on the main study goals allowed for augmentation and discussion (see Appendices B and C).

For a number of reasons, interviews provided a logical methodology for data collection. Interviews may be described as in-depth encounters with experiences and viewpoints over a topic where answers could generate more topics to investigate (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2002; McLeod, 2014; Turner, 2010). In this study participants were encouraged to describe their encounters and views of the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project with as much detail as they wanted to include, and were able to digress or to elaborate. Johnson and Christensen (2014) emphasized the variety of ways in which interviews could be conducted, and in this study, that flexibility was important. Participants in this study were not interviewed at the school, nor were they interviewed during school hours. Instead, they were interviewed after school, on weekends, and during holiday breaks. Locations included participants' homes, restaurants, or coffee shops. In addition, interviews operate with a back and forth relationship among the researcher and participants. Because I was a colleague to the interviewees that give and take was conversational and underscored by the inherent trust already established in the working relationship.

Interview methodology has cautions and limitations to consider, as well. Trahar (2009) expounded on the nature of interviews, pointing out that researchers often have their own motives which are with them as they conduct interviews and those motives may pertain to how the interviewer wants to be perceived by the interviewee. On the other hand, the participants may cater to describing stories which they feel the listener will regard as receptive. Trahar (2009) reminded that the interplay between the interviewer and the interviewee flip flops throughout conversations, so power may revert from one to another as the interview progresses. McLeod (2014) pointed out that the conducting of interviews warrants some type of preparatory training because of the social interaction involved. Interviews do have constraints and considerations with which to contend, but potential problems can be addressed ahead of time.

The actual time spent interviewing faculty in this study presented the greatest challenge, as interviewing was conducted away from school during evenings, weekends, or holiday breaks. This compromised the participants' non-work time. However, because of time constraints each interview was offered to be scheduled in one sitting as well as over an extended period of time if the need arose. To promote interview reliability, Lammers and Badia (2006) recommended a standardizing of the interview and a standardizing of its procedures. This was addressed in this study through the adoption of interview protocols (see Appendices B and C).

Document Analysis

Artifacts from the schoolwide project were collected and shared with the researcher. The artifacts were stored as reflections of the study. Interview participants were given the chance to review artifacts since so much time had passed between the project and the interviews. Artifacts included a copy of the *Queenie Peavy* novel, Literacy Night announcements in both Spanish and English, Literacy Night brochures, and cross-curricular lesson schedules.

Data Analysis

Once gathered, Huberman and Miles (2002) suggested that data should be stored but accessible, and advised researchers to keep detailed records and documents. In this study, narrative analysis of the data categories was incorporated to explain the human experience and relationship aspects faculty members reflected and reported. That allowed a focus on the actual experience of the cross-curricular literacy project. A review of the literature for this study showed Daniels and Steres (2011) employed a thematic analysis to approach findings of their research of student engagement within a school's commitment to reading. In addition, because of its flexibility, narrative analysis may be conducted in a number of ways. Andrews, Squire, and Tamboukou (2013) pointed out that narrative analysis is often used to explore social and

individual changes since it allows an analysis of story structure, the circumstances in which the narrative develops, and human life. The concentration centers on how individual people think or feel in regards to a topic, point, or event.

Exploring teacher perspectives of a cross-curricular literacy project as well as life skills which emerged from the work was accomplished through a collaborative effort among participants and me, as participants were asked to review and check the material for accuracy. Further, Miles and Huberman (1994) contended that data should be culled and organized before analyzing and transcribing qualitative research. Therefore, extraneous material was stored while material for this study was sorted for efficient management. Because these participants had their own stories to tell, they were able to be studied through individual consideration of their own perspectives (Johnson & Christensen, 2014).

Linking and coding common codes, themes, and categories fell under the qualitative hierarchal umbrella as described by Johnson and Christensen (2014). At its heart, coding is a systemic approach toward organizing textual information (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Further, coding involves a series of steps to transition from transcribed text to the final research analysis (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). In my study I followed several steps and an outline of those steps follows.

The process of data analysis initially began by conducting the literature review and identifying emergent themes. Research questions followed which led to the creation of interview questions. First interviews were conducted. Once those interviews were transcribed participants performed member checks for accuracy and all interviews were read through as a whole. Major and minor codes were developed and line by line coding followed in my study. Code groups of repetitive codes were examined in relation to the trends from the literature review. The literature

trends resulted in memos designed to clarify, support, or contradict the trends. Themes were linked to the research questions and second round questions developed. Interviews followed and once transcribed, participants conducted member checks. Line by line coding led to analysis and to an examination of all findings. Results of my study were then shared. Figure 3.1 illustrates an overview of the data analysis process which was followed in this study.

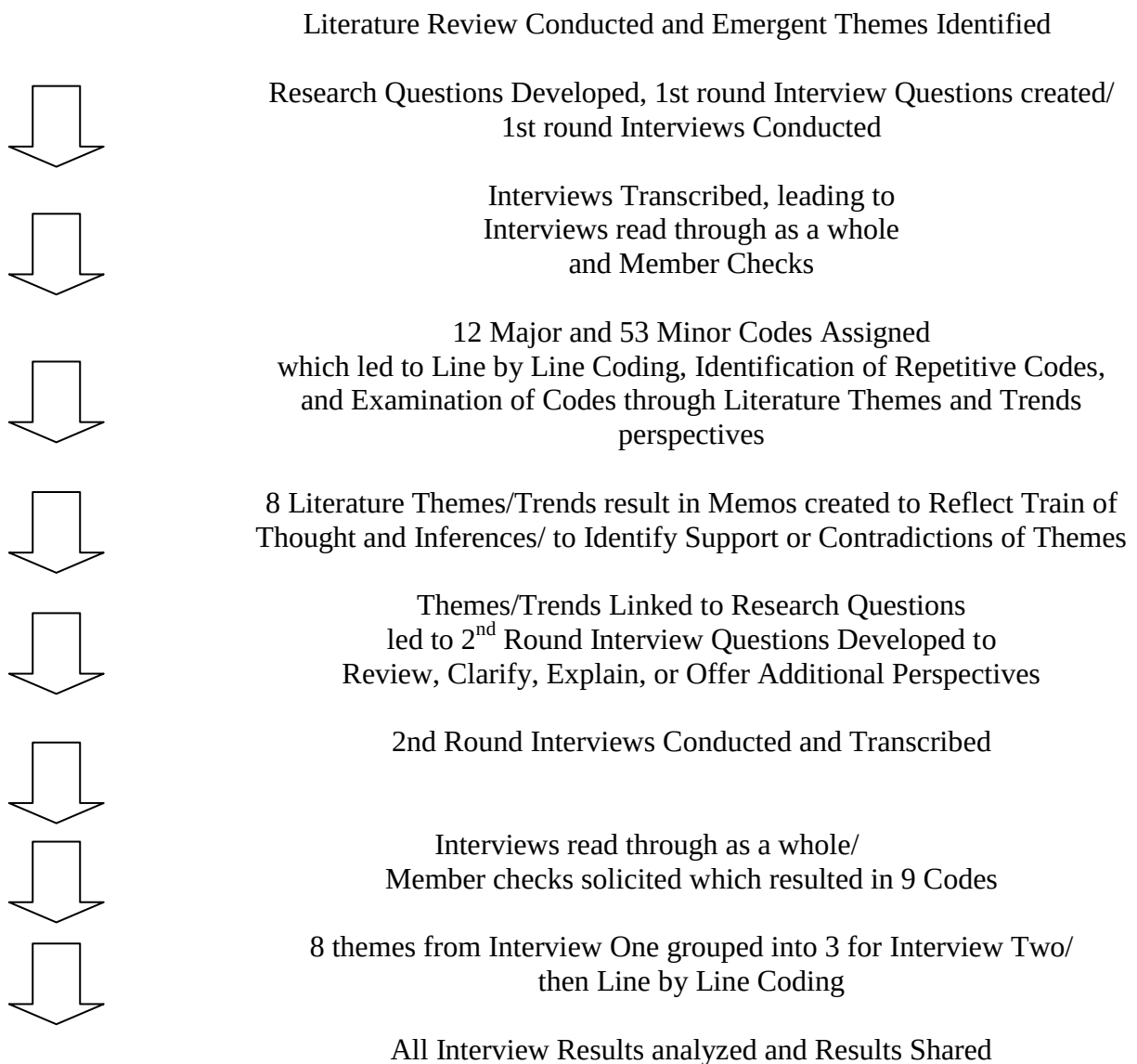


Figure 3.1: Data Analysis Process

Data analysis of my study began with the transcriptions of all audio recordings. An important part of data analysis is hearing what is said, which is why participants were asked to review the written transcriptions and check for inaccuracies. Charmez (2014) recommended the coding of entire interview transcripts to gather understandings that would otherwise not be included or shared. Once the audio recordings of all interviews were transcribed, data were first examined as a whole, then individually from each participant's interview transcription. Next, line by line coding was employed with each individual transcript with codes stemming from the actual interview protocols (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Charmez, 2014). A total of 65 codes were identified, 12 of which were major and 53 minor. Thus, relevant text relating to the research questions could be identified. Similar coded lines were grouped together within individual interviews.

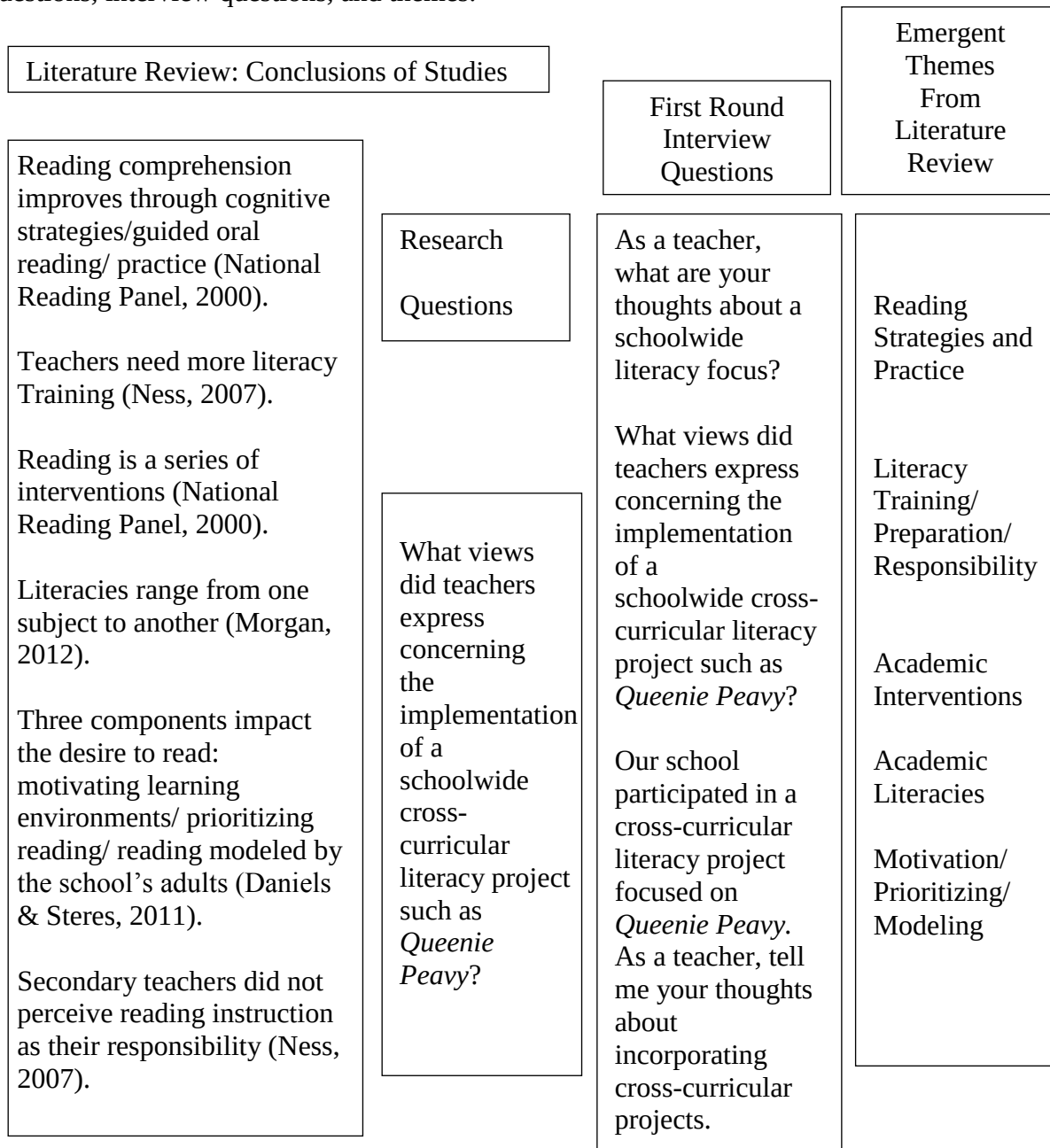
Once all of the first round interviews had been individually coded, their collective codings were inspected as well for repetitive codes established across the groups. Those groupings of repetitive codes were then examined, taking into account those themes or trends identified through the literature review over literacy, cross-curricular instruction, and life skills. The result was 8 literature based themes which encompassed the 12 major and 53 minor codes. Major codes ranged from Discussion and Engagement to the School District while minor codes included codes from Repeating the Project to Years of Experience (see Table 3.1). The resultant literature based themes included: Reading Strategies and Practice; Literacy Training/Preparation/ Responsibility; Academic Obligations; Motivation, Prioritizing, and Modeling; Crossing Curriculum; Academic Literacies; Development of Life Skills; and Academic Interventions.

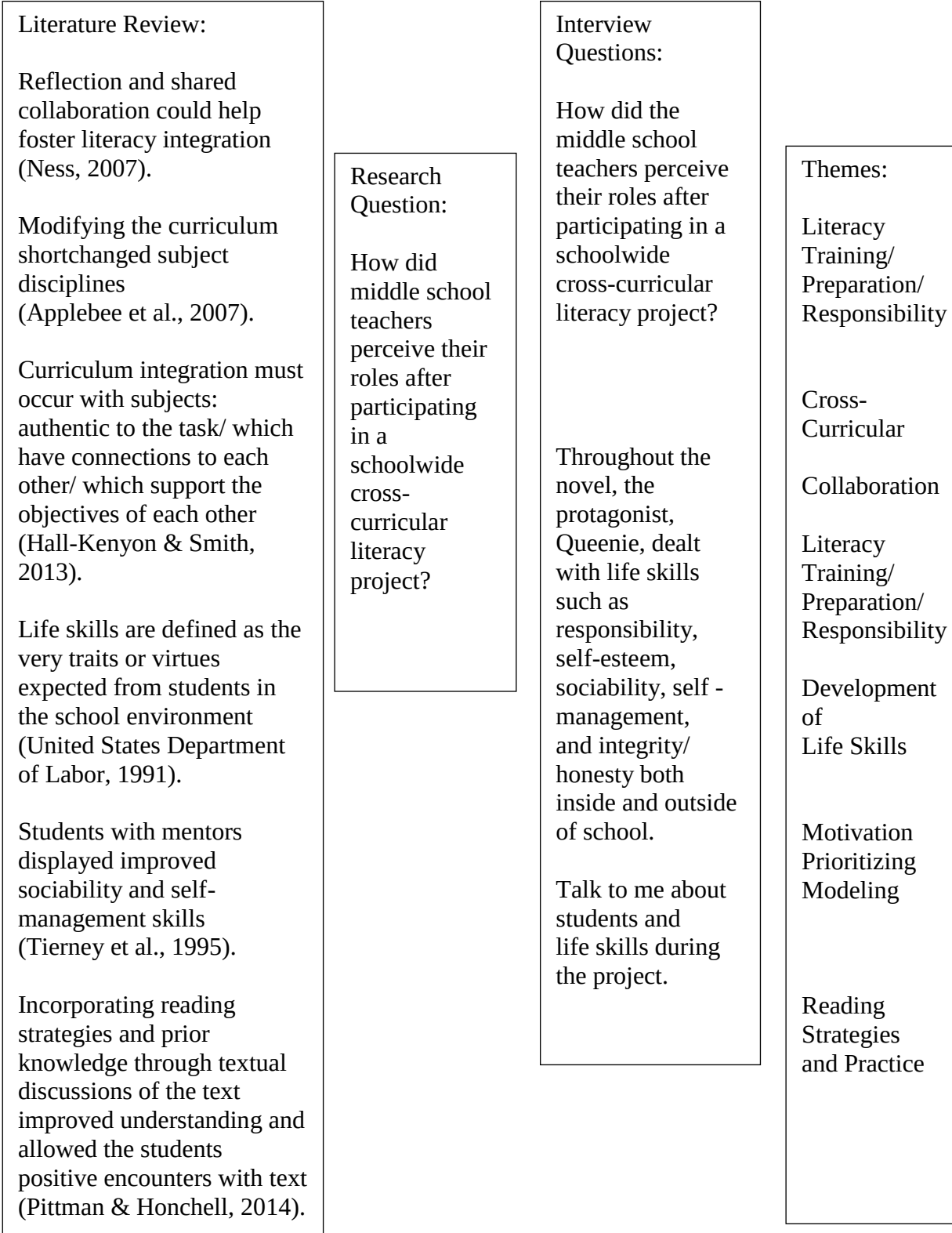
Table 3.1

Creation of the Code Map

53	Minor	Codes	12 Major Codes	Emergent Themes from Literature Review	Major Codes and Themes Linked to Study's Research Questions
Repeat the Project		Standards Schoolwide	After the Research	Reading Strategies and Practice	1. Schoolwide Literacy Project
Share the Findings		Project-Any Schoolwide	Collaboration	Literacy Preparation/ Training/	Reading Strategies and Practice
Negative Cross-Curricular		Project- <i>Queenie</i>	Cross-Curricular Discussion	Responsibility	Literacy/Reading Literacy Training
Positive Cross-Curricular		Student buy-In	Engagement Life Skills	Academic Interventions	Preparation/ Teaching
Responsibility		Language Arts/ Reading	Literacy/ Reading	Academic Obligations	Academic Obligations
Integrity/Honesty		Connections: Consumer	<i>Queenie Peavy</i> the Novel	Academic Obligations	School District
Negative Life Skills		Science	School District	Academic Literacies	2. Schoolwide Cross-Curricular Project
Positive Life Skills		Art	Schoolwide	Motivation, Prioritizing, Modeling	Motivation, Prioritizing, and Modeling
Hypothetical Self-Esteem		Band	Teacher Teaching	Crossing Curriculums Development of Life Skills	Engagement Discussion
Self-Management		Agriculture			Collaboration
Sociability		Foreign			Cross-Curricular Academic Literacies
Prior Knowledge		Language			<i>Queenie Peavy</i> -Teacher
Positive Literacy		Orchestra			3. Emergence of Social/Emotional Life Skills
Negative Literacy		Physical Education			Development of Life Skills
Relevance		Math			Academic Interventions
Textual Exposure		Science			After the Research
Queenie-Character		Social Studies			
Extended ELT Curriculum		Special Education			
Demographics		Gifted			
Evaluation		Grade Level: Eighth			
Assessment		Seventh			
Instructional Time		Sixth			
International		Degree: Bachelor's			
Baccalaureate		Master's			
		Specialist's			
		Years of Experience			

Last, those eight themes were theoretically grouped to address the study’s research questions. Memos based on each theme were created to help review the data, frame categories of data within the research questions, and develop foundations for writing about the data. Charmez (2014) explained coding’s focus as a means of illuminating a studied life. Figure 3.2 illustrates the progression linking the study’s progress from the literature review to the study’s research questions, interview questions, and themes.





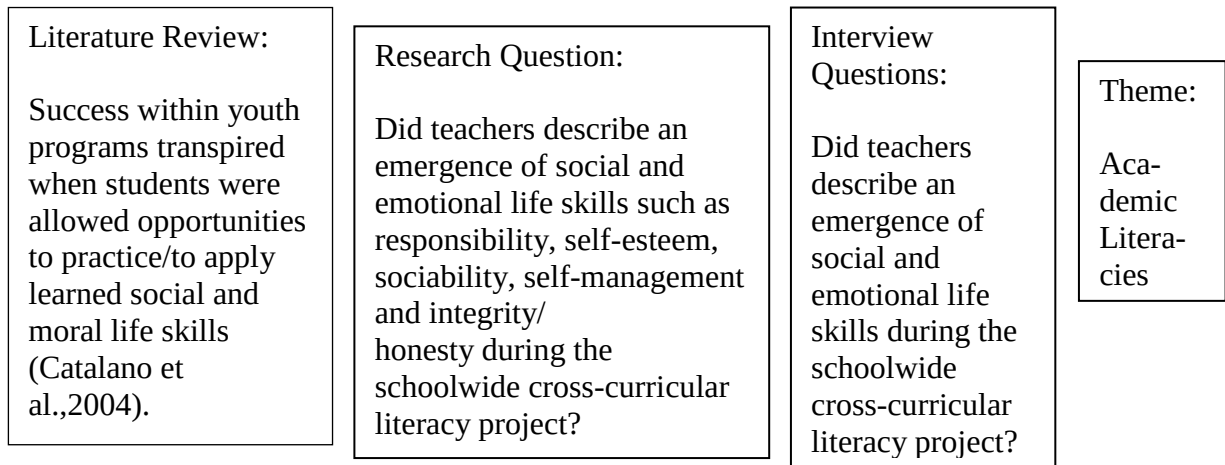


Figure 3.2: Progression from Literature Review to Themes

I employed the analysis, memo, descriptor, coding, media, and excerpting tools (Version 7.5.9) provided by the Dedoose (2017) web application once I uploaded all of my participant transcriptions. Dedoose allowed me to determine codes and create memos as I worked through line by line coding of every transcript. Dedoose offered an organizational and management platform to collate and analyze the interview results individually and collectively. In addition, Dedoose presented ways to track and count code frequencies, along with ways to group like codes and excerpts for analysis. Though the memos emerged from my literature review of literacy initiatives, cross-curricular initiatives, and life skills in education, I added my own thoughts and observations as I proceeded through the transcripts. Rather than develop mechanical memos, Charmez (2014) advocated for spontaneous ones.

The Dedoose web program uses color in its displays to signal frequency or lack of frequency and to indicate major or minor designations. With the exception of 3.5, figures 3.3 through 3.11 reflect screenshots from Dedoose which visually chronicle coding, interview excerpts, memos, and aspects of my study. Figure 3.3 highlights the 12 major codes used in the study's analysis of the first interviews:

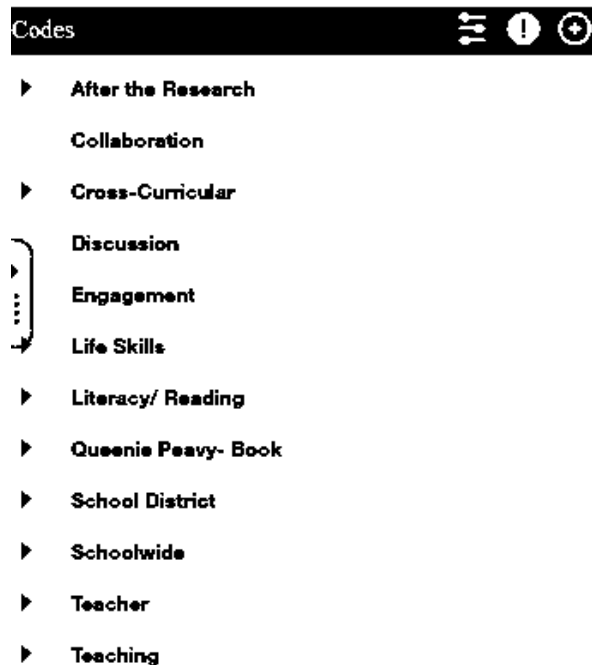


Figure 3.3: Major Codes- Interview 1(Dedoose Screenshot)

Figure 3.4 shows an expanded view of the coding system with a screenshot of some of the major codes along with minor codes they parent.

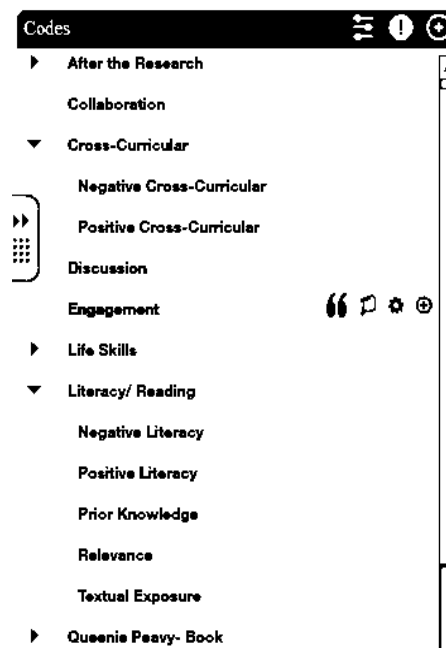


Figure 3.4: Some Major and Minor Categories- Interview 1(Dedoose Screenshot)

Once codes were defined in Dedoose, excerpts from interview transcripts were categorized and grouped. As an example, Figure 3.5 illustrates 3 excerpts from the second round of interviews assigned to the Instructional Time code categorization.

Title: Miss Steppy's 2nd Interview.docx

Codes Applied: Instructional Time Teacher Buy In

I think the teacher buy-in for most of us it's not really a problem. The only thing that would stop me from being like, "Yeah, let's do it!" would be just the time aspect. It's one more thing. And they're always piling one more thing on us and they never take anything off the bottom. They just keep putting stuff on the top and then say "Why aren't you doing that?"

Title: Ellen's 2nd Interview.docx

Codes Applied: Collaboration Teacher Buy In

I think that you can't- you can't force it. I think if you have teachers who want to do it, they embrace things like this. If you have a team that doesn't want to do it, you can't make them. There's nothing you can do. You can legislate it, but you're not going to make it happen.

Title: Martha-Interview 2.docx

Codes Applied: Assessment/ Testing Instructional Time Teacher Buy In

The testing, the assessments, the walk-throughs, the observations, you know it's all based on what's expected of us, expected to be seen and what we have to do. And it just doesn't leave any space in there for us to come up with these creative projects and products without a lot of extra work from teachers after school, before school.

Figure 3.5: Excerpts Categorized as Instructional Time-Interview 2 (Dedoose)

The screenshot in Figure 3.6 indicates a tally of code occurrences during the analysis phase of the study. The numbers reflect the number of interview excerpts labelled with each code.

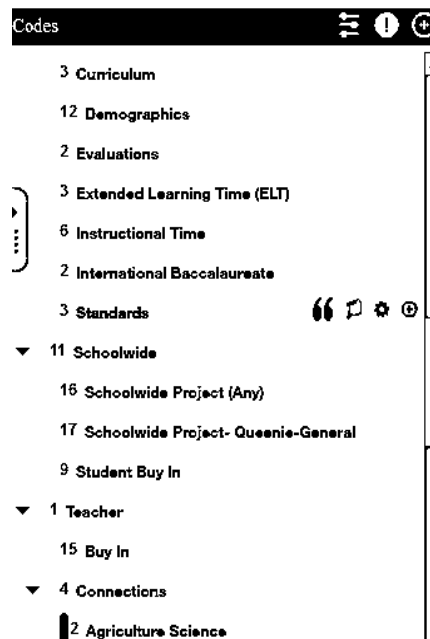


Figure 3.6: Tallied Code Occurrences- Interview 1(Dedoose Screenshot)

The word cloud generated by Dedoose in Figure 3.7 presents a different view of the major and minor codes. Here, during analysis the coded excerpts from the transcripts are displayed. The larger fonts indicate higher frequencies of code occurrence.

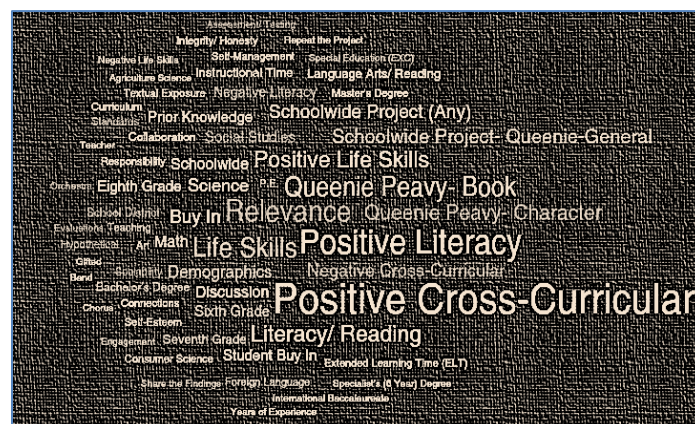


Figure 3.7: Word Cloud of Excerpt Frequency- Interview 1 (Dedoose Screenshot)

Figure 3.8 displays interview codes and their frequencies through a different visual media approach. In this example the interviewees are listed along the left hand side while the major and minor codes can be viewed from the top.

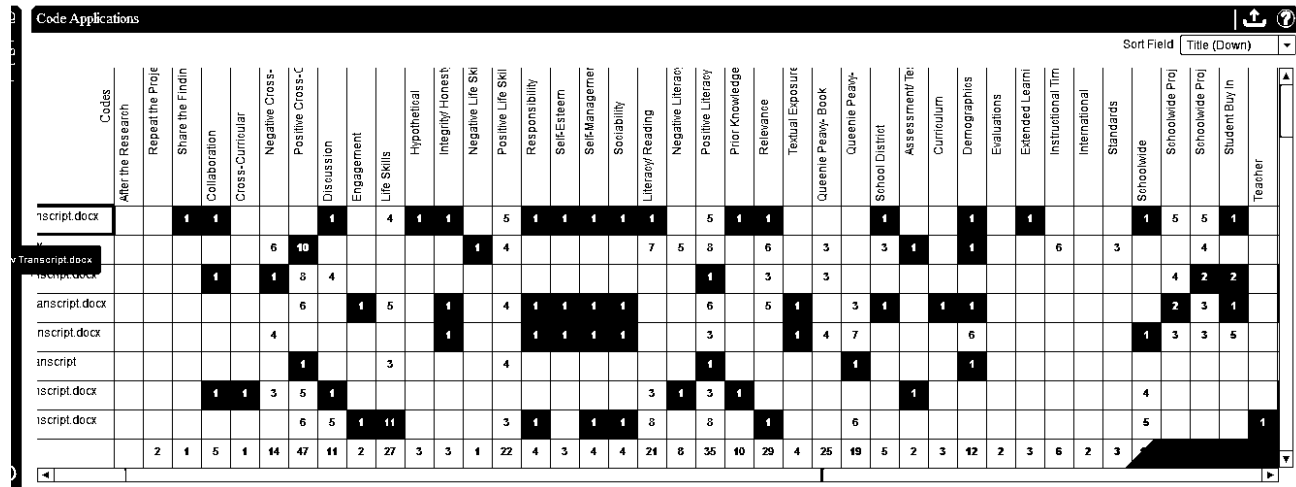


Figure 3.8: Code Applications and Frequencies-Interview 1 (Dedoose Screenshot)

In the Figure 3.9 screenshot media sources and code counts are the focus. Highlighting a cell brings up details about the media source and provides another analytic tool.

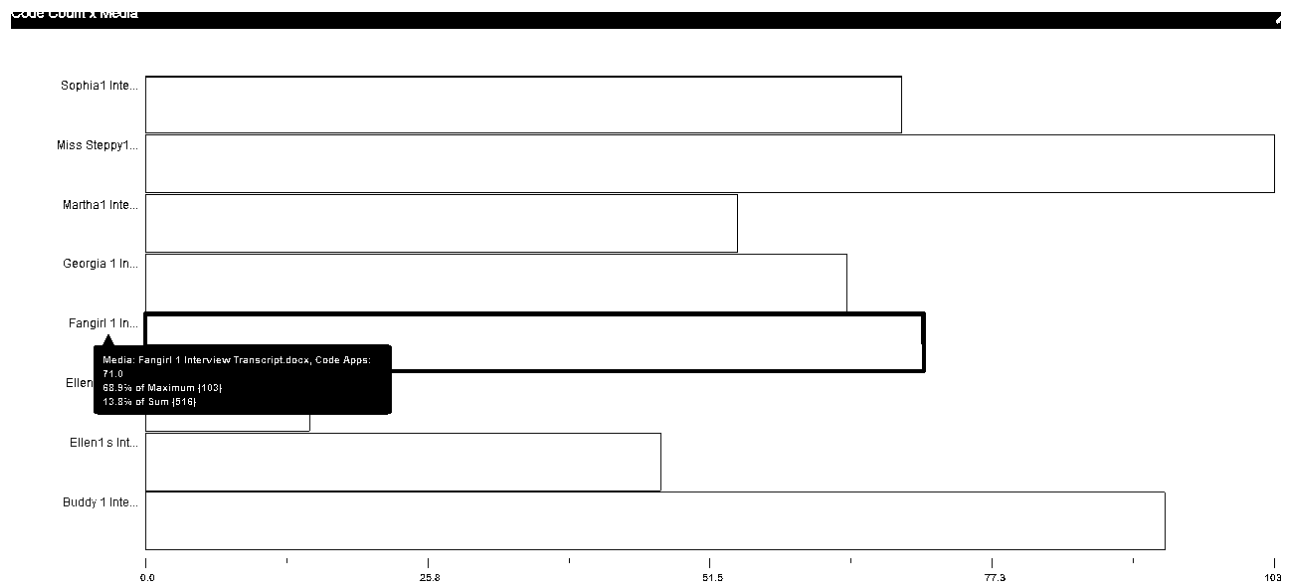


Figure 3.9: Media and Code Counts- Interview 1 (Dedoose Screenshot)

Analysis also included an examination of participants. Figure 3.10 demonstrates another display of interviewees and percentages of total assigned codes. This pie chart presents code counts combined with interviewees. Note Ellen 1's slice is divided because her transcript was uploaded in two sections, rather than in one. This transpired because the audio recorder required a change of batteries.

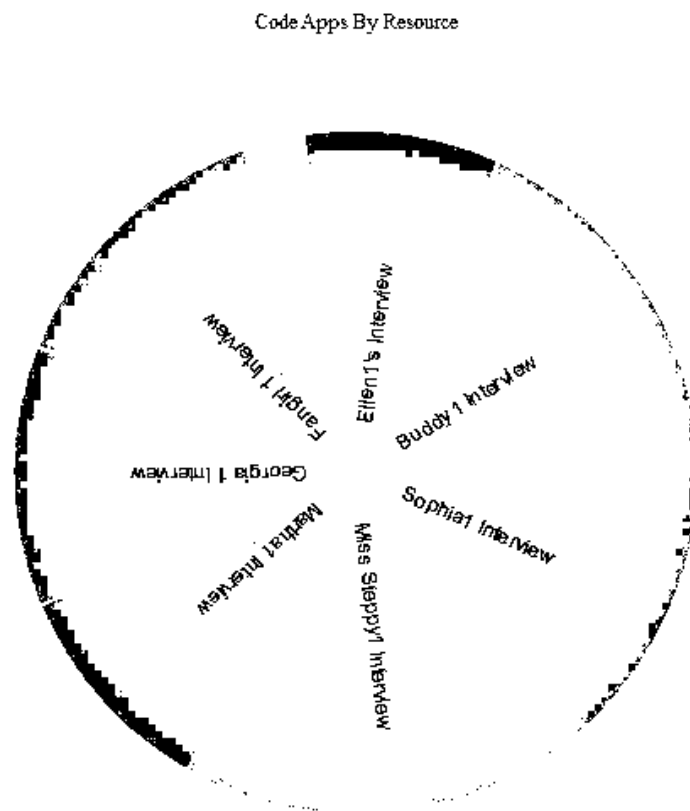


Figure 3.10: Code Counts and Interviewees- Interview 1 (Dedoose Screenshot)

The final Dedoose screenshot, Figure 3.11, provides a look at some of the memos developed during the coding and analysis aspects. The memos represent the literature based analytic process shown in Figure 3.2 as it transitions from the literature review to the research questions, then on to the interview questions and emergent themes. Further, the memos provide a means of analytical note taking and an avenue in which to link material.

Motivation, Prioritizing, M... ☐ Teachers seem naturally distrustful of having anything thrust upon them to do, no matter the project. Having more say so in what book to use popped up a few times. Teachers who were enthusias...	Literacy Training/ Prepar... ☐ Participants are very open and honest about backgrounds and degrees supporting literacy. Most non-ELA still feel confident about presenting literacy projects though the concern seems to be with math and science. ...	Academic Obligations: In... ☐ Having the time to promote/ foster/ encourage projects schoolwide or even class wide is a genuine concern. The school's demographics keep being referenced.	Crossing Curriculums: L... ☐ A few participants mentioned teacher resistance and a few also were of the opinion that there would always be teachers who refused to participate. Most seemed generally interested in the cross-curricular aspect, and support...	Development of Life Skill... ☐ Participants were enthusiastic about the life skills and their trails. Most liked Queenie as the epitome of the life skills model. Demographics were mentioned several times.
By Cindyhr 01/2017 	By Cindyhr 01/2017 	By Cindyhr 01/2017 	By Cindyhr 01/2017 	By Cindyhr 01/2017 
Academic Literacies: Init... ☐ The book choice itself seemed to be satisfactory, but involving everyone in choosing the schoolwide novel came up a couple of times. Most teachers had no objections to reading- and see the amount of reading in their ...	Academic Interventions: ... ☐ Schoolwide Projects were viewed halfheartedly. Though appreciative of the idea, participants kept bringing up the school and district's non-stop demands and unrealistic expectations of instructional time.	Reading Strategies and P... ☐ Most appear supportive of Literacy projects. Time seems to be a disadvantage towards incorporating literacy. Textual exposure does not really appear though participants like the idea of reading....	In our other classes, in o... ☐ 	I think when it's cross-cu... ☐
By Cindyhr 01/2017 	By Cindyhr 01/2017 	By Cindyhr 01/2017 	By Cindyhr 01/2017 	By Cindyhr 01/2017 

Figure 3.11: Memos- Interview 1 (Dedoose Screenshot)

Ethics

Research did not begin until permission had been granted by the study's school district and the University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board. However, there were no ethical issues involved with the study. This research project did not bring harm to faculty or the school. In fact, the study focused on teacher perspectives of objectives and material included in the established curriculums of the middle school. The research involved faculty associated with the school and presented no moral or legal challenges.

Confidentiality, which Johnson and Christensen (2014) defined as a researcher sharing the identity of participants only with the research staff, was assured for all participants within the study. Sharing narratives remains a personal act, so recording them accurately carries ethical considerations (Barone, 2007). I chose to transcribe all interviews myself. Confidentiality can be compromised if someone other than the researcher transcribes the interview (Suzuki et al., 2007). Participants were therefore asked to review the transcriptions of the interview sessions and narrative sketches to perform member checks for errors. Any discrepancies could then be addressed before data analysis occurred.

Once completed, recorded interviews were uploaded into the NCH Express computer transcription software program Express Scribe (NCH Software, 2015) in the form of audio files. Those audio files were transcribed into written records and then taped interviews were erased once transcribed into written text. Paper copies of data contained no identifiable information linking collected data to specific participants. Original paperwork with identifiable information was stored in locked files and destroyed once the study was complete. Any material saved into a computer file was accessed only with a password to maintain privacy and confidentiality.

Reliability

According to Creswell (2014), reliability in qualitative studies reflects the consistency or stability of the approach from one researcher to another. In other words, the degree of reliability depends on the degree to which the research can be reproduced by other researchers and evaluated with similar results. Since generalizability was not possible for this study, reliability was assured by attention to the procedures of the study. Anecdotal notes were kept to record details about participant interviews and the data collection. Yin (2003) reminded that minimizing bias and minimizing errors are the purpose of reliability and recommended the inclusion of a protocol to use as a guide. In this study, the interviews themselves actually followed protocols (see Appendices B and C) so that all participants were asked the same questions. A further recommendation from Yin (2003) was to maintain a detailed documentation of the research procedures themselves. In this study that reliability was strengthened with the written recording of the procedures and steps for this dissertation. In a further effort to ensure both reliability and validity, this study followed the recommendations of Johnson and Christensen (2014) in crafting interview questions. Questions were developed which avoided leading participants and avoided the incorporation of emotionally sensitive phrases. To further

promote reliability, Lammers and Badia (2006) recommended a standardizing of the interview and its procedures. The authors cautioned against ambiguous or leading questions, and recommended considering future potential biases before setting up the interviews. Thus, questions were developed for this study which avoided leading participants and avoided the incorporation of emotionally sensitive phrases.

Validity

Research involves strategic planning and implementation, and validity acts as a barometer to assess the extent to which the research actually examined or explored the expected, intended goal. Creswell (2014) clarified validity differs within quantitative and qualitative research, so in qualitative certain procedures are used to ensure validity. Participants or researchers are able to decide on the accuracy. Creswell (2014) defined eight validity strategies and recommended the incorporation of at least three, which this research followed. Based on Creswell's (2014) proposal, procedures in this study focused on member checking and the triangulation of data.

First, member checking was used with participants to ascertain transcriptions of the interviews were correct. To strengthen credibility, a triangulation of teacher perspectives through interviews, member checks of the transcripts and narrative sketches, and an examination of artifacts from the project was practiced to establish and rationalize themes of the research. Along with member checking and triangulation, validity was reinforced with the rich, thick descriptions provided regarding the study. Validity and triangulation were also strengthened by utilizing interview questions which allowed participants to respond naturally and which avoided leading words and emotionally charged phrases. McLeod (2015) pointed out that validity often emerges from an open-ended interview approach, because answers bring about more topics. In

this study the first interview followed a rote list, with responses generating more subjects for further exploration. Those additional subjects were then used to create interview questions for the second interview. Freeman, DeMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, and St. Pierre (2007) concluded no procedure can define validity. Instead, the definition transitions and turns throughout the shifting of the qualitative study.

Researcher Subjectivity

Etherington (2004) contended that the scrutiny researchers employ with participants should extend reflexively to researchers themselves. Merriam (2009) described the researcher's reflexivity as the researcher's position and advised contemplating biases and assumptions even before research begins. Researcher subjectivity was a credible consideration in this study since I was a peer teacher to the teachers interviewed as participants. That subjectivity was integral to the research and must be acknowledged since it both enabled and disabled (Peshkin, 1988). In addition, I spearheaded the adoption of the schoolwide novel and provided lessons during the project. Throughout the study I worked to moderate personal views, ideas, and positions about the novel and the project as Etherington (2004) advised. Nevertheless, as the researcher I understood the potential influence personal subjectivity presented. Acknowledging that subjectivity, as Merriam (2009) recommended, has provided a way for readers to understand and clarify the researcher's data interpretation. In conclusion, close involvement in the complex progression of qualitative research always brings with it some serious areas of contemplation.

Limitations

Limitations existed with this study. At the conclusion of the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project, students were not assessed academically and no actual evaluation of the cross-curricular literacy project was undertaken by students or teachers. This study approach focused

on one specific school and targeted perspectives from teachers at that middle school. Thus, generalizing the results to another population was not the primary focus. Since the conclusions evolved from that approach and with that population, they may not necessarily ring true for another community or for another school system. Further, since the study involved a single researcher, a certain amount of bias occurred. Though it will be impossible to generalize this study, it may serve to encourage further investigations from other researchers. In addition, what the teachers interviewed had to say illustrated areas of educational concern or of educational confidence. Because this study targeted one school with one population through one curricular activity, a limitation exists in extrapolating those findings.

Chapter Summary

The framework of this research study was selected to conduct and evaluate teacher perspectives of a schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project and emerging life skills by the most appropriate methods. A review of the literature showed several studies targeting literacy had indicated the importance of reading and reading comprehension (Daniels & Steres, 2011; Morgan, 2012; National Reading Panel, 2000; Pittman & Honchell, 2014). Other literature described cross-curricular studies, as well as studies targeting life skills (Applebee et al., 2007; Catalano et al., 2004; Durlak, et. al, 2011; Ness, 2007). Unfortunately, the literature review also suggested a lack of studies specifically targeting literacy projects presented through schoolwide cross-curricular methods.

A qualitative research design, constructivist epistemology, and interpretive perspective framed the entire study. Relying on a case study design allowed a truly in-depth investigation, one in which I, as the researcher, possessed the means to become immersed in what was studied (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2010; Walsham, 2006; Yin, 2003). In addition, this case study provided

personal testaments to the whom, the what, the where, the how, and the why of one particular case. Therefore, what was concluded from this study may give a far more detailed explanation and picture of cross-curricular literacy projects and the emergence of life skills because of the detail in the teacher perspectives.

Teachers provided the data through interviews, though documents relating to the schoolwide literacy project were also included. Collecting data with interviews provided an opportunity for in-depth and descriptive responses (McLeod, 2014; Turner, 2010). Formal teacher interviews were conducted face to face and recorded following a protocol of structured and unstructured questions designed to encourage detail and description, similar to the approach favored by Yurdaki (2015). Interviews were conducted and scheduled at times convenient to participants. Responses were recorded and then transcribed through transcription software. The interview settings were not at the middle school but were conducted at participant homes, at restaurants, or at coffee shops at times convenient to the participants. Once the interviews were completed an analytic method was selected to segment and count words, to code the words into categories, and to determine relationships and themes to summarize and interpret material gleaned as literature suggested (Johnson & Christensen, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Measures were also taken to uphold the validity and reliability of the study with member checks and careful documentation of the inquiry process (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2003).

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how middle school teachers perceived, expressed, and described their experiences with teaching via a cross-curricular literacy project. A secondary purpose was to explore how teachers perceived middle school students experienced life skills such as responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty which may have emerged during the cross-curricular literacy project. Thus, this qualitative case study sought to investigate and describe how teachers viewed a cross-curricular literacy project in which social and emotional life skills were included. These skills included responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty, and were examined in the context of the *Queenie Peavy* cross-curricular literacy project. In this chapter narratives from the participant interviews address and answer the study's research questions.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the research and were addressed throughout the interviews with study participants:

1. What views did teachers express concerning the implementation of a schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project such as *Queenie Peavy*?
2. How did middle school teachers perceive their roles after participating in a schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project?
3. Did teachers describe an emergence of social and emotional life skills such

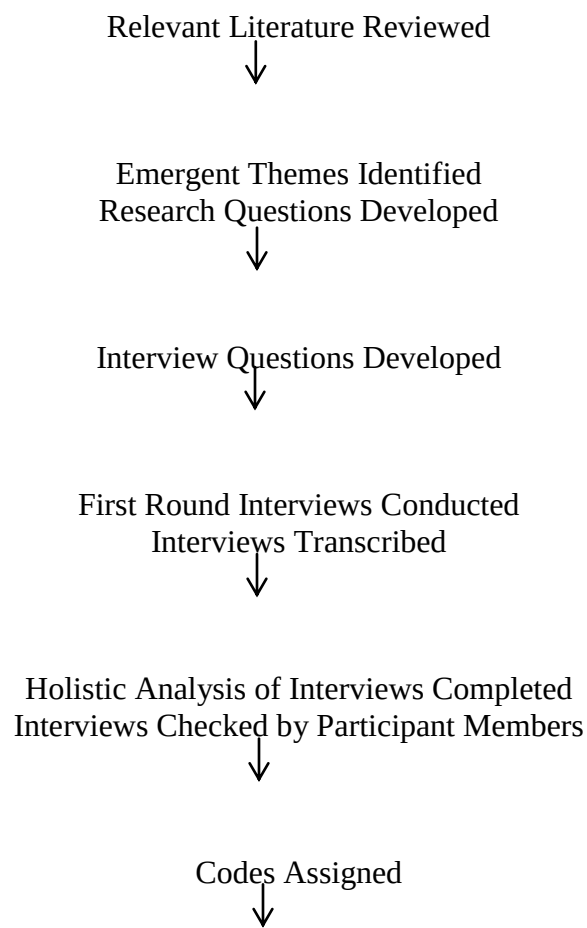
as responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty during the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project?

This study extended prior research focused on teacher perspectives, literacy, cross-curricular instruction, and life skills. Further, teacher perspectives provided the hub of the qualitative case study because the study's participants were seven teachers from the same middle school. These teachers were selected because they had previously participated in the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project and also reflected the school's demographics. Two one-hour interviews were administered to six teachers while a single one hour interview was administered to a single teacher who was hospitalized during the interview time period. Interviews were conducted from November, 2016, through January, 2017.

Creswell (2007, 2014) defined qualitative research as an inquiry initiated with assumptions and worldviews which examine the meanings awarded to problems or situations by individuals or by groups. Qualitative research is interpretive research where meaning is often defined and re-defined (Stake, 2010). An interpretive single case study approach was chosen for this study to better explore and understand perspectives from teachers (Yin, 2009). The case study design worked well in framing teacher perspectives of social interactions and the constructions of meaning in my study. In addition, a case study approach established the research within the real context of the middle school (Yin, 2009). By utilizing this approach, teacher participants were allowed a voice with which to describe the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project and the life skills which might have emerged from the project.

Data sources encompassed interview transcripts from two separate interview sessions. Data sources were gathered through interviewing to record teacher perspectives of the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project and life skills. No interviews were conducted at the

school where the project took place. Interviews were not conducted during school hours. Instead, interviews took place throughout holidays, weekends, or after the school day, and were conducted at participant homes, restaurants, and coffee shops. A consideration of the interviews was to ensure privacy and convenience for participants, along with convenient times for the interviews. Two one hour interviews were administered to six participants, and a single one hour interview was administered to an additional participant. The latter's second interview was not conducted due to the participant's ill health. The interviews were transcribed verbatim before coding and subsequently replayed to ensure the accuracy of the material. Data collection took place from November, 2016 through January, 2017. Below, Figure 4.1 provides an overview of the entire data analysis process.



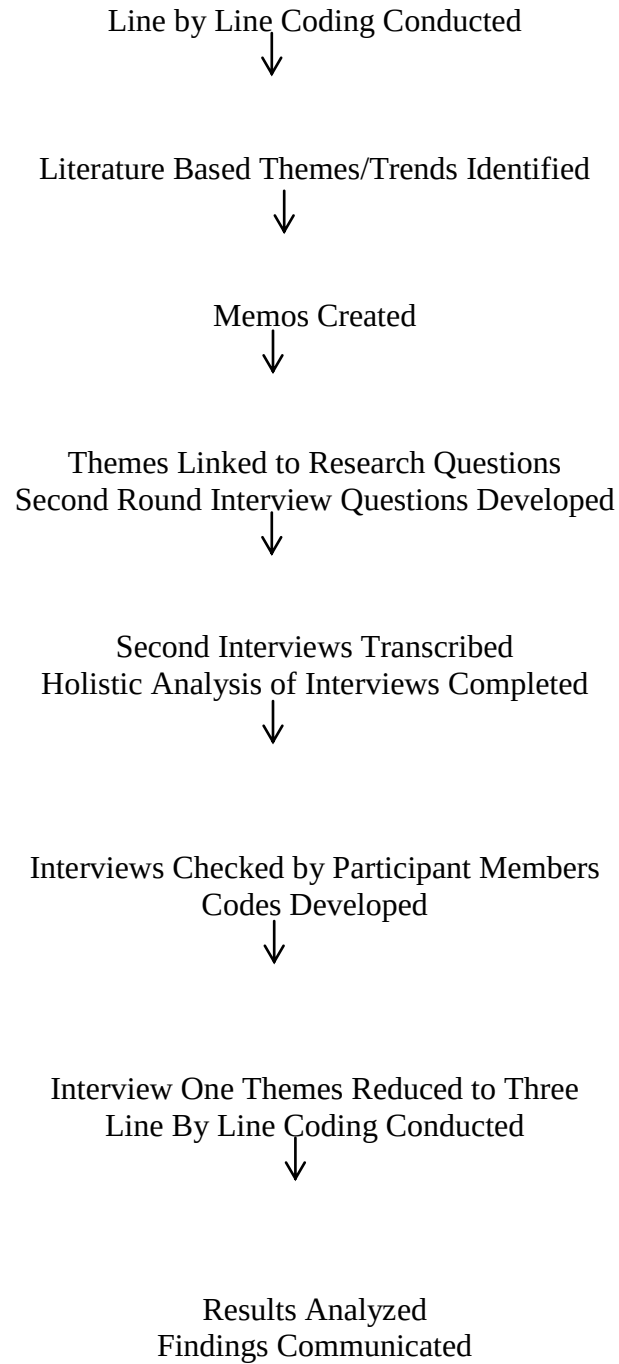


Figure 4.1: Data Analysis Flow Chart

Community and School District Context

A purpose of this chapter is to explain the context and setting of the cross-curricular literacy project as both could influence or impact perspectives of the teacher participants. The school featured in this case study opened in 1995 and remains one of four middle schools in the county. In 2016, the county provided public education to 13,633 total students, with 2,785 enrolled in middle school. The high school graduation rate was 80%. The school system employed 1152 teachers in the district. The middle school featured in this research had a total population of 677 students (Georgia Department of Education, 2013). In addition, the school was located in a moderately rural area near the county's boundary. The county's population was 120, 938. Of those, 56% of residents were White, 27.7% Black, 10.8% Latino, and 5.5% Asian or Other. Last, the poverty range encompassed 36.7% of the county's individuals, while 5% of the county's individuals were unemployed (United States Census Bureau, 2013).

The school featured in this case study had been designated as a Title I school. Thus, its population of lowered socio economic status students entitled it to additional federal funding. Within this public middle school, 95% of the student population qualified for free or reduced lunches. Whites, Asians, and other ethnicities comprised 10% of the student population, while an additional 38% were Latino and 52% were black. Of the school's 49 teachers, 74% were female and 26% were male. In addition, 35% of the teachers were Black and 65% were White. Further, 5 teachers were considered International (Bahamas, Ghana, Nigeria, Peru, Spain) of the total 49 (Georgia Department of Education, 2013). Figure 4.2 provides a visual representation of the data.

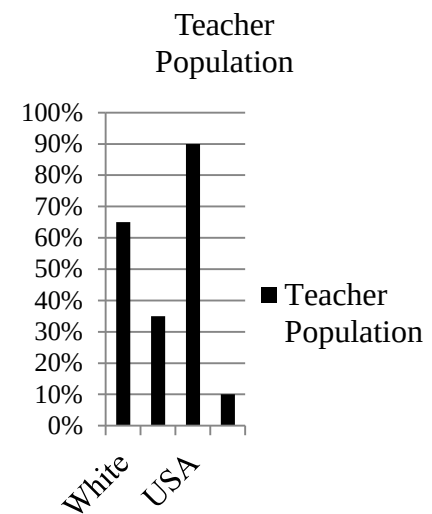
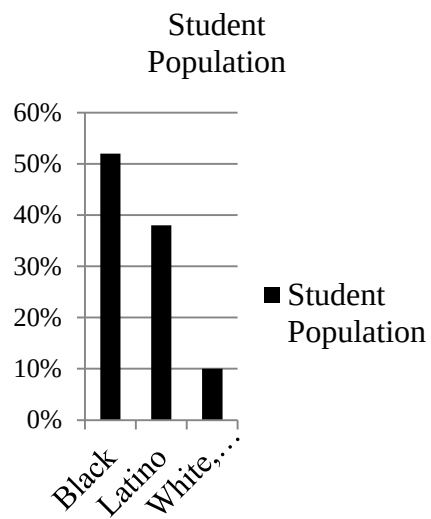
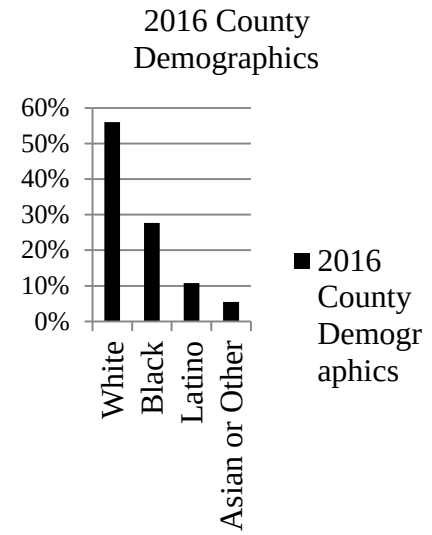
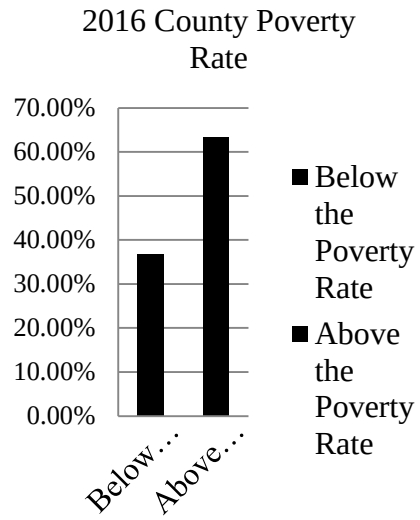


Figure 4.2: Summary of Case Demographics

The Groundwork: Participant Interviews

This chapter shares the narratives of the teachers who participated in the *Queenie Peavy* schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project and were later interviewed for this study. Each participant's interview narrative has been collated from material transcribed after conducting both participant interviews. No editing was applied to direct quotations other than some modifying of sentence and paragraph structure to maintain the flow of the message. Teacher tenure at the time of the project ranged from a first year teacher to one with thirty years of experience. Table 4.1 illustrates characteristics of the seven teachers who were participants in this study. Special Education is designated as EXC in Table 4.1 while Extended Learning Time is shown as ELT.

Table 4.1

Participant Characteristics

	Buddy	Ellen	Fangirl	Georgia	Martha	Miss Steppy	Sophia
6 th		x	x	x	x		
7 th	x	x		x	x		x
8 th		x		x	x	x	
EXC	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Gifted	x	x		x	x		
Agriculture		x					
Science							
Art				x			
Consumer Science					x		
Language Arts			x				x
ELT	x		x			x	x
Language Arts							
Science	x		x			x	
Interviewed Twice	x	x		x	x	x	x

The accounts by these participants describe outlooks of literacy and cross-curricular instruction, as well as thoughts about life skills. The discussions which took place through the interviews address and answer the study's research questions. Because of the time lapse between the implementation of the project and the interviewing of participants, artifacts were shared with participants to aid recall. Each participant was interviewed at a location away from Abbeville Middle School, after school, or during holiday periods. Interview locations included participant homes, restaurants, and coffee shops. The seven participants provided thorough, detailed perspectives of the schoolwide *Queenie Peavy* project, of literacy, of cross-curricular approaches, and of life skills.

Buddy

In the year of the *Queenie Peavy* schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project Buddy taught seventh grade science. Hired seventeen years ago by the Durham County School District, she has also held the positions of instructional coach and grade team leader. Buddy earned a Master's in teaching and a Specialist's (six year) degree in Educational Leadership and Administration from the University of Georgia. Her goal is to secure a job in educational administration. Buddy currently works as a Gifted collaborator with a focus on science and social studies enrichment for middle school students.

In her first interview Buddy described how her parents' commitment had shaped her. She credited her parents with instilling within her the value of a good education and a love of reading. Thus, Buddy enjoyed the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project. In addition, she reported her students enjoyed it as well. When the project was incorporated Buddy began with student read-alouds. After a few days she started reading *Queenie Peavy* aloud herself, with students reading silently with her. Buddy felt strongly students cannot progress when their

reading is poor, so reading should be stressed in math, science, and social studies. She appreciated the discussions the book initiated, along with the cross-curricular opportunities which emerged and the Literacy Night at the end of the project.

Buddy viewed the life skills from *Queenie Peavy* as relevant to the school's population. For example, students were able to make connections with Queenie's own home responsibilities and their own. Unfortunately for other students, hunger, an incarcerated parent, and bullying were additional topics with which they related. Because students could participate in the discussions and conversations, they favored the project. Buddy viewed the entire cross-curricular literacy project positively.

Buddy supported the literacy focus in the *Queenie Peavy* project, and contemplated the importance of increasing literacy encounters in schools. She explained she stressed to the students the role literacy plays in their education. Buddy also discussed the ways that literacy, especially with Abbeville Middle's demographics, would enrich their future lives. To impact textual exposure, Buddy felt students needed material which touched them or with which they felt familiar. That would allow them to engage with the reading. Buddy enumerated factors that increased student engagement throughout the project. First, far from the perfect student, Queenie spent most of the book landing in trouble at school. Buddy believed Queenie's tomboy qualities hooked the kids. She reported to motivate students and further enrich learning, students need material which engages them. For example, students could seek out another book by the author of *Queenie Peavy*, or could choose a book to read similar to *Queenie Peavy*. Buddy added that one reason teachers participated in the project was because students were engaged with the book.

Buddy emphasized the role of teacher engagement to ensure cross-curricular success, because without engagement, literacy skills would not be stressed or practiced. Buddy approved

the schoolwide focus *Queenie Peavy* created. Teachers made lesson plans for Extended Learning Time (ELT) through discussions and collaboration with other teachers as they read the novel. Without teacher buy-in, though, the project would not have succeeded. The lesson frameworks which were provided illustrated how the project impacted their own classrooms and helped ensure teacher support. Students experienced the cross-curricular aspect differently. Buddy illustrated by referring to the streak-o-lean mentioned in the story. At first students claimed they had no idea what Queenie and her classmates meant. Once she described it for them, students tied the steak-o-lean to dishes they knew.

Moreover, Buddy appreciated the attention devoted to life skills. Of principal interest was the subject of bullying. Buddy brought up that with Teachers as Advisors (TAA) instruction during Extended Learning Time (ELT), teachers covered bullying. So *Queenie Peavy* could easily link onto those TAA character education objectives. Buddy and her students discussed the roots of bullying, then considered Queenie's general motive for bullying, protecting someone as opposed to simply acting tough. In addition, self-management and sociability in Queenie's world found relevance in Buddy's classroom. She and her students reflected on Queenie's approach to social skills and optional means of communication other than throwing rocks and acting hateful. Some students made connections with Queenie's hunger and poverty, and others related to her being a bully or confrontational. Buddy shared her own personal family story, where growing up there was no extra money, but the expectation was that she and her siblings read, acted responsibly, and completed school. Students also adopted a hypothetical approach toward some of Queenie's antics, asking Buddy how she would react if they acted in such a way. Thus, Buddy found the life skills in the novel germane to her students and the school.

Buddy shared ideas concerning the hypothetical adoption of a future cross-curricular literacy project at Abbeville Middle and suggested soliciting feedback:

They could do a survey or something on teachers, from the students, and then maybe narrow that down to a couple of books, maybe five. Survey it again, and then the top two—we'll choose from those. Then everybody will feel like they have a voice. Even parents could even do that, submit it to PTA and get parents involved also.

When asked if teachers whose selections were not chosen would still participate, Buddy felt certain they would:

I really do, because teachers want the kids to read the book. So even if it wasn't my book that I chose we would still read it. Because that's the whole idea of the schoolwide literacy, we knew we were going to read a book. It may not be your book but guess what? We're going to read the book.

In conclusion, Buddy proved a strong supporter of the entire schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project. She felt strongly about the need for more exposure to reading to target and enrich literacy. Buddy pointed out that kids unable to read will be unable to work math problems. She agreed with the selection of *Queenie Peavy* and predicted students who read it during the project would still recall some of the book's plot today. Her perspective of the cross-curricular aspect was that it was given a mixed reception by the faculty. Some teachers honed in to the cross-curricular opportunities while others worried over how linking grades and subjects would actually work, especially in regard to math. However, the project's purpose did parallel the school's focus on literacy and math. She supported the coverage of life skills because the discussions would make a difference to students, and potentially, could impact the rest of their lives. Buddy reflected that uniting the school over one topic which could be referenced in math,

science, and social studies did create student and teacher engagement. Buddy concluded with the fact that the entire school population, from custodians to the administration, was involved with the book, which made it an overall positive experience for Abbeville Middle.

Ellen

Though no longer teaching at Abbeville Middle School, while there Ellen taught Agriculture Science during the implementation of the *Queenie Peavy* schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project. As a Connections teacher, Ellen worked with all three grade levels, sixth, seventh, and eighth. Prior to her transition to the teaching field Ellen worked in research at a university as well as made a living as a farmer. She earned a Bachelor's of Science before later completing her teacher certification. A position at Abbeville Middle followed that certification, Ellen's first certified teaching job. Ellen currently teaches gifted science at a middle school in an adjoining county.

In retrospect, Ellen analyzed the *Queenie Peavy* project's reception from the faculty by saying that some teachers considered the project an annoyance, while others thought it a good idea with great potential. She elaborated with a discussion of teacher buy-in, which she felt depended on teachers being shown how the project could adapt to their disciplines and to their daily curriculums. Ellen supported both the choice of work by a Georgia author as the basis of the project as well as the adoption of *Queenie Peavy* for the text.

Regarding the project's literacy focus, Ellen viewed literacy instruction as an avenue which could strengthen science. Reading lexile scores and reading comprehension figure heavily into the science discipline. Ellen explained science incorporates a different language with its particular vocabulary. Thus, any method used to enable language decoding or aiding with comprehension would make her own responsibilities as a teacher easier. Though students tend to

segregate reading by considering it solely part of Language Arts, reading comprises a large portion of the science curriculum. She pointed out that math also depends on competent literacy skills for students to analyze and to solve word problems.

Ellen supported increasing chances for textual exposure through literacy projects because increased repetitions of textual exposure meant the students' vocabularies became richer in science. Ellen defined prior knowledge as something students vaguely recalled, something they had heard or seen. She added that prior knowledge could be something heard or seen in practice which could connect with new material. Though she did not think students linked *Queenie Peavy* through prior knowledge from their families or from themselves, she saw the lack of prior knowledge as a positive twist which created dialogue. Ellen viewed teaching literacy as a necessary foundation to science and to student achievement, and considered literacy instruction not just the domain of Language Arts and Reading teachers.

Ellen regarded cross-curricular approaches involving all grade levels as a positive initiative for any school, not just Abbeville Middle. Incorporating cross-curricular projects could make science more inviting, rather than unapproachable to students. Ellen cited testing as a deterrent to cross-curricular work, however. She specified that during the *Queenie Peavy* project testing occurred in all grade levels of the school. Teachers were reluctant to sacrifice instructional time appropriated for standardized testing, which at the time was the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT). Ellen remarked that the commitment to testing pressured teachers just as hard as it did students, and teachers earn job evaluations based on student learning:

So they are under pressure just like the kids but at the same time, personally for me as a science teacher, I feel like kids hate science because they find it so unapproachable and

anything that I can do to make it approachable only improves how they do. I don't believe that I just-that they remember facts because of me. They remember loving learning and I think cross-curricular projects make that a lot more relevant.

In addition, Ellen said many teachers treat their classrooms as kingdoms, which proves problematic for collaboration with other teachers and in valuing cross-curricular opportunities. Despite the impediments, Ellen championed cross-curricular opportunities as ways to encourage a love of learning.

The adoption of *Queenie Peavy* as the cross-curricular novel met Ellen's approval. She felt the fact that the book was set in the South made it more relevant to Abbeville Middle's students. Further, local Georgia authors like Robert Burch deserve emphasis and recognition because of their contributions to both adolescent and adult literature. Also, in her first interview Ellen shared she felt *Queenie Peavy* offered discussion and bonding opportunities between students and parents because of the setting and content. If students discussed the novel with their parents, the exchange would create memories.

Ellen championed the focus on life skills and likened life skills to survival skills. She posited that Abbeville Middle's population lacked life skills because most of the population's parents lacked them as well. Thus, she appreciated a story integrated with life skills. Ellen commented on the transition of middle schoolers toward independence and the benefit of a role model, Queenie, with whom they could compare their desire for independence and maturity. Students at Abbeville Middle shared Queenie's survival instincts. The fact that students could find common ground with Queenie and discover someone their age who struggled through issues pleased her. Specifically Ellen felt exposure to the novel highlighted self-management and responsibility, important aspects of middle school development. Though she admitted that

Agriculture Science did not necessarily evoke discussions with students of life skills, she felt Queenie's story inspired readers. Ellen pointed out that middle school students were on the verge of entering high school where life skills could impact future outcomes. Therefore, life skills were justified as warranting instructional time. She pointed out that Queenie represented another child from another time with the same concerns, which would provide a way for students to feel more secure about their own self-doubts. Ellen advised that students would either choose the path of the people rearing them or they would not.

Ellen's interviews concluded with her expressing positive feelings and support for the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project and life skills. She even offered a suggestion for a different approach should the project be repeated. As a first step, only sixth graders would read the novel and that reading would be treated as an overview, but when they moved to seventh grade the book would be re-visited with an emphasis on the novel's life skills. In eighth grade, their third year with *Queenie Peavy*, instruction would target responsibility and plot events applicable to their lives. Ellen had considered a way to adapt the project while still maintaining the focus on literacy, cross-curricular instruction, and life skills.

Fangirl

Fangirl graduated from a liberal arts college in Virginia with a Bachelor of Arts. Prior to working at her current position her love of travel led her to teach abroad for two years. Afterwards, she chose to teach at Abbeville Middle because a friend taught at the school. Fangirl currently teaches English Language Arts to sixth graders and values reading opportunities. During her interview Fangirl talked about the need to have all teachers of Language Arts certified in Reading. Her teaching career has already surpassed the thirty year mark, and Fangirl has no plans to retire for at least the next couple of years.

Fangirl had not encountered *Queenie Peavy* prior to the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project. She commented that it was a wonderful story, one which she enjoyed. Still, she felt teachers in the sixth grade did little to promote the book or the project. On the other hand, Fangirl described the enthusiasm her own students developed for *Queenie Peavy*. She summarized their engagement by saying they identified with Queenie's determination to remain her own person and to ignore rules, even in her poverty. Reflecting on ways to increase teacher buy-in, Fangirl offered advice for a future project. Once the book was chosen, teachers from each subject area should meet separately and discuss the book and project. The meetings would work to secure teacher support. However, Fangirl admitted that there would always be a group of teachers hesitant or unwilling to participate in any schoolwide project, no matter what the objective was. Fangirl expressed support for the *Queenie Peavy* project and endorsed any forthcoming cross-curricular literacy projects.

Fangirl elaborated that literacy projects had, and always would be, met with a lukewarm reception from faculty. Teachers would respond that they could not participate, they did not know enough about literacy, or they just would not take part. Crossing curriculums would prove just as problematic with teachers defending their reluctance because they did not teach Language Arts or did not know anything about Language Arts. They simply would not want to cross curriculums.

Fangirl believed poverty proved the biggest impact on textual exposure for Abbeville Middle's students. She explained they fail to see any value in much of what is presented in school because they fail to connect it to their own lives. When students do establish links with something they read, however, they love it. If they can visualize the scene or have a character remind them of someone down the street they will buy-in to the reading.

Fangirl endorsed cross-curricular approaches to literacy, but felt the school district and state lagged in implementing cross-curricular measures. Fangirl described teachers as reticent toward participating in the project, and in fact, described sixth grade teachers as dragging their feet. Fangirl felt that some of the teachers did not want to participate in the project because they considered the book dated. In addition, she thought teacher buy-in partially depends on teachers viewing cross-curricular methods as beneficial and then being willing to take time to participate. Despite less teacher support, Fangirl emphasized students actually enjoyed reading *Queenie Peavy*.

Fangirl's students embraced *Queenie Peavy* as soon as the school project began, and bought into the character of Queenie. She reported she had good discussions with her students concerning life skills and Queenie. Fangirl defined prior knowledge as an accumulation of experiences which has transpired over the years. Children acquire a great deal of prior knowledge from their own homes and from their own television viewing. With *Queenie Peavy* students were able to link prior knowledge. Class members reflected over the work ethic shown by Queenie's mother. They also talked about Queenie's take on reality, how she processed events in her own mind, such as the scene where Queenie searches for eggs. Students identified with Queenie and enjoyed Queenie's interplay with her neighbors. The fact that the story had both black and white characters added to their interest. Also, Queenie transformed into a hero to the readers. She faced adversity and came through intact, something many of them hoped to do. Further, they related to her, and connected through her poverty or with her struggles with the life skills of self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty. They shared some of her experiences and identified with her. Fangirl reported that the children genuinely loved all of the book and remained engaged from one lesson to the next.

Fangirl offered advice for a future project. Once the schoolwide book was chosen, teachers from each subject area should meet and discuss it. The meetings would work to secure teacher buy-in:

I think this is the first thing. I'd like to see you come up with another book, but I would suggest it be done a different way. I would suggest that you have a meeting of all the teachers, you know the grades. For example, all the language teachers meet. You discuss it. All the math teachers meet. You discuss it. You discuss by departments and get everyone to buy-in to it. I think it would be wonderful and I think if you could come up with another book like this it would work wonderfully.

Fangirl stressed students really enjoyed the book, and in the interview it was apparent that Fangirl enjoyed *Queenie Peavy* as well. Further, she saw evidence of students responding to the life skills which emerged during the reading of the novel. Fangirl said that students loved the novel, and reacted positively toward it. Despite the buy-in from students and Fangirl, she felt other sixth grade teachers were not very supportive of either the book or of the project.

Georgia

After earning a Bachelor of Arts in Studio Arts Georgia moved from Michigan to Pine Forest, Georgia. She entered graduate school at the University of Georgia and acquired a Master's of Fine Arts, along with teaching certification in Art Education from the state of Georgia. A colleague recommended she apply for the position at Abbeville Middle. She did, and was hired. During the year of the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project Georgia taught visual arts to sixth, seventh, and eighth graders.

Georgia approved of the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project and explained it was as much about community building in the school as it was about presenting textual information.

She appreciated the project's organization. It also pleased her that everyone involved was a stakeholder either during the project or during Literacy Night when the project was featured. Teachers had a say in their individual approaches to the project, and that ensured their ownership.

Before the project students were unfamiliar with *Queenie Peavy*. Georgia spoke of the role of prior knowledge. Georgia defined prior knowledge as the knowledge an individual carries and elaborated that students acquire prior knowledge from the classroom and at home. Some of that knowledge could be emotional learning resulting from both positive and negative life experiences. How much prior knowledge students brought to the project varied from student to student.

Georgia explained how she viewed the role of literacy in schools. She described it as the academic foundation tied to a student's future job success. Further, she felt literacy should extend schoolwide and system wide because of its essential function in education. Georgia also addressed how peer teachers typically view any school project. First, teachers regard initiatives with distrust since the school district orders the implementation of numerous initiatives in a school year. Teachers already have a huge work load. So as expected, there was a wariness in adding yet another project.

Georgia, though, embraced the cross-curricular literacy project immediately. Her support came in part because of prior experience. When she taught high school art she had often collaborated and connected high school literature selections to art projects. She found she enjoyed crossing curriculums and enriching literacy. In addition, Georgia regarded *Queenie Peavy* an appropriate selection for Abbeville Middle's schoolwide project. Incarceration, bullying, emotional reactions, and family issues from the novel resonated with the school's

students, as well, as they encountered them with *Queenie Peavy*. It was not difficult for a student to walk in Queenie's shoes and to view life from her perspective. Georgia contrasted the novel to current textual encounters. It worried Georgia that students depend on the Internet for so much of their text. Not only are sites filled with misinformation, but the writing may be grammatically incorrect. That does nothing to aid students in improving literacy. Georgia felt that schools should support books of quality, and those books should not be sacrificed or replaced with the Internet.

Georgia reiterated her belief that reading creates the foundation of all academic classes. To succeed in science or social studies students must read course textual content. Georgia equated reading in art to learning in art and gave some examples she uses to connect the two with her students. Reading about an artist's approach to art is learning art. In addition, reading about different artists and their projects is learning art, as well as meeting curricular standards. Georgia's students participated in the *Queenie Peavy* project by either illustrating a scene from the novel or by designing a re-creation of the book's cover. She and her students created a quilt-designed display to arrange all of the student art pieces once all students finished. Georgia recalled other activities which took place for the *Queenie Peavy* project. In Physical Education classes students played games characteristic of the Great Depression era, which is when *Queenie Peavy* was set. The foreign language classes translated excerpts from the book from English to Spanish and French.

Georgia pointed out that life skills in *Queenie Peavy*, self-management, integrity, sociability, and self-esteem, are aptitudes Abbeville Middle works to cultivate in all students. Students will not master those skills after one example, but through repeated exposures such as with *Queenie Peavy*. However, once those traits are internalized and students mature, the traits

are processed. Georgia said discussions and reflections over life skills emerged throughout the implementation of the project. In fact, students related to Queenie and talked about the good and bad choices she chose. Most students responded to Queenie empathetically and connected to some of her motives and characteristics. Georgia explained:

I think that our students had great empathy for Queenie as a character. I think if they saw, especially some of our tougher students, saw themselves reflected in the character, Queenie. You know I think that every example that you can give students in any text about personal growth is part of the process of helping kids find their best selves.

Georgia appreciated the emergence of life skills in the project, and supported the personal growth exemplified in the text.

Georgia concluded with words of support for the *Queenie Peavy* schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project. Georgia felt an element of fun should form the base of schoolwide projects. With the Literacy Night featuring *Queenie Peavy* teachers, students, and parents gathered in an academic and social celebration. Georgia commented that each person has a way to interpret a story, and their interpretations of stories connect people, giving them a voice. This happened with the *Queenie Peavy* project. Georgia concluded that the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project and focus on life skills was a positive experience.

Martha

Martha launched her education at the University of Georgia with a degree concentrated on Interior Design. However, after three years she interrupted her studies to marry and start a family. Martha took a hiatus of several years before she enrolled again and graduated with a degree in Family and Consumer Science Education. Martha's college advisor told her about a position at Abbeville Middle and encouraged her to interview. She was hired. Martha's role as a

Family and Consumer Science teacher at Abbeville Middle meant she taught sixth, seventh, and eighth graders such topics as culinary arts, foods and nutrition, early childhood education, fashion design, and economics. As a connections teacher she encountered nearly all of the school's population since scheduling allowed students two connections classes per day.

From Martha's perspective, the weakest link of the *Queenie Peavy* project was teacher buy-in. She stated not all teachers routinely involved themselves in schoolwide endeavors. Martha pointed out that some simply did not ever want to participate in anything. Others felt the time devoted to Abbeville Middle during the actual school day satisfied their duties to the job. Still, she specified once teachers saw students benefitted in some way from the project, and then from a Literacy Night focused on *Queenie Peavy*, their participation increased. Martha explained that buy-in developed from personal or professional interests, along with the rationale that investing in the project would be worthwhile.

Martha felt integrating literacy in classes other than Language Arts or Reading strengthened literacy. That schoolwide approach allowed students to participate in discussions with any teacher during the project. Thus, they could read in any classroom and deepen their literacy skills. The fact that the schoolwide novel was *Queenie Peavy* helped students and teachers to connect through the shared literacy opportunities. Martha defined prior knowledge in relation to *Queenie Peavy*. If students knew nothing of the Depression or of the South before reading the novel, they would have nothing from which to pull to make the book easier to understand. With teachers reading as well, however, they were able to guide students.

Martha credited the *Queenie Peavy* project with opening doors, especially in relation to Abbeville Middle's transition into an International Baccalaureate (IB) school where curriculum follows a more global focus. The project encouraged lines of communication between

connections teachers and core teachers. Further, it deepened understandings of core objectives through *Queenie Peavy* activities, as all teachers reinforced skills related to the project. Martha provided an example of the cross-curricular aspect. After reading about Queenie eating biscuits for lunch, churning butter, and referring to sorghum syrup, students discussed the foods with Martha. The discussions evolved into Martha teaching her students to make biscuits from scratch before crafting butter from whipping cream. She said she went shopping for the sorghum syrup so her students could taste it. So those connections to *Queenie Peavy* led to students preparing their own homemade biscuits with real butter and sorghum syrup. Martha believes in hands-on learning, and recommended the method for future projects:

I think to make sure that there is some type of hands on project that goes along with the literary project so that for those students that may not learn in certain ways, that they can grasp it in other ways.

Martha reported students connected with *Queenie Peavy* through life skills, and some of the teachers did as well. They were certainly able to find similarities in their lives, and some brought up emotional feelings. Martha mentioned life skills in the novel linked the book to students as they read and teachers as they read. Because the project was a schoolwide one, students could discuss the book and any events with peers or teachers. That offered a measure of support and reinforcement. Martha worried over students not having adequate skills in her second interview, and felt a lack of skills could keep students from trying to participate in new experiences.

Martha relayed that at the beginning, many teachers perceived the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project as yet another undertaking with extra work they would have to complete. Luckily, the faculty integrated the project so well and the kids embraced it so quickly

that it did not prove problematic. Teachers and students read *Queenie Peavy*. Martha recalled discussing the novels with some of her peers, as well as with the majority of her students. She reported their interest kindled as they progressed through the novel. Martha concluded that she found the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project based on *Queenie Peavy* to have been an overall positive experience.

Miss Steppy

Miss Steppy's decision to teach began with her introduction to the television series *Romper Room*. In the show the teacher character seemed magical as she dispensed knowledge to Miss Steppy and other viewers. Years later Miss Steppy graduated from the University of Georgia and earned a Master's degree in Science and Language Arts Education. At the time of the schoolwide *Queenie Peavy* cross-curricular literacy project Miss Steppy taught eighth and ninth grade physical science, as well as Language Arts during the Extended Learning Time (ELT) period. Miss Steppy supported the project from its inception and even purchased a copy of *Queenie Peavy* from Amazon. She explained that even though she had once belonged to the Weekly Reader Book Club she had never possessed a copy of the novel. Miss Steppy elaborated about her own school literacy expectations:

We read all the time and reading I mean the literature is the study of the human condition. So by not reading or not reading across several genres or not reading across...genres and by not doing these things you kind of close off your mind. It's like saying 'I'm only going to listen to rap music and no other kind of music.'

Miss Steppy spoke at length about her own literacy and educational background and shared how grateful she was that reading and academics had been so prioritized both at her school and in her home. In her second interview she added it is at home listening to our families

speak where we hone communication skills. When the project began in her ELT class Miss Steppy convinced students who initially balked at reading *Queenie Peavy* to explore the novel. She explained to students that kids in the past shared core qualities with them, even though clothes and fads changed. Next, she emphasized all children wanted acceptance and to be acknowledged. Though language and attitudes had altered, those core qualities had remained through the years.

Miss Steppy arranged the project's instructional time by first reading out loud for twenty minutes, then requiring students to read silently another twenty each day. Her concern with the actual reading revolved around the lexile level of the novel. She worried that since so many students had low lexile levels they would find the reading difficult to navigate by themselves. Students kept reading journals and Miss Steppy's expectation was that they would record significant events and take notes during the reading. She conceded some of the students read because the novel genuinely interested them, while others participated because it was a requirement. Miss Steppy remains a strong advocate of reading, and she cautioned reading must be present in every classroom.

Despite Miss Steppy's support of the project she admitted she had reservations at first. She shared that teachers would be more likely to support projects like *Queenie Peavy* if they did not already have so many schoolwide demands on their instructional time. Furthermore, most often those demands are issued from someplace else with little consideration to what teachers already do or need to do. Miss Steppy recalled that the incorporation of the literacy project met with resistance from some of Abbeville Middle's teachers. Part of the dissension stemmed from the faculty being already committed to participating in a faculty book study. Thus, *Queenie Peavy* added one more obligation for both teachers and students to address. Miss Steppy

theorized that with the *Queenie Peavy* project, she did not feel all of the teachers understood the extent of the cross-curricular aspect.

Miss Steppy considered the project beneficial, however, and defined literature as the story of the human condition. She warned that restricted exposures to genres or across curriculums would close student minds. Miss Steppy insisted all subjects, including math (but to a lesser degree), should consider literacy integral to their domains. In math, for example, instructions and questions still need to be read, and science and social studies rely on informational reading. An added literacy focus would enhance Social Studies, and Miss Steppy pointed out reading letters sent during a historical event could make the material less dry. Literacy could balance social studies, as a matter of fact. On the other hand, since science is based on facts, it falls into the genre of informational reading. Following directions to build a stereo or tackling the owner's manual of an automobile represent informational readings which could be linked. Miss Steppy felt strongly that opportunities to improve comprehension in informational reading should be encouraged.

It bothered Miss Steppy that so many of the Abbeville Middle students lacked and continue to lack textual exposure. She described a reading interest survey her students had taken in which the majority of her ELT students reported they had no books in their homes. Miss Steppy viewed that admission as both shocking and depressing. She believed that a lack of reading material resulted in students turning against reading. They failed to view books as friends, or as eyes to another world. Unfortunately, students do not consider books entertainment. Miss Steppy concluded that her own students considered books enemies.

It exasperated Miss Steppy that the district's coaches and the school's coaches continually underestimate cross-curricular approaches. She illustrated that disconnect with an

example of reading about a science issue in language arts, which the district would then claim as a cross-curricular event. In addition, Miss Steppy added professors involved in teacher training often do not have a true concept of the demands of cross-curricular instruction. A true cross-curricular reading assignment would compromise instructional time, or sacrifice content in three subjects to read about a fourth subject. Miss Steppy acknowledged teachers simply cannot afford to relinquish a huge block of instructional time.

Miss Steppy described how she has incorporated a cross-curricular approach between science, social studies, and language arts within her own classroom. She teaches the children to read about science's history, from the Democritus and Aristotle dispute to Dalton, to atomic theory, and finally, to parts of the atom. Though she felt comfortable linking subjects she shared she encountered objections from the school district when she strayed from science and science standards. Still, she met her objective of exposing her classes to the ways of thinking which evolved into current scientific thought on the atom. Miss Steppy chronicled another cross-curricular project she had initiated with her ELT students, preparing French toast as they observed. As she worked students took notes on the steps and on the recipe. She equated that observational outlook to the way students would normally approach an activity in science. Afterwards, when they described the experience through writing, the assignment connected them to language arts, family, and food. Miss Steppy closed the example with a metaphor of language arts painting the picture of history.

Miss Steppy viewed prior knowledge as multi-faceted. First, Miss Steppy defined prior knowledge as something heard, absorbed, or known, no matter how vague. Prior knowledge could also include something already learned or mastered. The material could be used to scaffold or to connect new material. Then beginning with a broad base made up of acquired knowledge,

as new material is grasped the pyramid narrows as that knowledge becomes specialized. The broad base represents the actual base of knowledge from which the learner draws information, and should continue to expand and become broader. Unfortunately, some students lack that knowledge base, which affects their prior knowledge repertoire.

Because of the commitment to standards for each course or class which students must master plus assessments required for them to pass, blocks of time toward any other goal are not easy to create. An over-abundance of standards in science covers way too much information to master in a school-year, which proves disheartening to teachers. Besides daily science obligations, Miss Steppy enumerated many of the obstacles which affect instructional time in ELT classrooms. To begin with, that hour is the hour of time when students work on science fair material. Behavioral policies and programs are addressed during ELT time. Enrichment and remediation lessons also take place, along with coverage of study skills. Juggling ELT obligations continues to frustrate teachers. With so little time spread across so many objectives, Miss Steppy acknowledged allocating a chunk for a cross-curricular purpose proved problematic.

Miss Steppy detected connections between the emergence of life skills in the novel and students who participated in the project. The issue of responsibility remains in our culture. Whether or not students choose to follow the right path, regardless of whether others became angry with them, still resonates. Like Queenie, some students have a parent in jail. However, Miss Steppy advised because students have not accrued many life experiences, lack textual exposure, and miss exposure to life skills, they are not aware that they can connect with characters. Some of today's challenges such as gangs and drugs do not relate to Queenie Peavy's life; however, many more do. Ethical dilemmas still transcend from one generation to another. Miss Steppy reported many students readily discussed life skills as they emerged,

staying actively connected to the project. Other students participated at times while some students did not participate in conversations about life skills, but preferred to keep to themselves. Miss Steppy also pointed out that engaging the class in discussions worked at times while at others it did not. School activities, the holidays, or other current interests could distract students and limit their focus on life skills. However, she added a reminder that the middle school mind and maturation would also affect attention.

Unfortunately, contrary to Miss Steppy's upbringing, many students at Abbeville Middle were not brought up with moral compasses, religious backgrounds, interpersonal skills, stable families, or educational goals. As the teaching opportunities over life skills emerged, Miss Steppy countered any student objections that the novel was outdated. She reminded students that they faced the same types of decisions that Queenie did. Doing the right thing versus doing the wrong thing occurs with everyone. Miss Steppy told them they could learn, as Queenie did, that more good repercussions followed when you acted not as a "frenemy" but as a friend. Controlling tempers and managing behavior ultimately remained inherent with each individual. Learning responsibility by self-monitoring what does or does not get said is universal. Many students carried the same chips on their shoulders that Queenie did. Some students bullied and others were bullied, which resonated throughout the novel. Connecting with *Queenie Peavy* meant connecting with life. Miss Steppy concluded by contending the introduction of life skills always brings forth positive after-effects.

In conclusion, in her interviews Miss Steppy expressed positive support for the cross-curricular literacy project, but added the educational atmosphere did not necessarily favor it. She felt the devotion to assessments and standards overrode what students needed and left them shortchanged. No matter how pleasant and promising the experience, incorporating a future

project would prove difficult. Miss Steppy endorsed the adoption of a schoolwide book, and valued *Queenie Peavy* since in contrast to modern books, *Queenie Peavy's* theme focused on carving out individual futures or avenues. After all, Queenie could have been a victim but chose not to be one instead. Miss Steppy added that the actual cover of the novel might have worked against how it was accepted, because the book design appeared outdated. Miss Steppy concluded her interviews with an endorsement of the *Queenie Peavy* cross-curricular literacy project and the resultant emergence of life skills.

Sophia

During the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project Sophia taught Special Education at Abbeville Middle School, and she has continued with her career at the school. Sophia is certified not only in Special Education and its four main content areas, but also in Reading, Language Arts, and ESOL. Sophia initially taught in Florida, but moved to Georgia in 2007. The Durham County District hired her, and she has spent ten years teaching at Abbeville Middle. During her initial interview she expressed the hope that the results of this study would be shared with the school and administration, even though the results of other studies have not been shared.

Sophia recalled that when the school initiated the *Queenie Peavy* schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project at the very beginning of the school year there was a tremendous amount of support from faculty and students. Sophia's students read the novel during the ELT (Extended Learning Time) period and the literacy focus was the main reason Sophia supported the project. She explained her view that literacy impacts educators, families, and students and should be emphasized and encouraged. In addition, Sophia reported the *Queenie Peavy* project was a positive experience for students because the faculty, media specialist, and administration promoted it. The entire school worked as a team. Students appreciated that all the students in

the school would read the book along with all faculty. In addition, Sophia stated that because of her background with Language Arts and Reading, she had no reservations about *Queenie Peavy*. However, the negative tone associated with the project was because teachers had not been involved in decisions involving the project, yet were told to implement the project. Sophia stressed the need to request teacher input with the adoption of any cross-curricular project.

Sophia strongly believed that students should have numerous opportunities for textual exposure. It bothered her that the Durham County School District has incrementally sacrificed books for technology, which she felt was not necessarily a positive approach. Students lack textbooks when instead, they should have them in hand for all of their content classes. Learning encounters should be authentic at school, however, and technology should not keep students from books. Thus, a schoolwide project which featured a book to read was a worthwhile endeavor.

Sophia emphasized the cross-curricular approach has great value in student learning. She enumerated distinct cross-curricular ties *Queenie Peavy* shared with math and science and discussed the value of reading crossing curriculums. Sophia mentioned the agricultural setting and historical time provided numerous opportunities to link to all four core subjects. Sophia also discussed the ways *Queenie Peavy* tied into connections classes. For example, band and orchestra could address music popular during the story's timeframe. Physical education could target games, the Olympics, and sports of that time. Sophia acknowledged prior knowledge would vary with students and defined prior knowledge as whatever a student brings into a classroom. Prior knowledge ranges from cultural experiences to what has been learned in various grades. Thus, some students would hone in on areas of the book where they had some background knowledge, while teachers would be keys in helping to describe or tutor other facets

or scenes of the book. Sophia shared that though many of the teachers had balked at the project when it started, eventually they came to enjoy it. They found the literacy project interesting, as did the students.

Life skills in *Queenie Peavy* were reflected in Abbeville Middle's student population. Sophia disclosed that the school's students do not always display responsible life skills, though. She maintained that if anything, their life skills are immature:

Well, as far as our students are concerned they have life skills. Are they responsible life skills? Not always. That's not always the case. Their self-esteem is hard. Their social skills are very- the social skills of our students, for the most part, are very immature and their self-management is something that they certainly, certainly struggle with. Integrity and honesty are a struggle. These are all struggles that our middle schools suffer with. Thus, self-esteem lags and students struggle with self-management. Integrity and honesty present a conflict for students both in school and outside of school. In fact, parents often confide their frustration that life skills are just as problematic at home. So having the *Queenie Peavy* project allowed students to relate their own life skills as Queenie's struggles with life skills arose throughout the book. Sophia has always advocated for a strong parent, student, faculty, and community bond. In her second interview she described a hypothetical scenario focused on community commitment. With Abbeville Middle the designated location of a flea market, parents, students, and faculty could volunteer and help at the market, or set up booths and sell their own merchandise or foods.

Sophia brought up an interesting truth, that often students will disguise themselves in third person when they are unsure about participating. To illustrate, she explained students may say, "My cousin thinks," or "My friend did that," when they actually are referring to themselves.

Still, students will share what they have experienced or feel in that manner. That candor speaks of their own identities and willingness to reflect. Sophia felt Abbeville Middle's students did relate to the life skills emerging and presented in the novel. That was especially true of the inappropriate behaviors which Queenie exhibited, such as spitting or throwing rocks. However, more positive life skills which encouraged discussions or reflections also emerged.

Sophia advised a major component of successful teacher participation in future schoolwide literacy projects should involve tasking teachers with selecting the book. Selecting the book will allow them to examine how the text and their content areas will merge. Sophia elaborated that when any of Abbeville Middle's schoolwide projects are assigned each year teachers are not consulted about how they would like to be involved. Instead they are told what to do, and that leads to frustration and powerlessness. That approach further denies teachers the chance to choose how they would like to involve themselves and their students in the project. Sophia endorsed the cross-curricular approach, and in addition, felt a project which contained a component with life skills should be repeated in future school years. Sophia summarized her perspective. Literacy projects, cross-curricular instruction, and life skills have the potential to create positive results with students, but must be sanctioned by all of the faculty members.

Conclusion

This chapter provided rich descriptions of teacher perspectives through individual interviews. Each narrative presented an individual teacher's perspective of literacy, cross-curricular instruction, and life skills within a schoolwide project. Overall themes for all of the interviews are discussed in the next chapter through a holistic thematic analysis of themes common to those discussed by the teacher participants. Connections among perspectives are discussed and presented in more detail in chapter five.

CHAPTER 5

THEMATIC FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how middle school teachers perceived, expressed, and described their experiences with teaching via a cross-curricular literacy project. A secondary purpose was to explore how teachers perceived middle school students experienced life skills such as responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty which may have emerged during the cross-curricular literacy project. Thus, this qualitative case study sought to investigate and describe how teachers viewed a cross-curricular literacy project in which social and emotional life skills were included. These skills included responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty, and were examined in the context of the *Queenie Peavy* cross-curricular literacy project. In this chapter narratives from interviews focused on teacher perspectives address the study's research questions

Research Questions

The following questions guided the research and were addressed throughout interviews with study participants:

1. What views did teachers express concerning the implementation of a schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project such as *Queenie Peavy*?
2. How did middle school teachers perceive their roles after participating in a schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project?
3. Did teachers describe an emergence of social and emotional life skills such as

responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty during the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project?

Voice is a crucial and expected product of qualitative interviewing (Johnson & Christensen, 2014; McLeod, 2014; Opdenakker, 2006). Accurately reflecting the voices of those interviewed was a crucial step in this study as that established the importance and value of the views shared. In Chapter 4 the individual narratives of the teachers interviewed provided voice to their experience with cross-curricular literacy and life skills within a schoolwide context. Chapter 5 focuses on an exploration of themes developed from data obtained in the case study. Chapter 6 discusses the study's findings and implications to those findings.

Theme: Schoolwide Literacy Project

The Schoolwide Literacy Project Theme linked to Research Question 1, an exploration of the schoolwide literacy project. Table 3.1 illustrated the progression of the study from the literature review to the research questions and themes. In this case study teachers were interviewed to gather their perspectives of a cross-curricular literacy project conducted around the novel *Queenie Peavy*. Initially the literature review undertaken to gather research on literacy (Table 2.1) yielded six studies which targeted a range of reading issues. Those led to three emergent sub themes/trends illustrated in Figure 3.2: Reading Strategies and Practice; Literacy Training, Preparation, Responsibility; and Academic Obligations. Themes and the literature review generated first round interview questions to ask participants.

Once first round interviews were complete they were transcribed. Participants conducted member checks of their own interviews before all interviews were read and reviewed as a whole. Coding followed to label repetitive phrases and words and resulted in 12 major codes and 53 minor codes (see Figures 3.3, 3.4, 3.6- 3.10). Line by line coding of each individual interview

transitioned to grouping those codes by referencing the literature review and themes. Afterwards, they combined to form 8 literature themes/trends. Memos (Figure 3.11) were designed to identify train of thought or inferences, as well as identify support of themes or contradictions of themes. Second round interview questions followed to provide clarification or review of themes. The procedures for the second set of interviews repeated those of the first. Final steps involved both the analysis of the results and the communication of the findings.

Triangulation took place as member checks were made of both written interview transcripts as well as of each individual narrative analysis after all interviews were completed, along with an examination of artifacts from the project. Written transcriptions were produced from each audio taped interview to ensure the voices of the participants were accurate (Opdenakker, 2006). Both interview administrations followed the same protocols for each participant (Lammers & Badia, 2006). Linking and coding common codes, themes, and categories fell under the qualitative hierarchal umbrella as described by Johnson and Christensen (2014). The coding of interviews was conducted as recommended by researchers (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Charmez, 2014).

The Schoolwide Literacy Project Theme includes three sub-themes and addresses participant perspectives relating to literacy. Because the schoolwide project also included components for cross-curricular teaching and learning and life skills education, some overlap occurred within each theme and among all three major themes.

Reading Strategies and Practice

Literacy itself exists as a complex process developed through reading strategies. Teachers explained the role of prior knowledge in relation to literacy. In her first interview Georgia defined prior knowledge as knowledge a person carries or knows. Georgia elaborated in the

second interview by linking prior knowledge to academics and life. She cautioned that often students have prior knowledge of issues we wish they did not possess. Ellen's had a slightly different view of prior knowledge which touched on dialogue:

I think some prior knowledge sometimes takes the form of something they vaguely remember. I think for most of the kids this was not keyed into the prior knowledge or keyed into the prior knowledge of their families. But that's a great thing because it opens a dialogue. So to me if a child has heard it or seen it or seen it in practice and then can make the connections then that's prior knowledge.

As Ellen did, Fangirl mentioned the student's family in her observations:

Prior knowledge is the knowledge that any child... has acquired over their young life so they can identify... It's what you have accumulated over the years through your experiences that gives you the prior knowledge.

Participants recognized the role of prior knowledge in literacy as helpful, as a catalyst for discussions, or as a reflection of negative life encounters. The entire school concerned itself with literacy and reading at the time the schoolwide cross-curricular project occurred, and apprehension has not dissipated. Miss Steppy shared the seriousness of the issue by saying she worries over the low reading levels of the students constantly. Ellen discussed *Queenie Peavy* as a literacy event and a potential future scenario:

They remember things that are a little different than the norm. And I think that there will be a time that they'll come back. And they'll see this book, or they'll hear something about Robert Burch. And they'll be like, "Oh I read a book about him."

Miss Steppy stressed how important literacy encounters are for students in general, even if students do not view them as entertaining.

But you still have to be able to read instructions and read questions. With science and social studies you can't escape it. It's informational reading which I think the kids find very dry and uninteresting.

Participants valued the power literacy wields and want students to experience positive encounters. Still, they worry at what students need to master.

Teachers provided candid views of Abbeville Middle School's demographics in an effort to rationalize and describe the importance of literacy at the school. Buddy summarized two of the most worrisome factors the school's students face, homelessness and not having enough food to eat. Ellen commented on the feasibility of implementing any schoolwide project. She cited the transient nature of the school as an impediment, and suggested future cross-curricular projects cross from one school to another since the district's students move so much.

Textual exposure evoked some discussions and a consensus that students need far more encounters with text than they currently have. Miss Steppy explained her students completed a reading interest survey. Through it she discovered the lack of textual exposure could be traced back to their homes, where most owned no books other than the *Bible* or a phone book. Fangirl blamed poverty with the greatest impact on textual exposure.

Miss Steppy clarified the problem:

When I talk to the kids a lot of their parents did not read to them as children and part of that is because you know a lot of their parents had to work all the time. But part of that is also because their parents are not strong readers.

Georgia added another angle to textual exposure:

So I think that a lot of our students get most of their text now on the Internet and their screen is where they're getting most of their textual exposure, which is not always a good

thing... Sometimes if you read websites and everything you're not getting very well written texts. You're getting texts that have misinformation, are grammatically incorrect, and you know that's not necessarily- if you're reading poor texts...your literacy is not growing.

Thus teachers felt that students lacked the exposures to text they needed and home lives were the culprit. In addition, the text students did encounter was predominantly of a lower quality and accessed from the computer.

Literacy Training, Preparation, and Responsibility

Participants described their training and education, which showed similarities and differences among them. Buddy, for example, has a Master's in Teaching from Piedmont College and a Specialist's in Educational Leadership and Administration. Ellen's degree is a Bachelor's in Animal Science from the University of Georgia. Fangirl also has a Bachelor of Arts. Georgia earned both a Bachelor of Arts in Studio Art and a Master's of Fine Arts. Martha began college an interior design major, then switched to Home Economics Education. Home Economics transformed into Family and Consumer Science Education. Miss Steppy holds a Master's in Language Arts and Science Education. Sophia's degree is in Special Education, K12, in the four content areas. She also holds certification in General Education Reading and General Education Language Arts, along with an ESOL endorsement.

Focusing on literacy within a school project elicited some passionate responses regarding literacy development. Miss Steppy traced development to a student's home life, asserting that students who encounter reading interactions at home develop better reading knowledge. Martha felt literacy projects aided development by enforcing the reading portion. Miss Steppy also worried over future literacy development:

They don't like reading books. Their attention spans- and I blame technology for this- are extremely short and I don't know how difficult it would be to institute a book study now because most of them actually kind of resent being made to read a book.

Teachers viewed and continue to view literacy development as an integral component of a child's academic development.

Academic Obligations

Though appreciative of the idea of a literacy focus, participants repeatedly brought up the district and school's demands and expectations of their instructional time. Martha described some of the issues teachers face:

The testing, the assessments, the walk-throughs, the observations-you know, it's all based on what's expected of us, expected to be seen and what we have to do. And it just doesn't leave any space in there for us to come up with these creative projects and products without a lot of extra work from teachers after school or before school.

Ellen added details concerning testing:

Also at that point in time with testing being in all grade levels in middle school I think they were afraid to compromise some of that time preparing for Milestones or CRCT even back then, to take some time out to do a cross-curricular literacy project.

Miss Steppy explained the difficulty of making room in the instructional day for a literacy project:

We're supposed to be running a Science ELT. The Social Studies teachers are supposed to be running science and we're supposed to be remediating and re-teaching during that time. So if we had to do a project that would take away that instructional time.

Martha worried about so much structured instructional time compromising creativity and independence. She pointed out that students are not given time and freedom to create because so much of their day is already filled for them. Thus, teachers viewed the school and district's requisitioning of instructional time as counter-productive. Teachers proved distrustful of any initiative, project, or duty they regarded as being thrust on them to do, no matter the purpose. Georgia explained reluctance from teachers:

I do think that sometimes initiatives are met with a little bit of hesitation by teachers because teachers have such a large work load to begin with. And there are many initiatives that come through school districts.

Miss Steppy felt the district and school's attitude toward instructional time created frustration:

I think the teacher buy-in for most of us it's not really a problem. The only thing that would stop me from being like, "Yeah, let's do it!" would be just the time aspect. It's one more thing. And they're always piling one more thing on us and they never take anything off the bottom. They just keep putting stuff on the top and then say "Why aren't you doing that?"

Clearly teachers viewed the demands placed on instructional time as unrealistic and a reason teacher motivation to embrace a new project would suffer. Teachers considered Assessments and Testing problematic, and that topic brought forth some emotional responses from them. Their concern supports Nelson's (2013) contention that preparation time for testing slashes available instructional time by the same amount. Ellen felt critical thinking had been neglected to focus on mastering standards and content. Georgia discussed other drawbacks:

I think standardized testing limits textual exposure because I do think that teachers are so worried about getting, you know, quote-on-quote, teaching to the test...I'm not in an area

that gets tested like that. But I have been and I know that when you are trying to make sure that you're getting everything that you think is going to be on these tests covered, then sometimes you don't have time to explore things in a more deeper meaningful way.

Miss Steppy was adamant about over testing:

We test way too much. As a matter of fact, Durham County has kind of a statewide reputation for being the most testing county in Georgia. We give way more standardized tests than anybody else, not just the Milestones because everyone has to take those, but SRI testing, MRI testing, ACCESS testing- nobody else gives Benchmarks- nobody else gives Benchmarks. And then we look after International Baccalaureate (IB) which is really just a sneaky way of getting in eight more tests each year!

Summary

Pittman and Honchell (2014) rationalized positive textual encounters resulted from the incorporation of reading strategies and prior knowledge, while through textual discussions, students encountered positive textual experiences. Administration of both rounds of interview questions encouraged participants to share insights about their own literacy experiences and added details about demographics, assessment, and relevance. Reading comprehension improves through cognitive strategies/guided oral reading/ practice (National Reading Panel, 2000). Participants proved very open and honest about their backgrounds and degrees supporting literacy. Ness (2007) encouraged more literacy training to strengthen teacher skills and confidence. In this study, however, teachers in areas other than Reading and Language Arts illustrated the self-assurance they felt in presenting and including literacy projects. They also commented on literacy in science and math disciplines. Further, participants reflected on the value of literacy either by itself or within a literacy project. Participants framed literacy around

the time commitment required to promote, foster, or encourage schoolwide or class projects. In addition, they described demands on instructional time made by Abbeville Middle School as well as with the Durham County District, along with the impact of those demands. In this study participants acknowledge the acquisition of literacy was critical to all subject areas.

Theme: Schoolwide Cross-Curricular Project

The Schoolwide Cross-Curricular Project Theme linked to Research Question 2, an exploration of the schoolwide cross-curricular project. Table 3.1 illustrated the progression of the study from the literature review to the research questions and themes. In this case study teachers were interviewed to gather their perspectives of a cross-curricular literacy project conducted around the novel *Queenie Peavy*. Initially the literature review undertaken to gather research on cross-curricular initiatives (Table 2.2) yielded five studies which targeted a range of reading issues. Those led to three emergent sub themes/trends illustrated in Figure 3.2: Motivation, Prioritizing, and Modeling; Crossing Curriculums; and Academic Literacies. Themes and the literature review generated first round interview questions to ask participants.

Once first round interviews were complete they were transcribed. Participants conducted member checks of their own interviews before all interviews were read and reviewed as a whole. Coding followed to label repetitive phrases and words and resulted in 12 major codes and 53 minor codes (see Figures 3.3, 3.4, 3.6- 3.10). Line by line coding of each individual interview transitioned to grouping those codes by referencing the literature review and themes. Afterwards, they combined to form 8 literature themes/trends. Memos (Figure 3.11) were designed to identify train of thought or inferences, as well as to identify support of themes or contradictions of themes. Second round interview questions followed to provide clarification or

review of themes. The procedures for the second set of interviews repeated those of the first. Final steps involved both the analysis of the results and the communication of the findings.

Triangulation took place as member checks were made of both written interview transcripts as well as of each individual narrative analysis after all interviews were completed, along with an examination of artifacts from the project. Written transcriptions were produced from each audio taped interview to ensure the voices of the participants were accurate (Opdenakker, 2006). Both interview administrations followed the same protocols for each participant (Lammers & Badia, 2006). Linking and coding common codes, themes, and categories fell under the qualitative hierarchical umbrella as described by Johnson and Christensen (2014). The coding of interviews was conducted as recommended by researchers (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Charmez, 2014).

The Schoolwide Cross-Curricular Project Theme includes three sub-themes and addressed participant perspectives relating to cross-curricular instruction. Because the schoolwide project also included components for literacy and life skills education, some overlap occurred within each theme and among all three major themes.

Motivation, Prioritizing, and Modeling

Teacher participation or resistance toward the implementation of a project is a component with which teachers have some control. Regarding the *Queenie Peavy* project, Sophia said teachers who balked at the beginning were surprised that the students enjoyed the project. Ellen shared her thoughts about a lack of teacher participation in general. She felt that some teachers treat their own classrooms as kingdoms, thus hampering collaborative efforts with peers. Fangirl described teachers who did not consider themselves obligated to teach literacy:

You're going to have teachers like in social studies. One of them made the remark the other day, "Well, I don't teach English so don't ask me to ever teach anything that has to do with English." I think that we're going to see a reluctance on the part of a lot of teachers who don't want to cross curriculums.

Georgia had a more philosophical attitude toward the reality of buy-in:

I think that in general, the people that are going to buy-in are the people who are going to buy-in. And the people who are not are the people who are not. I think that's more to do with teacher personalities than necessarily which text is chosen.

Teachers having more voice in choosing the text for a literacy project surfaced a few times in regard to teacher buy-in. Sophia reiterated her support for teacher participation but added teachers needed to contribute their input. She recommended teachers should first choose the text, then explore how the text would work in their content areas.

Georgia suggested one way to select a schoolwide text:

Let the teachers sample the books and vote instead of just being assigned a book. That might help...These are the possibilities we're thinking about doing next year. Look them over. Here are the book trailers. Here are some excerpts.

Fangirl offered a different method to select a future book:

I'd like to see you come up with another book... I would suggest that you have a meeting of all the teachers, you know the grades. For example, all the language teachers meet. You discuss it. All the math teachers meet. You discuss it. You discuss by departments and get everyone to buy in to it. I think it would be wonderful and I think you could come up with another book like this.

In addition, teachers viewed teacher discussions and teacher-student discussions as both a teaching tool and as a means of bonding. Buddy valued the discussion aspect of the project. She reported she enjoyed the fact that the participation was schoolwide. Therefore, everyone from custodians to students and administrators read the same book and could have conversations about the book. Buddy illustrated linking the text to real life through discussion:

Having a friend who is being bullied, the kids would be like Queenie and try to respond positively. They know what happened with Queenie and having a parent locked up in jail. I think some of our kids really deal with some of that and that's why they can bring those conversations to our discussions. So I mean, that's real life.

Martha saw discussion as a way to further comprehension:

I think when it's cross-curricular the students probably get more from it then when it's just the Language Arts or Reading teacher. I think that had a lot to do with it because it was schoolwide. You know the kids could talk, not in just that class, but with any of their friends. They could talk about what was happening in the book. They could talk to any teacher about it. If they didn't understand something or if they were struggling, you know there was a lot of support there for them.

Martha commented on the potential for discussions among students and other school personnel:

We had discussions about it. The kids would come in and a lot of times they would have the books with them...The teachers were reading the book, also. So it sparked the interest and the kids wanted to cook some of the foods that they talked about in the book.

Fangirl appreciated the fact that in discussions, students could connect with Queenie Peavy's character and personality traits:

They could identify with her as a girl. They could identify with her in her poverty. They identified with her age. They identified that they're a little bit like Queenie, boys and girls. And so, they loved it. They loved Queenie Peavy!

Based on teacher perspectives through the interviews, teachers wanted to be included in any decision making involving a schoolwide text. Furthermore, they found schoolwide discussion of the text as valuable as classroom discussion of the text.

Crossing Curriculum

Teachers reported on collaborative efforts within the same discipline, across disciplines, or within and across grade levels. Miss Steppy commented that in middle grades science not much cross-curricular collaboration takes place on a routine basis. Georgia addressed the disengagement of connections classes with core subjects:

The only issue that I see with cross-curricular is the scheduling issue. So, I do think timing is an issue with our particular schedule and the way it is at this point. Cross-curricular between the connections areas and the academic areas is very tricky.

Martha's perspective mirrored Georgia's:

Yes, I think ... if teachers had more time during the school day where we could talk- but the way it's set up now we don't have that. She added: Yes it is, very segregated, so we don't have that common planning time where we could do more, to discuss how we could integrate more projects.

Sophia pointed out that non-Language Arts/Reading teachers could be insecure about their own literacy expertise:

Other teachers are not as comfortable with the written word, literature, and different genres of material. So how can we get those teachers to buy-in to it? It would have to be

because, “the data shows” or “research shows that this is in the best interest of the students’ whole development and education and improvement”.

Teachers also reported a range of responses toward the crossing of curriculums, the cross-curricular aspects of the *Queenie Peavy* project. Teachers described collaborative efforts which occurred specifically during the implementation of the *Queenie Peavy* project. Buddy relayed a positive experience with collaboration. She reported that teachers discussed the project, planned work for the project, and consulted with each other to make certain students were on target with their reading. Sophia also found the collaborative experience to have been a positive one:

I think it was a really positive experience especially because the students were aware at that point and time when they were introduced to *Queenie Peavy* and it was promoted with our media specialist and our administrator. They were introduced to it from the administration from the higher ups, from the teachers, and they became aware every single student in the school was going to be reading *Queenie Peavy* and they had grasped onto it because that made them part of that team.

Buddy recalled that the book’s life skills allowed the school’s counselors a good avenue with which to collaborate, and expressed some teachers were very positive and vocal in anticipating the *Queenie Peavy* project to be successful. Ellen also shared that a group of teachers felt the collaboration with the book was a great idea. She considered cross-curricular instruction with all grade levels to be a good initiative for a school. Fangirl viewed crossing curriculums as a positive instructional focus, as well, but added that few schools in Durham County practiced crossing curriculums. Martha remarked that the International Baccalaureate program (Abbeville Middle applied to become an International Baccalaureate school) is cross-curricular, and the *Queenie Peavy* project helped prepare for that.

On the other hand, others spoke of difficulties associated with cross-curricular instruction. Miss Steppy discussed a lack of support and understanding from the district:

It's very hard to connect a lot of middle school reading to science because, well, I make my kids read about the history of science. I've actually had people from the school district come to me and say "Why are you doing this? This is not part of your standards."

Fangirl described hesitancy from sixth grade teachers in participating with and engaging through a cross-curricular literacy project. Buddy and Ellen shared some teachers worried about the project crossing into all disciplines, especially math. Some of the participants had participated in prior cross-curricular experiences. Georgia spoke excitedly about hers:

So, I think that skepticism is natural. But personally speaking, I was excited to work on the *Queenie Peavy* project because I had already done some work with literature in the high school art classes that I was teaching.

Buddy had enjoyed her prior experience, as well:

So we stressed reading in social studies and science. We've done some cross-curricular work in seventh grade before. But *Queenie Peavy* was schoolwide and I think that was why I enjoyed it that much more.

Teachers offered personal insights or suggested ways to improve any future collaborative efforts. Ellen suggested each core subject engineer a project in which all disciplines would collaborate and participate. Sophia brought up an interesting point about basic teamwork:

Well, with any kind of collaborative situation you have personalities that are going to be more dynamic and you have others that will go along with the flow. If you have a combination of leaders and others that provide different ideas for the different contents I

think that would be fine. But there are going to be some personality issues that will be difficult to wrap your head around.

Based on teacher input, cross-curricular instruction and collaboration were generally viewed as positive approaches. However, participants reported the school and district compromised most of their instructional time. In addition, some teachers could not grasp how the book would fit into all subjects. Thus, accepting *Queenie Peavy* as a cross-curricular opportunity depended on the teacher.

Academic Literacies

As far as the novel was concerned, participants viewed the selection of *Queenie Peavy* as a positive one for the cross-curricular literacy project's novel. They described links to various subjects. Ellen enjoyed the fact that the book was based in the South, something with which Georgia students could relate. As it turned out, she had known the author, Robert Burch, personally as a family friend. Ellen appreciated the cross-curricular potential of *Queenie Peavy*:

So I feel like anything that enhances their ability to understand language, to decode language, whether through a literature project or whether through a scientific reading only makes my job easier as a science teacher or even as an Ag teacher because kids tend to compartmentalize reading to language arts.

Georgia considered *Queenie Peavy* an appropriate choice for the school's demographics:

I think *Queenie Peavy* was very appropriate for the students that we have at Abbeville Middle and some of her experiences, even though they were set in the Depression era. Some of those experiences of having to deal with incarceration, family, and bullying were appropriate. Reacting to situations in a highly emotional way is a commonality that

we find within our students, as well. And I think they were able to understand Queenie Peavy's point of view very well.

Buddy discussed the book's appeal:

I mean if we went back to and found some of the kids who read this book they're going to all remember something about Queenie Peavy. When I was talking to my son his favorite line and mine was, "Queenie Peavy, Queenie's daddy's on the chain gang!"

Miss Steppy had recognized the novel as a Weekly Reader Book Club selection though she had never read it prior to the project. She elaborated that she appreciated the window of history *Queenie Peavy* provided. Fangirl had no prior exposure to *Queenie Peavy*, either, but enjoyed the ways the students connected:

The one thing that grabs them in the whole story is her poverty, how poor she is. And the second thing that they identify with is that she's very much her own person and she does not follow the rules. And they like both of those things.

Sophia relayed students connected to the book through Queenie's inappropriate behaviors, especially with her spitting and throwing rocks. Buddy agreed with Sophia's insight into what connected the students to the text:

I think the kids really got into it because she wasn't like the perfect student. She was a little bit of a tomboy. She got into trouble. She had some words in there. She did some things. So I think that hooked the kids. The teachers I think, once they realized the kids were engaged, then we became more engaged.

In contrast, other participants described negative aspects associated with using *Queenie Peavy* as the cross-curricular literacy project's novel. Georgia worried that the book was too dated. She recommended a more contemporary book by an African American or Hispanic

American author in the future, which she felt would prove more relevant to the school's demographics. The copyright concerned Fangirl, as well, and Ms. Steppy pointed out that the book's cover artistry worked against it, because kids dismissed the front illustration as old.

Summary

The implementation of the *Queenie Peavy* cross-curricular literacy project involved the entire school focusing on one novel. Therefore, non-English Language Arts/ Reading teachers were asked to incorporate a literacy initiative through cross-curricular instruction. To foster literacy with students, three components impact the desire to read: motivating learning environments/ prioritizing reading/ reading modeled by the school's adults (Daniels & Steres, 2011). So teacher buy-in and engagement certainly matter for a cross-curricular approach to literacy. Reflection and shared collaboration could help foster literacy integration as well (Ness, 2007).

On its own, a cross-curricular instructional method has detractors and supporters. First, literacies range from one subject to another (Morgan, 2012). That means each discipline has its own set of objectives. Applebee et al. (2007) cautioned that modifying the curriculum shortchanged subject disciplines. On the other hand, in an eight year study Aiken (1942) found modifying curriculums can lead to student success. To succeed, curriculum integration must occur with subjects: authentic to the task/ which have connections to each other/ which support the objectives of each other (Hall-Kenyon & Smith, 2013). In this study, participants recognized the purpose of cross-curricular instruction and considered it positive. However, they expressed both support and concern over actually incorporating cross-curricular approaches because of compromised instructional time.

Theme: Emergence of Social and Emotional Life Skills

The Emergence of Social and Emotional Life Skills Theme linked to Research Question 3, an exploration of the emergence of social and emotional life skills. Table 3.1 illustrated the progression of the study from the literature review to the research questions and themes. In this case study teachers were interviewed to gather their perspectives of a cross-curricular literacy project conducted around the novel *Queenie Peavy*. Initially the literature review undertaken to gather research on life skills education (Table 2.3) yielded five studies which targeted a range of issues concerning life skills. Those led to two emergent sub themes/trends illustrated in Figure 3.2: Development of Life Skills, and Academic Interventions. Themes and the literature review generated first round interview questions to ask participants.

Once first round interviews were complete they were transcribed. Participants conducted member checks of their own interviews before all interviews were read and reviewed as a whole. Coding followed to label repetitive phrases and words and resulted in 12 major codes and 53 minor codes (see Figures 3.3, 3.4, 3.6- 3.10). Line by line coding of each individual interview transitioned to grouping those codes by referencing the literature review and themes. Afterwards, they combined to form 8 literature themes/trends. Memos (Figure 3.11) were designed to identify train of thought or inferences, as well as to identify support of themes or contradictions of themes. Second round interview questions followed to provide clarification or review of themes. The procedures for the second set of interviews repeated those of the first. Final steps involved both the analysis of the results and the communication of the findings.

Triangulation took place as member checks were made of both written interview transcripts as well as of each individual narrative analysis after all interviews were completed, along with an examination of artifacts from the project. Written transcriptions were produced

from each audio taped interview to ensure the voices of the participants were accurate (Opdenakker, 2006). Both interview administrations followed the same protocols for each participant (Lammers & Badia, 2006). Linking and coding common codes, themes, and categories fell under the qualitative hierarchal umbrella as described by Johnson and Christensen (2014). The coding of interviews was conducted as recommended by researchers (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Charmez, 2014).

The Emergence of Social and Emotional Life Skills Theme includes two sub-themes and addressed participant perspectives relating to life skills education. Because the schoolwide project also included components for literacy and cross-curricular teaching and learning, some overlap occurred within each theme and among all three major themes.

Development of Life Skills

Participants united in their belief that students would benefit from more exposure to life skills, and were receptive to exposure to life skills. Miss Steppy described Abbeville Middle's kids as behind the eight ball with life skills in their own lives. Martha felt the same, and said social skills were needed the most. Ellen believed the student population lacked the skills because their parents lacked them, as well. It pleased Buddy that Queenie's antics led to some good classroom discussions about right and wrong behavior, especially concerning school behavior. Martha enjoyed the book's appeal with students, which made them want to read because they were drawn to the story. Georgia cited the life skills from the book: responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty, as skills routinely addressed at school. Miss Steppy viewed the exposure to life skills as beneficial and said life skills always provide positive outcomes.

Participants responded enthusiastically about life skills which emerged through the *Queenie Peavy* project and considered Queenie a poster child for the representation of life skills.

Buddy paid tribute to responsibility and sociability as life skills:

So, with the life skills about responsibility- Queenie with her mama working had to go home and basically take care of herself... Little Mother felt like she had to mother everybody. Sociability is very important in being able to communicate with others and not just throw rocks and be mean and everything.

Fangirl discussed how Queenie appealed to her students. She elaborated they identified with Queenie totally: with her self-esteem, her sociability, her self-management, her integrity, and her honesty. Issues Queenie experienced were ones with which her students could identify.

Ellen approved of the ways students found Queenie relevant:

I think that for those kids knowing that another child from another age in another time struggled with those same things makes them feel at least a little more secure that they're not the only kids on Earth who deal with that.

As far as life skills were concerned, participants not only considered them very important, but were genuinely pleased at finding them so prominent in *Queenie Peavy*.

Academic Interventions

Should an opportunity arise, teachers supported targeting even more life skills than the ones highlighted in *Queenie Peavy*. Participants suggested additional life skills they viewed as important to middle school students. Sophia decided that two major life skills on which to focus with students were supporting others and giving back to others. These were areas in which she really found students remiss. Later in her interview Sophia added cross-curricular literacy based self-esteem issues. Georgia cited a need to emphasize empathy. Georgia also provided a more

all-inclusive approach. She advocated text examples about personal growth, any that touched on the process of helping kids to find their very best selves.

In addition, participants shared suggestions for future projects which could be used as either an intervention or as a means of enrichment. Sophia responded that she would absolutely like to see the repetition of a project like the *Queenie Peavy* one. Martha discussed some positive practicalities:

I think there are roles on something like this because it opened up the lines of communications, lines of communication between connections teachers and the core teachers that maybe were not there before. So that we kind of had an understanding of what they were doing in their classrooms and then when we did the activities connected to *Queenie Peavy* a lot of times they would come into our classroom and see the connection. In a lot of our connections classes, especially the career and tech classes, we actually put into place and reinforce what's taught in the core subjects. We just take it one step further in real life skills.

Ellen held confidence in the long-term benefits:

I think schoolwide projects like this tend to teach more critical thinking and making connections. It's not short term like your test scores are going to pump up that year. I think it's more like IB, where in the long run you're going to see more of a better developed, more well-rounded thinking child than just a child who can spout out things that you've just taught him.

Georgia found value in the way the entire project connected the school, the students, and the community:

I think about *Queenie Peavy* and Literacy night and...there is an element of fun and being able to connect with teachers and parents on a social level as well as an academic level. It's not always just about presenting information; it's also about building a community as well.

Sophia wanted specified time to make sure the project was integrated. She recommended the project should take a full grading period to positively benefit comprehension. Georgia described the inherent value in participating in the Queenie Peavy project:

Well, I do think that everybody had something to offer. As a group we arranged in a quilt like pattern, art work that addressed Queenie Peavy's story and I gave students a choice of choosing a scene from the book to illustrate or re-creating the cover design with their own image of Queenie Peavy. And then we arranged those artworks in a quilt type fashion on the wall. There were also games that were played in the gym so even the PE area was able to contribute because they played games from the era of the Great Depression when Queenie Peavy's story took place. Additionally, there were multiple language presentations translating some of Queenie Peavy's words into different languages. Stories in general are one thing that tie everyone together and everyone has something that they can find, a niche within their area of expertise, that they can share with the community.

As Georgia did, Martha appreciated how areas of the book manifested through classwork and Literacy Night. She enjoyed the dinner, and the fact that students made foods mentioned in the novel. She also credited Literacy Night with helping teacher buy-in. Ellen focused on family links and supporting local authors:

If they talked to their parents about the book then there would be memories. There would be... a bonding there that kids don't necessarily get from popular literature. So to me, there's not a down side for them to do another Georgia type book. I feel we don't emphasize that, we don't emphasize local authors.

Georgia wanted to organize the schedule to prioritize all subjects around the project:

Set aside more class time for it specifically rather than having to add it into all your other curriculums, a set time. This is the month we're going to do this and everybody's lesson plans this month are going to be based on this novel.

Buddy advocated for a future text which would engage students:

I think it has to be something that touches them, something they're familiar with, something that engages them with learning. If we're going to be reading it, it's got to be something that's going to hook them to make them want to learn more about it.

Summary

The reading process follows a series of interventions (National Reading Panel, 2000). Presenting life skills through a literacy project has the potential to effectively work as an intervention. For example, success within youth programs transpired when students were allowed opportunities to practice/to apply learned social and moral life skills (Catalano et al., 2004). Life skills themselves are defined as the very traits or virtues expected from students in the school environment (United States Department of Labor, 1991). However, there are no absolutes in ranking which of those skills to stress schoolwide. Durlak et al., (2011) advised theory driven research should center around the development of a standardized method to measure social and emotional components. In this study, teachers voiced support for those life skills featured in the project.

Overall Summary of the Findings

Increased encounters of cross-curricular literacy initiatives will produce future rewards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2015; Daniels & Steres, 2011; Pittman & Honchell, 2014). The thematic analysis indicated teachers felt strongly about the role literacy plays in the educational arena, whether or not it is presented in isolation or within a schoolwide project like *Queenie Peavy*. These teachers cited literacy and reading as a primary focus of Abbeville Middle, and several specified the school population's demographics as negatively affecting literacy. In addition, participants agreed that students need recurring exposures to texts and opportunities to develop their literacy skills. Findings of this study aligned to published conclusions that to better themselves in literacy, students require repeated exposures to text and literacy skills (Goldman, 2012; Morgan, 2012; United Nations Educational, Scientific, & Cultural Organization, 2005). However, school and district demands made it difficult for teachers to increase textual encounters and have caused teachers to greet any initiative with suspicion and even resentment. They also felt testing and assessments have gotten out of hand, and the pressure to produce acceptable scores dominated expectations, standards, and curriculums. For the most part, teachers viewed the choice of *Queenie Peavy* as the schoolwide novel favorably. Those who objected to the choice viewed the novel as too dated.

As evidenced in the data analysis, participants supported cross-curricular endeavors but expressed reservations about implementing them. Motivation figured strongly, and teachers were clear that they wanted to contribute to deciding important factors for cross-curricular endeavors, like choosing a schoolwide novel. Having some control over the how and what would be included in their classrooms was important, and that control reflected the control they also wanted to have in choosing the novel. Teachers valued the discussion aspect of

collaboration, but seemed ambivalent about actually practicing cross-curricular collaboration. They cited the loss of instructional time they could not afford to sacrifice. Robinsons (2015) noted the insular nature of middle schools where teachers tend to concentrate solely on their own subject areas. However, participants readily shared numerous examples of cross-curricular work during *Queenie Peavy* and responded with some thoughtful ideas to improve future collaboration. This confirmed Applebee et al.'s (2007) contention that cross-curricular implementation produces both positive and negative outcomes.

The data signified teachers viewed exposure to life skills positively and enthusiastically, whether or not they were introduced within the *Queenie Peavy* schoolwide project. They spoke of life skills affecting relationships between students and peers, faculty, family, and the community. Teachers welcomed opportunities to work and connect with students and *Queenie Peavy* allowed discussions with students focused on their social and character development. This interconnectedness among teachers and students illustrated Carlisle's (2011) contention that bonding among teachers and students over a textual experience produces positive results. Participants in this study readily shared life skills they considered important for students and described the importance and necessity of the skills. They also endorsed the life skills specific to the *Queenie Peavy* book. It was evident that they considered life skills an investment which would not only benefit the school, but society, as well.

Teachers endorsed the overall cross-curricular literacy project as a credible and worthwhile intervention. Participants agreed with the literacy, cross-curricular aspect, and life skills in the project, and considered those components academically sound. Nevertheless, misgivings stemmed from the limited control teachers perceived they wielded in their own

classrooms. The act of allowing teachers a platform in which to reflect proved powerful throughout the interviews as it allowed them a voice with which to share their thoughts.

CHAPTER 6

RESEARCH IN CONTEXT: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how middle school teachers perceived, expressed, and described their experiences with teaching via a cross-curricular literacy project. A secondary purpose was to explore how teachers perceived middle school students experienced life skills such as responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty which may have emerged during the cross-curricular literacy project. Thus, this qualitative case study sought to investigate and describe how teachers viewed a cross-curricular literacy project in which social and emotional life skills were included. These skills included responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty, and were examined in the context of the *Queenie Peavy* cross-curricular literacy project. In this chapter narratives from interviews focused on teacher perspectives address the study's research questions

Research Questions

The following questions guided the research and were addressed throughout interviews with study participants:

1. What views did teachers express concerning the implementation of a schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project such as *Queenie Peavy*?
2. How did middle school teachers perceive their roles after participating in a schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project?
3. Did teachers describe an emergence of social and emotional life skills such as

responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honesty during the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project?

Summary of Research Design

Perspectives of seven teachers who participated in a schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project were explored through a qualitative case study design. Data were gathered through two one hour interviews with six teachers, and a single one hour interview with the seventh teacher. A constructivist theoretical foundation was chosen as the most appropriate for this study. Vygotsky (2004) described constructivism as personal experience and observation leading to a construction of meaning. Comparatively, Kim (2005) emphasized constructivists support the development of reflective tools for cognition which emerge from cultural wisdom, insights, and personal experiences. Last, a constructivist framework emphasizes the building of knowledge through personal interactions such as interviews (Juvova et al., 2015). Through the utilization of a constructivist framework I endeavored to understand the significance of the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project, as well as the possible emergence of life skills, as reported by the participant teachers.

The methodology selected to interpret the constructed meaning of this study was a case study design. Yin (2003) pointed out case studies emphasize context surrounding the phenomenon to be investigated, and interviews provide rich sources of data for case study research. The middle school where all of the participant teachers taught, Abbeville Middle, functioned as the case for this particular study. Elliott and Luke (2008) commented a single case study, as opposed to one with numerous cases, is valuable research in its own right. Brown (2008) determined the value of case studies rests in their ability to provide holistic and humanistic understandings of complex situations. In addition, case studies allow the context to

be tied into the how and the why of the research. Meanings and conclusions from the case evolved through a constructivist interpretation of the data. Thus, considering the study and study's responses qualitatively and grounded within a constructivist framework aided in justifying the personal convictions shared from the teachers interviewed.

Interviewing served as the data collection methodology because it allowed a forum in which teachers could share, inform, and reflect over the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project and emergence of life skills. In this study it allowed social interactions as each interview unfolded. McLeod (2014) pointed out interview questioning has a degree of spontaneity and flexibility in the question-answer interactions. To ensure reliability across interviews, protocols of interview questions were followed during both administrations as recommended by Lammers and Badia (2006).

After conducting both first and second round interviews the audio recordings were transcribed. Participants were contacted to conduct member checks of their interview transcriptions. All transcriptions were then read and reviewed with a holistic approach since interview material interconnected across participant interviews. Afterwards, the process continued with a focus on the repetition of ideas or repetitive words and phrases and the assignment of codes. For example, when more than one teacher mentioned student engagement, it was assigned a code name to theorize the significance. As the analysis proceeded, significant trends or themes concerning teacher perspectives of the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project and perspectives of life skills emanated. The themes were subsequently analyzed in context to determine if they occurred in a pattern, and grouped into manageable data describing frequency and summaries of key elements based on the study's research questions. It was then possible to create memos.

Coded material and literature themes/trends were analyzed inductively in relation to the coded transcriptions. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) depicted the actual coding process as using small steps to graduate from the raw data to that information relevant to the research, with each additional step fortifying the step before it. Lincoln and Guba (1986) considered that undertaking a crucial move toward ensuring the findings had their support in the actual data. This analytic process was also important to understand the resultant meanings and perspectives attached to life skills, cross-curricular studies, and literacy-based instruction.

Discussion

In this study, a detailed sketch of teacher perspectives toward literacy projects, cross-curricular approaches, and exposure to life skills is presented. Trends in teacher perspectives in regard to assessment/testing, instructional time, demographics, textual exposure, and teacher buy-in were identified and described, as well. Triangulation took place as member checks were made of both written interview transcripts as well as of each individual narrative analysis after all interviews were completed, along with an examination of artifacts from the project. Triangulation strengthened the internal validity of the analysis, ensuring the research actually explored to a satisfactory extent what I hoped to investigate. In addition, triangulation served to keep the research as unbiased as possible. Interviews, transcriptions, and member checks were used to strengthen this case study's credibility. This study concluded with three themes emerging from the case study analysis and in light of the relevant literature: literacy, cross-curricular instruction, and life skills. They are discussed on the following pages.

Literacy

Literature documents the incredible power inherent in mastering literacy, and studies have long proved exposure to literacy, or lack of exposure to literacy, can enrich or sabotage a

student's success (Applebee et al., 2007; Daniels & Steres, 2011; Goldman, 2012; Hall-Kenyon & Smith, 2013; Hinde et al., 2011; International Reading Association & National Council of Teachers of English, 1996; Morgan, 2012; United Nations Educational, Scientific, & Cultural Organization, 2005). Further, reading encounters and textual connections in subject disciplines other than Reading/Language Arts or in literacy encounters at home or elsewhere impact overall literacy (Ivey & Fisher, 2005; Ness, 2007; Sanacore, 2012). In this study, teachers illustrated support for those literacy conclusions through their own perspectives.

Teachers supported reading strategies and practice through textual exposure in their individual classrooms, even within non-Language Arts/ Reading classrooms. Georgia provided a succinct summary of the perspectives:

I think literacy is the foundation of all education and in academics,,, I think that literacy is something that has to be schoolwide-system wide. It's essential. It's tied with a student's future in any kind of academics and ability to succeed in the job world.

Teachers specifically spoke of vocabulary and text complexities in their own classrooms. Therefore, they confirmed Morgan's (2012) explanation that literacies range from one subject to another. Despite the caution Ness (2007) offered that teachers need more literacy training, the teachers in this study felt very comfortable and confident handling literacy in their classes.

Teachers spoke repeatedly of their biggest obstacle in incorporating more literacy in their classrooms, the sacrifice of instructional time. They cited assessment and testing, as well as school and district demands, as keeping them from participating. As Pittman and Honchell (2014) did, this study focused on one novel to springboard a schoolwide literacy initiative. The decision to choose one particular book to adopt within a schoolwide literacy project met with approval. Sophia summarized those views. She concluded involving all contents with

schoolwide adoption of a book was a wonderful initiative. In addition, she agreed students needed personal copies of the books. However, participants in this study took issue with not participating in the book choice, and with having one person make that literary selection. Nevertheless, they approved of the contents of *Queenie Peavy*. Despite not participating in the book's selection, Fangirl spoke favorably of the reception her students gave the novel and the protagonist, Queenie:

They identified with her. There was no hesitancy. She talked about that she couldn't find but one egg, and she talked about how she went out and finally found the other egg. She talked about her neighbor...who owned the little farm that was meticulously cleaned and they loved it.

Buddy echoed Fangirl's positive opinion and described the teaching component:

We read the *Queenie Peavy* book. We tried to do read alouds in class but it would take too long so I would read it myself. But I discovered that I had to allow them to read at their own pace. It led to some good discussions.

The study also found that guiding students to incorporate reading strategies and prior knowledge through discussions of the text improved both understanding and enjoyment and allowed the students positive encounters with text. Conclusions of the current study supported the literature which suggests increasing exposure to text and reading strategies aids literacy, but proves problematic if teachers do not view literacy as valuable (National Reading Panel, 2000; Ness, 2007; Pittman & Honchell, 2014).

Cross-Curricular Instruction

This study concluded that even when teachers communicated positive feedback toward cross-curricular instruction, they had mixed feelings towards actually practicing cross-curricular

approaches in school. They cited district and school demands, as well as assessment/testing obligations, with restricting and compromising instructional time for cross-curricular work. In this study, teachers echoed Nelson's (2013) concerns over the instructional time devoted to assessment/testing. Nelson maintained learning time has decreased to accommodate not only testing, but also test preparation time. Further, teachers must incorporate standardized tests, benchmark tests, and local tests, plus carve out administrative instructional time to give directions to students. In this study, Ellen described the dilemma teachers faced:

Also, at that point in time with testing being in all grade levels of middle school, I think they were afraid to compromise some of that time preparing for Milestones or CRCT, even back then, to take some time out to do a cross-curricular literacy project.

Georgia reflected on testing, as well, and said standardized testing cuts into rich curriculum teachers could otherwise design based on literature. Miss Steppy commented on the District's involvement as demanding too much in a ridiculously short amount of time.

Ness (2007) maintained reflection and shared collaboration could help foster literacy integration. Unfortunately as it stands now, faculty members continue to work mostly in isolation (Jacobs, 2010; Johnson, 2013; Kagan, 2005). Martha added a valid observation, that in truth, some teachers simply do not want to participate in anything. Still, some teachers viewed the project the way in which Hall-Kenyon and Smith (2013) advocated would result in success, with curriculum integration connecting subjects and supporting the objectives of each other. Martha recounted her view:

I think a lot of teachers at first thought oh no, this is one more thing we're going to have to do, and it's going to be extra work. But I think it didn't take long because

we integrated it so well into the school and the kids caught onto it so fast that I don't think there were a lot of problems with it becoming excess workload.

On the other hand, Miss Steppy explained that not having that connection or support could sabotage any integration:

I think that the coaches are a little too glib about it and I think the school district is too glib about it. It's like, "Oh, well, we're going to do cross-curricular so they're going to read about science in language arts." That's not enough. It is just like all these little displaced things. It's like if you want to do a truly cross curricular reading it's going to impinge on your content time.

The findings of this study supported relevant literature which has communicated that cross-curricular instruction has the capacity to bring about positive academic and social consequences (Aiken, 1942; Applebee et al., 2007; Hall-Kenyon & Smith, 2013; Hinde et al., 2011).

Life Skills

In the current study, findings supported teacher endorsement of life skills as an academic intervention or enrichment strategy. Success within youth programs transpired when students were allowed opportunities to practice/to apply learned social and moral life skills (Catalano et al., 2004). Thus, based on the work by Catalano et al. (2004), social and moral life skills impact interpersonal skills between students and peers as well as students and adults. There is no doubt that this study found teachers supported opportunities in which to promote life skills. Fangirl shared her thoughts:

My children love reading things that they can feel like has something to do with their lives. Or they can recognize someone down the street and say they actually can see that. There has to be visualization with them or they don't buy into anything.

To reach the minds of students, their hearts must primarily have been accessed, because children are emotional, first, and intellectual, second (Sanacore, 2012). Thus, students witnessed and connected with Queenie's struggles as they read the novel. In conclusion, research does show that exposure to life skills produces positive results, especially when introduced in group settings (Catalano et al., 2004; Durlak et al., 2011; LaFromboise & Rowe, 1983; Tierney et al., 1995; United States Department of Labor, 1991).

Implications for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study there are areas which warrant future research. Implications from the themes of literacy, cross-curricular instruction, and life skills certainly deserve an investment in additional research. First, implementing another schoolwide study with the same parameters for the literacy, life skills, and cross-curricular components but with a different novel would address some personal and professional speculation. With a different novel, would teachers devote more time to the project? Exactly how would another book be chosen with teacher buy-in from the entire school, and how many days or weeks would it take to implement or read? To what degree would the novel cross into all of the school classroom curriculums?

Next, a place exists for additional research directly targeting instructional time devoted to assessment/testing as well as with the district initiatives required for inclusion each school year. Would an evaluation show that assessments and district requirements are unrealistic or detrimental? Last, because life skills received unanimous support in this study, future studies could delve into researching those social/emotional skills with the most impact on future career success for students, as well as seeking a way in which to make life skills part of established curriculums. The narrative discourses on which this study centered carried the strength of the

research, and taking the perspectives the teachers shared and exploring them further would be worthwhile. Additional detail and insight would enrich and clarify points teachers attempted to convey through their perspectives.

Implications for Practitioners

The study proved beneficial by assessing teacher perception of cross-curricular literacy projects and student exposure to life skills. The potential to recommend professional development opportunities for educators with cross-curricular teaching, literacy projects, or life skills existed once the study's results were evaluated. Implementation of the study enriched the school in a number of ways. First, it allowed teachers to reflect on increased opportunities for students to encounter texts through a literacy focus. Through their own retrospective views, teachers strengthened their own pedagogical approaches by evaluating the value of incorporating a literacy focus.

Further, teachers who expressed positive perspectives toward cross-curricular instruction will likely incorporate cross-curricular instruction in the future. Thus, their students will gain crucial skills in comprehending and practicing the transfer of learning from one curricular area to another. Those teachers in the study who explored cross-curricular connections favorably analyzed and recognized connections between and among subject disciplines. Last, fostering life skills will continue to enrich the social and emotional development of students with teachers who continue to collaborate and analyze life skills they perceive as most valuable. Besides connecting content areas as a future benefit to students, teachers will also prosper through the collegiality and collaboration with peers.

Concluding Thoughts

Thus, because of their literacy base, Language Arts and Reading have the ability to benefit, enrich, and augment other disciplines (Applebee et al., 2007; Daniels & Steres, 2011; Hall-Kenyon & Smith, 2013; Hinde et al., 2011; International Reading Association & National Council of Teachers of English, 1996). This study allowed teachers to reflect on personal experiences with literacy in non-Reading/Language Arts classrooms and the findings proved consistent with literature which advocated literacy encounters in different subject disciplines. Cross-curricular instruction proves beneficial by enriching vision, curriculum, and collaboration (Aiken, 1942; Hall-Kenyon & Smith, 2013; Hinde et al., 2011). Akos et al. (2011) linked teacher perspectives and content integration. My study supported those findings. In addition, providing exposure to life skills has positive implications (Catalano et. al, 2004; Durlak et al., 2011; LaFromboise & Rowe, 1983; Tierney et al., 1995; United States Department of Labor, 1991). Through reflections of teacher perspectives in this study, conclusions supported the exposure to life skills.

I hope that my study of teacher perspectives at this school will also emphasize the innate potential and strength in a cross-curricular approach to literacy instruction. Teachers showed support for cross-curricular endeavors linking subjects and grade levels, but felt handicapped to incorporate cross-curricular instruction. Their concerns are valid but not insurmountable. It is possible to work strategically to ensure that cross-curricular undertakings have the necessary instructional time allotted before launching them. Since curriculum is addressed on district and state levels, without a commitment from the district and state to embrace literacy through schoolwide projects, to foster cross-curricular instruction within a single project, or to expose students to life skills, those teachable opportunities will not transpire. However, I plan to remain

optimistic that educational policy makers, planners, and thinkers will eventually re-evaluate curriculum, because expanding encounters with cross-curricular literacy initiatives in schools will reap incredible future rewards for our students and for our schools.

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Appendix A

Project Consent Form

Dear Participant:

You are invited to participate in a graduate research project conducted by a student in the College of Education at the University of Georgia. It is important that you understand the scope and procedures of the study before you consent. Please read the consent form and allow me to answer any questions. In this project interviews will be conducted with teachers for the purpose of collecting perceptions exploring thoughts and beliefs concerning a cross-curricular literacy project and life skills. I am the chief investigator, and the research will be supervised by Dr. Elaine Adams and Dr. Sally J. Zepeda.

The research purpose is to examine teacher perception of a cross-curricular literacy project such as the one undertaken with *Queenie Peavy* and life skills which may have emerged from it.

You have been asked to participate in the study by engaging twice in hour long taped interviews, during which you will be asked questions about your experiences, impressions, and thoughts about cross-curricular literacy projects such as *Queenie Peavy* and the possible emergence of life skills.

All identifiable shared information will be treated as confidential in this research. Pseudonyms will replace names in the research findings and discussion. The taped recordings of your interviews will be erased at the end of the research period, around May, 2017. In addition, audio files of your recordings will be password protected. The audio files will be destroyed prior to May, 2017, after they have been transcribed into written text. Your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw from this study at any time. Your decision to participate or not will have no bearing on your employment or employment evaluations. Information that you have submitted

will be included in the study unless you request in writing that it be destroyed or removed. Otherwise, all information in the study will be kept for seven years for the purpose of informing other research which may arise. In that instance you may possibly be contacted and asked to participate. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to the study. Though there are no individual benefits for participating, the study's findings may have benefits and may have implications for deepening understanding of literacy-based instruction, cross-curricular instruction, and life skills as they pertain to middle school. In addition, findings may contribute to current studies and literature.

Please contact dissertation co-chairs Dr. Elaine Adams (706 542 4204/ adamsje@uga.edu) and Dr. Sally J. Zepeda (706 542 0408/ szepeda@uga.edu), or me (706 357 5318 x 24362/ cindyhr@uga.edu) with questions or concerns.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Georgia IRB Chair at 706-542-3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Your participation and contribution toward educational knowledge of cross-curricular literacy projects and life skills is appreciated.

Sincerely,

Cynthia H. Rivers

Dr. Elaine Adams,

Department of Career and Information Studies

Dr. Sally J. Zepeda,

Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy

Participant Signature:_____

Date:_____

Researcher Signature:_____

Date:_____

Please sign both copies. One copy is for your records and one is for the researcher's.

For additional questions or concerns about your participation in this study, please contact:

Chairperson,

Institutional Review Board

University of Georgia

629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center

Athens, GA 30602

706 542 3199 or IRB@uga.edu

Appendix B

Interview 1 Protocol and Interview Questions

Let me take a moment to review the consent form and have you sign. Basically it says that you are granting permission to be recorded and to be interviewed, and that you are assured your privacy will be protected. You will be referenced with a pseudonym in the transcript as well as in my paper. Further, the audio recording will be destroyed at the end of this research period, around the end of May, 2017, though the other research information will remain for a period of 7 years. The interview will take no more than an hour, and if you are uncomfortable with a question, you certainly have the right to refuse to answer. Further, if our discussion triggers questions of your own, feel free to ask them.

Do you have any questions about your consent?

I have begun an audio recording of this interview. Is that all right with you?

I want to thank you again for allowing me to interview you for my Research project.

This school participated in a cross-curricular, literacy based project which revolved around the novel *Queenie Peavy*, which has led me to my study.

The major purpose of this study is to examine how teachers perceive, express, and describe their experiences with teaching via a cross-curricular literacy project. In addition, the secondary purpose is to explore the life skills emerging throughout the duration of the study.

Do you have any questions about the interview?

1. Would you introduce yourself by sharing your professional title and job description?

Probes:

How did you come to work at this particular school?

Talk with me about your educational background.

2. As a teacher, what are your thoughts about a schoolwide literacy focus? (RQ1)

What views did teachers express concerning the implementation of a schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project such as *Queenie Peavy*?

Probes:

Tell me about your experience with the Queenie Peavy project.

Do you believe the Queenie Peavy project contributed to those feelings? Please elaborate.

Regarding student achievement, talk to me about your feelings toward a cross-curricular instructional approach to literacy as opposed to literacy instruction taught solely through Reading or Language Arts?

What do you see impacts textual exposure for students?

3. Our school participated in a cross-curricular literacy project focused on *Queenie Peavy*.

As a teacher, tell me your thoughts about incorporating cross-curricular projects? (RQ2)

How did the middle school teachers perceive their roles after participating in a schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project?

Probes:

Do you feel the Queenie Peavy project contributed to those feelings?

How would you define prior knowledge?

Please share the components of schoolwide projects you view as beneficial or necessary to engage teacher participation.

4. Throughout the novel, the protagonist, Queenie, dealt with life skills such as responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/ honesty both inside and outside of school. Talk to me about students and life skills during the project. (RQ3)
- Did teachers describe an emergence of social and emotional life skills during the schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project?

Probes:

Based on your experience, did the project's events encourage discussions or reflections over life skills?

How did students respond as Queenie encountered these life skills?

In what potential scenario could life skills provide positive outcomes?

To summarize this interview, during our conversation I felt you viewed literacy projects, cross-curricular instruction, and life skills with an overall impression of _____.

Would that be an accurate summation?

Do you have any questions to ask me, or any points to add to what we have discussed?

Once I have created a written transcription of our interview I will be asking you to check the transcript for inaccuracies.

Would you also like a transcript of this interview for yourself? If so, do you want me to personally deliver a copy to you or email one to you?

Let me reiterate that this audio tape will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project, and that I will only refer to you with a pseudonym.

If I have any follow up questions, would you be willing to answer those?

Thank you so much for your cooperation and for helping me with my research.

I am terminating the recording session.

Appendix C

Interview 2 Protocol and Interview Questions

Thank you for allowing me to interview you a second time for my Research project.

I am making an audio recording of this follow-up session. You will be referenced with a pseudonym in the transcript as well as in my paper. Further, the audio recording will be destroyed at the end of this research period, around the end of May, 2017, though the other research information will remain for a period of 7 years. This follow-up interview will take no more than an hour.

As a reminder, our school participated in a cross-curricular, literacy based project which revolved around the novel *Queenie Peavy*, which has led me to my study.

The major purpose of this study is to examine how teachers perceive, express, and describe their experiences with teaching via a cross-curricular literacy project. In addition, the secondary purpose is to explore the life skills emerging throughout the duration of the study.

Once I have created a written transcription of our interview I will be asking you to check the transcript for inaccuracies.

Would you also like a transcript of this interview for yourself? If so, do you want me to personally deliver a copy to you or email one to you?

Do you have any questions before the interview begins?

5. In the first interview, everyone made reference to there being positive aspects of the *Queenie Peavy* literacy project. Concerning relevance, demographics, and instructional time, what would make a schoolwide cross curricular literacy project more positive?
6. Give me more detail about assessment/testing and textual exposure as they factor into schoolwide projects.
7. Many participants mentioned positive aspects of the *Queenie Peavy* cross-curricular project and of the novel itself. Regarding discussion and teacher buy-in, what would make a schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project more positive?
8. Talk to me about cross-curricular collaboration.
9. When considering the character of Queenie Peavy, most participants viewed the emergence of life skills throughout the project favorably. What should be considerations for teachers when focusing on an emergence of social and emotional life skills via a schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project?
10. In respect to life skills, tell me more about what you would like incorporated through the implementation of a schoolwide cross-curricular literacy project.