UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF MIDDLE SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS CREATING PERSONALIZED LEARNING CLASSROOMS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Robert L. Carlyle III

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to examine teachers' experiences of implementing personalized learning in the social studies classroom at middle schools in Georgia. Personalized learning is the ability to tailor learning to each learner's interest, strengths, and needs. The theory guiding this study is the discovery learning theory, which was introduced by Jerome Bruner. The central research question guiding the research was "How do middle school social studies teachers in Georgia describe their experiences creating personalized learning classrooms?" Sub-questions used to further refine the central question were: (1) How do teachers motivate students in the personalized learning classroom? (2) How do teachers relate to the students in a personalized learning classroom? (3) How do teachers identify ways to adjust learning in the personalized learning classroom? (4) How do teachers describe the student's ability to achieve autonomy in the personalized learning classroom? The setting was three middle schools in Georgia. The sample was 15 middle school social studies teachers who currently teach in the personalized learning classroom. The data received came from interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. The Van Kaam Method of Analysis was used for this study. This method and the transcendental phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to obtain a full description of the participants' experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Keywords: discovery learning theory, instructional strategies, personalized learning, transcendental phenomenology

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List of Abbreviations

Bring Your Own Device (BYOD)

Depth of Knowledge (DOK)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Personalized Learning (PL)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Personalized learning is defined as tailoring learning to each learner's interests, strengths, and needs (Patrick, Kennedy, & Powell, 2013). This study investigated the experiences of middle school social studies teachers in creating a personalized learning classroom for their students. The research expored the strategies used to motivate students in the personalized learning classroom. The problem is that the literature shows that middle school social studies teachers have not been given the opportunity to share their experiences with creating a personalized learning classroom (In'am & Hajar, 2017). Middle school social studies teachers were given an opportunity to share their experiences of creating personalized learning in their classroom. The voices of middle school social studies teachers are heard through this study as they share their experiences of creating personalized learning in their classrooms.

Important background information that summarizes the foundations of, and the many different approaches to, personalized learning is provided here. The researcher shares his personal interest in personalized learning and how he has been impacted by the study. This chapter examines the problem behind personalized learning, that middle school social studies teachers do not have a voice in sharing their experiences. Additionally, it examines how social studies teachers created personalized learning classrooms in the middle school setting. The research provided in this chapter reveal the significance of the study, which is that it allows other teachers, administrators, and parents to learn from the experiences of teachers in a middle school social studies personalized learning classroom. In conclusion, a connection is provided, in order to tie in the research questions chosen for this study.

Background

Historical Contexts

Personalized learning has been of interest in education since the 1700s, when Jean-Jacques Rousseau advocated for schools to allow the students to individualize their learning to capitalize on their inherent motivations (Zmuda, Curtis, & Ullman, 2015). Research on the topic of teachers and the personalized learning classroom has focused on the reasoning of teachers and their learning spaces in the classroom that is used for personalized learning (Deed, Cox, et al., 2014). Approaches are being adopted to accommodate increasingly diverse learner populations and prepare graduates for their future roles in the workplace and in society (Andrade, 2016). Teachers are more relevant in a personalized learning classroom than ever before due to their ability to build relationships and see the potential of the students as well as provide high-quality feedback (Zmuda et al., 2015). Teachers must balance teaching different types of students, from the gifted to the struggling learner (Dixon, Yssel, McConnell, & Hardin 2014). In other research, the perspectives of teachers pertained to the transformation of K-12 in rural education through blended learning (Kellerer et al., 2014).

The focus of this research is the experiences of middle school social studies teachers in creating personalized learning in the social studies classroom. The inquiry granted middle school social studies teachers the ability to have a voice in what goes on in creating their personalized learning classrooms. Addressing the lack of research in personalized learning in social studies, as well as in other subjects, can only help support better course delivery and instruction. Providing middle school teachers with effective practices will enhance the learning of students in their classrooms. Students in the personalized learning classroom can benefit from this research due to their teachers having a voice and looking for ways to make improvements to

this learning environment. These new findings span far beyond middle school social studies and not only provide information to middle school social studies teachers, but also open the door for research in other content areas that utilize personalized classrooms.

Social Context

Studies have been completed on students' perceptions of social studies that includes reading and understanding the content. After observing the behavior of students as they read a passage from a social studies textbook, researchers could tell if the student was engaged or disengaged with the topic based on his or her emotions (Beck, Buehl, & Barber, 2015). Student perceptions on the blended learning environment have also been researched. Project-based learning is an approach that engages students who are grouped together into teams and allows them to investigate and respond to challenging and complex questions (Hamilton, 2015). This type of learning includes personalized learning using face-to-face instruction and online learning (Gyamfi & Gyaase, 2015). Additional research has explained how personalized learning operates in the classroom with teachers guiding the learning process (Basham, Hall, Carter, & Stahl, 2016). In other research, teacher perceptions on blended learning were considered (Kuo, Belland, Schroder, & Walker, 2014).

The literature has shown that school systems are changing the way teachers are instructing students in the classroom. Personalized learning, blended learning, and competency-based learning are of increasing interest to district leaders at the front of transformation efforts (Patrick & Sturgis, 2015). Students face an enormous challenge with the advancement of technology and the need to build a strong educational foundation based on the content that is studied. Schools across the country are looking to implement new approaches that allow students to personalize their learning (Patrick & Sturgis, 2015). Competency-based learning

allows students to “learn to learn” and provides them with self-regulated learning skills and greater autonomy over their learning (Byrne, Downey, & Souza, 2013). Many school districts are moving from a traditional style of learning toward personalized learning in that students are taking control over how they will learn. The theory of self-regulated learning asserts that students learn how to develop their abilities through goal-setting and strategy use (Andrade, 2016). Self-regulated learning is a process that encourages students to manage how their thoughts, behaviors, and emotions affect their learning experiences. In a self-regulated learning classroom, students are able to plan, monitor, and assess their work independently. Teachers must be prepared to instruct students on how to set goals, self-motivate, plan independently, and use learning strategies to reach their goals (Zumbrunn, Tadlock, & Roberts, 2011).

Differentiated instruction is another way of personalizing learning in the classroom. Research on differentiated instruction revealed similarities with personalized learning (Duncan, 2013). When utilizing differentiated instruction in the classroom, students are given an assessment of their prior knowledge of the content they are going to study. The teacher then designs the instruction to cater to the needs of the student (Duncan, 2013). In one study, personalized learning is described as discovery learning (In’am & Hajar, 2017). Discovery learning is proven to enhance the quality of learning compared to conventional methods, and learners can expand their knowledge during the learning process (In’am & Hajar, 2017). In one study, middle school geometry teachers were given a voice and were able to describe the process of discovery learning and how effective it had been in the classroom. This study revealed that students learn something most effectively when they discover by themselves. Bruner (1961) suggested that students learn through active participation using concepts and principles to obtain knowledge. Personalized learning offers school librarians a way to maximize learner

achievement by meeting students where they are and allowing students to engage in experiences that support their learning (Easley, 2017).

In research involving video games in the classroom, students were asked questions on certain middle school social studies topics. The answers to the questions asked could be learned by playing the video games Maguth, List, & Wunderle, 2015). To get students to build connections between class content and what they experienced in the video game, teachers created a wiki or website that can be edited by the users with ten different modules that students progressed through, all of which were based around different stages of game play (Maguth et al., 2015). Web 2.0 is another form of personalized learning that has been researched. Web 2.0 is defined as the ability of an individual to use the web socially and become an active participant in creating knowledge and sharing information online (Tucker, 2014). Students can personalize their learning using a self-guided course using online technology. Individual learners determine the rate at which they work through their course as well as when they will complete learning activities and assignments (Thiessen, 2016).

Theoretical Context

Transcendental phenomenology theoretical framework was utilized for this study. In this framework, Husserl pictured phenomenology as a rigorous procedure that would produce advances in philosophic knowledge similar to those expected of mathematics and the sciences (as cited in Kretchmar, 2014). According to Husserl (2012), phenomenology does not prove that the world does not exist but only clarifies its existence. Transcendental phenomenology is a research design that focuses on lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990). This design was used in the literature on finding the perceptions of veteran teachers implementing digital 1:1 in elementary schools.

Digital 1:1 is when schools provide every student in the classroom with a personal device, either a tablet or laptop computer. This allows students to have access to technology at all times, whether the student is at school or at home (Molin & Lantz-Andersson, 2016). McKee (2016) looked at the lived experiences of veteran teachers implementing digital 1:1 in their classrooms for the first time in several private elementary schools. He was able to see first-hand their experiences in creating a digital 1:1 environment.

Discovery learning theory drives this theoretical framework. Discovery learning occurs when a student can problem solve by discovering new information based on prior knowledge (Bruner, 1961). In one study on discovery learning in the geometry classroom, students were given a problem and asked to find a solution without the help of a teacher. This study revealed that students are able to learn and master content by active participation (In'am & Hajar, 2017). The personalization principle includes the idea that an environment should be both responsive to the learners' activities and helpful in letting them take a reflexive view of themselves (Malone, 1981). Research on science and technology in regard to discovery learning presents the idea that teaching students discovery, critical thinking, questioning, and problem-solving skills is one of the main principles of science and technology teaching (Balim, 2009).

Situation to Self

As a middle school social studies teacher who utilizes personalized learning daily in a sixth-grade classroom, this researcher has found this method of learning to be very challenging and rewarding. For many years, the researcher was told by school administration that one must stand in front of the classroom and use direct instruction daily. So, that is exactly what the researcher did for 10 years. Recently, this researcher had the opportunity to change school districts and, upon arrival, was introduced to personalized learning and accepted it with a bit of

skepticism. This concept was very challenging at first because it was hard to keep track of where each student was in his or her personalized learning environment. Soon thereafter, this researcher learned to manage this approach and build a trusting relationship with each student.

Personalized learning has made this experience as a teacher fun and exciting! This researcher can work one-on-one with each student as they progress throughout the course. In some cases, a student will have difficulty on an assignment, and this researcher can point out what he or she needs to complete or better understand the assignment. Some students are very self-motivated and can move along throughout the unit with no issues. The reason this researcher believes that personalized learning is effective is that each child can take responsibility for his or her learning and enjoy the ability of controlling his or her own education. As a teacher, this researcher can guide students while allowing each one to feel that he or she is in control of the learning. This allows the students to be able to appreciate their learning and become motivated to be successful.

According to Creswell (2013), there are four types of philosophical assumptions: ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological. Ontology relates to the nature of reality, epistemology involves a researcher trying to get close to the participants as much as possible, and axiological assumptions are made when the researcher acknowledges that the research is value-laden and that biases are present and the methodological assumption relates to the qualitative procedures in collecting data for research (Creswell, 2013). In this research, the ontological assumption is involved as the researcher is interviewing the participants and will face multiple realities of the middle school social studies personalized learning classroom. Participants will have different perspectives and experiences from these classrooms. In the epistemological assumption, the researcher will be able to learn from the individuals based on

their views of the experiences in creating middle school social studies personalized learning classrooms. This assumption allowed the researcher to get to know the participants and obtain detailed information regarding their experiences creating middle school social studies personalized learning classrooms. In the axiological assumption, the researcher needed to recognize the bias that was involved in this study based on this researcher's personal experiences in the middle school social studies learning classroom. The methodological assumption involves the researcher to start from the ground up by finding data and being able to analyze the data and to be able to become knowledgeable of the topic that is being studied.

There are several paradigms that are used to guide studies in research. These paradigms include positivist/post-positivist, constructivist, participatory, and pragmatist (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Positivism/post-positivism allows researchers to believe in multiple perspectives rather than in a single reality (Creswell, 2013). In constructivism, researchers seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. The participatory paradigm allows the researcher to focus on change and begins with an important issue or stance (Creswell, 2013). Pragmatism focuses on the outcomes of a study: the action, situations, and consequences of inquiry (Creswell, 2013). Constructivism is a paradigm that allows researchers to seek an understanding of the world in the environment where they work and live. The constructivist paradigm guided this study. Constructivism fits this study in that it is phenomenological research in which participants describe experiences through interviews and focus groups. In this study, the researcher used the information from these interviews and focus groups and interpreted these findings (Creswell, 2013).

Problem Statement

Many middle school social studies teachers in Georgia are not given a voice to share their experiences in creating a social studies personalized learning classroom. Recent research on the topic of teachers and the personalized learning classroom has only focused on the reasoning of teachers using their learning spaces in the classroom that is used for personalized learning (Deed, Lesko, & Lovejoy, 2014). In other research, the perspectives of teachers only pertained to the transformation of K-12 in rural education through blended learning (Kellerer et al., 2014). Research has also been conducted on geometry teachers and their experiences in a personalized learning classroom. In this research, the concept was called discovery learning (In'am & Hajar, 2017).

Student perceptions regarding blended learning environments have also been researched. This type of learning includes personalized learning using face-to-face instruction and online learning (Gyamfi & Gyaase, 2015). Additional research has explained how personalized learning operates in the classroom with teachers guiding the learning process (Basham et al., 2016). However, the only time that teacher perceptions have been considered was when research was done on blended learning (Kuo et al., 2014). The current research is deficient in that there is no literature that describes the experiences of middle school social studies teachers in a personalized learning classroom. The literature does show the perspectives of teachers and students on blended learning. Personalized learning is mentioned in the literature regarding utilizing personalized learning spaces, and the literature describes how personalized learning operates in the classroom with the guidance of the teachers. However, there is no research that gives middle school social studies teachers a voice to describe their experiences creating a social studies personalized learning classroom.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe teachers' experiences creating personalized learning in middle school social studies classrooms in Georgia. According to Patrick et al. (2013), personalized learning means tailoring learning for each learner's interest, strengths, and needs. This approach encourages flexibility to support mastery and enables learners to influence how, what, when, and where they learn. This allows the student to take ownership of learning in the classroom (Cavanaugh, 2014). This research gives middle school social studies teachers a voice regarding their experiences creating social studies personalized learning classrooms. The theory guiding this study is discovery learning theory (Bruner, 1961); it pertains to personalized learning in that it requires students to be motivated to learn on their own in an environment where they are given a task and the resources to accomplish the task. Bruner's (1961) discovery learning theory allows students to take an active role in their learning by becoming active participants by using the necessary concepts and methods to gain mastery of the content. The teachers in this environment facilitate the learning pathway of the student and mediate if the student is unable to complete a task.

Significance of the Study

The significant of this study provides research that will give all teachers, parents, and administrators the ability to understand social studies middle school teachers and their experiences in the personalized learning classroom. Teachers of all grades and subject areas can use the experiences from this study to apply the strategies in their own classrooms. Research has shown that being given choice in the classroom increases students' motivation, engagement, and performance (Netcoh, 2017). Giving students this control can be difficult for teachers who fear that student voice and choice may lead to classroom chaos and undermine student learning

(Morrison, 2008). However, teachers are there to provide resources for the students and mediate when students are unable to complete a task. Teachers use a variety of resources that include technology, small group instruction, and large group instruction when needed (Basham et al., 2016).

As a result of this research, teachers will be able to seek out personalized learning approaches that are specific to their needs in the personalized learning classroom (King, 2017). Teachers often struggle with finding new ways to engage students, or they can become complacent and resort to repeatedly using strategies in the classroom that do not work. Teachers have the ability to influence students because of their relationship with them. This allows teachers to have a working relationship with the students and their families, which in turn will allow the student to become successful (Redding, 2013). Middle school social studies teachers who create personalized learning classrooms shared their experiences based on how they have perceived the personalized learning social studies classroom. The teachers identified the benefits and challenges that arise in a personalized learning social studies classroom. Teachers can learn from other teachers who voice their opinions on how useful the instructional strategies are in the personalized learning social studies classroom. This study allows the middle school social studies teachers to voice their experiences creating personalized learning in their classroom.

Administrators can use the experiences of middle school social studies teachers creating personalized learning classrooms to develop strategies for their teachers in the classrooms. Leadership teams guided by administrators will work together to determine what strategies can be used to promote success in the personalized learning environment (Donskey & Witherow, 2015). Parents gain a firsthand look at a personalized learning classroom and are able to understand how this learning environment works in a middle school social studies classroom.

Parents can take this information and use the strategies at home to promote personalized learning to ensure success of their child. Parents have the opportunity tailor learning games and activities personalized to the interest and goals of the student (Garn & Jolly, 2014). Parents tend to put pressure on their children in regard to their grades, which often lowers their motivation in school (Garn & Jolly, 2014). Personalized learning will allow parents and teachers to work together toward one goal: the success of the student.

To make improvements to the personalized learning classroom, the voice of the middle school teacher needs to be heard (Creswell, 2013). This research builds upon the literature in personalized learning, providing a description of the experiences of middle school social studies teachers in the classroom. Students can learn at their own pace and skill level without the pressure of being rushed, which may leave them unable to learn the material (Duncan, 2013). Teachers who teach other subjects such as geometry can learn from the experiences that middle school social studies teachers shared in this study (In'am & Hajar, 2017). Often, teachers can learn from their peers to better develop themselves as educators (Thacker, 2017). Teachers can also find ways to integrate technology into the classroom by utilizing many different software and games into the classroom. With the help of technology in the classroom, teachers can base their instruction on the interests and preferences of the students. Technology will promote self-efficacy in the classroom and encourage motivation (Elstad & Christophersen, 2017).

Personalized learning is defined as tailoring learning or each learner's interest, strengths, and needs (Patrick et al., 2013). In this learning environment students are able to learn based on their own interests and preferences. The theory guiding this research is discovery learning theory, which promotes active engagement and motivation in students in the learning environment. Students will use prior knowledge to develop creativity and problem-solving skills

(Bruner, 1961). Here, students are given a task and use prior knowledge to discover new facts and truths (Bruner, 1961). This theory is unique in that it describes students who are actively engaged in the personalized learning environment. According to Bruner (1961), discovery learning theory promotes motivation, active involvement, and creativity. The pace of the students can be adjusted based on how they learn, and the theory encourages retention and independence (Bruner, 1961). Studies have shown that students can be successful when they actively participate in class to find solutions to problem (In'am & Hajar, 2017). Middle school social studies teachers in this research were able to describe their experiences on how the students in their classroom were actively engaged based on the prior knowledge they brought to the classroom. This research provides information to help middle school social studies teachers improve in the personalized learning classroom, giving them tools to help students succeed.

Research Questions

The research questions are grounded in the theoretical framework of Bruner's (1961) discovery learning theory. In this theory, students are an active participant in the learning process, using the concepts and methods of the discovery learning theory to ensure their success. Moustakas (1994) states that research questions should have characteristics that reveal more fully the essence and meanings of the human experience. Qualitative research questions are open-ended, evolving, and non-directional. The research questions restate the purpose of the study in more specific terms (Creswell, 2013). In a phenomenological study, the research questions seek to uncover the meanings of the qualitative behavior and experience. The questions allow the participants to engage and become involved with the study (Moustakas, 1994). The purpose of qualitative research questions is to narrow the purpose of the research to ideas that will be addressed (Creswell, 2013).

The central question is as follows: How do middle school social studies teachers in Georgia describe their experiences while creating personalized learning classrooms? The central question allows middle school social studies teachers to describe what they experience in creating a personalized learning classroom. This provides an inside look at the personalized learning social studies classroom at middle schools in Georgia. The teachers were able to describe what processes are involved in creating an environment that allows students to take ownership of their learning in the classroom (Cavanaugh, 2014). The research sub-questions are as follows:

1. How do middle school social studies teachers motivate students in the personalized learning classroom?

The first research sub-question allows middle school social studies teachers to explain how they motivate students in a personalized learning classroom. In personalized learning, a student must be motivated to complete assignments given by the teacher in the classroom. Discovery learning theory guided this theory (Bruner, 1961); it pertains to personalized learning in that it requires the student to be motivated to learn on their own in an environment where the students are given a task and the resources to accomplish that task. Bruner's (1961) discovery learning theory allows the students to take an active role in their learning by becoming participants by using the necessary concepts and methods to gain mastery of the content.

2. How do middle school social studies teachers relate to the students in a personalized learning classroom?

The second research sub-question seeks to identify how a middle school social studies teacher and student relate in creating a middle school social studies personalized learning classroom. In this environment, teachers will create a learning environment that allows students

to learn. The teacher needs to be able to know how students learn to find out what best suits their learning needs. Research has explained how personalized learning operates in the classroom with teachers guiding the learning process (Basham et al., 2016). Teachers and students need to have a personal relationship to ensure the success of the student in the personalized learning classroom. Personalized learning requires the student to determine the rate at which they work through their course as well as when they will complete learning activities and assignments (Thiessen, 2016). The teacher and student will need to have a relationship that builds trust in creating a personalized learning classroom in middle school social studies. Research has shown that personalized learning classrooms that are well designed can transform the behavior of the teacher and the student (Basham et al., 2016).

3. How do middle school social studies teachers identify ways to adjust learning in the personalized learning classroom?

The third research sub-question examines how middle school social studies teachers creating personalized learning classrooms adjust learning for each student. Teachers described how they modify lesson plans and assignments to meet the needs of the student. Often, teachers are in situations where a student needs additional time or is unable to understand a given assignment. An example of this is when the teacher is going over a topic from a book and allows the students to get into groups based on their interests from the book (Parrott & Keith, 2015). The teacher will emphasize the interests of the student, using them as the starting point in a lesson, and most importantly, allowing the students to work at their own pace (Morgan, 2014). It is important for the teacher to be intelligent and well prepared for changes that may arise in this learning environment (Morgan, 2014).

4. How do middle school social studies teachers describe the student's ability to achieve autonomy in the personalized learning classroom?

The fourth research sub-question examines how middle school social studies teachers are able to describe the ability of the student to achieve autonomy in the middle school social studies personalized learning classroom. Discovery learning theory encourages independence by the student through the use of prior knowledge of the content. This type of independence is called autonomy, in which students have the freedom to make their own choices in learning (Bruner, 1961). In discovery learning, students are active participants, and students construct new ideas or concepts based on what the students have learned in the past. A student must be willing to learn and have an interest in the content to really be motivated in this learning process (Bruner, 1961).

Definitions

1. *Blended learning* combines face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction (Bonk & Graham, 2012).
2. *Differentiated instruction* offers different paths to understanding content, process, and products by considering what is appropriate given a child's profile of strengths, interests, and styles (Dixon et al., 2014).
3. *Discovery learning theory* is known as a method of inquiry-based instruction. Discovery learning asserts that it is best for learners to discover facts and relationships for themselves (Bruner, 1961.
4. *Flipped classroom* approaches remove the traditional trans-missive lecture and replace it with active in-class tasks and pre/post class work (Abeysekera & Dawson, 2015).

5. *Instructional strategies* are strategies for a positive effect for achievement for all students, all grades, and all subject areas at all grade levels (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001).
6. *Personalized learning* is defined as tailoring learning to each learner's interests, strengths, and needs (Patrick et al., 2013).
7. *Phenomenological study* is defined as the common meaning of several individuals' lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).
8. *Project-based learning* is defined as the ability to complete complex tasks based on challenging questions or problems that involve students in design, problem-solving, decision-making, or investigative activities; give students the opportunity to work relatively autonomously over extended periods of time; and culminate in realistic products or presentations (Bradley-Levine & Mosier, 2014).
9. *Transcendental phenomenology* is the process of identifying a phenomenon to study, bracketing out one's experiences, and collecting data from several persons who have experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).
10. *Web 2.0* offers enhanced learning opportunities by strengthening students' critical thinking, writing, and reflection, and engaging students in a new world of information sharing and social learning (Jimoyiannis, Tsiotakis, Roussinos, & Siorenta, 2013).

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological research is to give a voice to middle school social studies teachers in Georgia. According to Creswell (2013), participants in a phenomenological study have an opportunity to voice their opinion on the subject. It is important to know what these teachers have experienced in their classrooms daily. With this information, researchers can

further understand what social studies teachers in middle schools encounter in their classrooms. This information will allow other personalized learning teachers in the middle school social studies setting to learn from their experiences to provide the resources necessary for their students to succeed. This study is necessary because literature does not reveal that these teachers have a voice or are able to give their opinion (Creswell, 2013).

Research has allowed students to voice their perspectives in the personalized learning classroom (Gyamfi & Gyaase, 2015). Teachers, however, have merely had the opportunity to express their thoughts on blended learning and the learning spaces in the personalized learning environment. This study will help administrators look for opportunities to make improvements not only in the middle school setting but across the district in the elementary and high school settings.

It is important to the success of students that teachers be able to make improvements to this learning environment once it has been revealed that one approach does not work. In Chapter Two, the gap in the research and literature will be evaluated, and it can be identified that school social studies teachers in Georgia have not had a voice. This study will open the door for research across the country and in other parts of the world. Bruner's (1961) discovery learning theory formed the foundation for and guided this study. Teachers' experiences were discovered along with the benefits and challenges of teaching in a middle school social studies personalized learning classroom. Instructional strategies were examined as they related to the middle school social studies personalized learning classroom.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

In this chapter, the theoretical framework is introduced to provide the reader with a direct connection to the ideas that guided the study. Literature is introduced that relates to personalized learning and what has driven this study of the experiences of middle school social studies teachers creating personalized learning classrooms. Literature will reveal that students have a voice regarding their experiences in the personalized learning classroom. However, the voice of a middle school social studies teacher in the personalized learning classroom has not been recorded. The literature has given a voice to teachers in the field of mathematics and allows those teachers to describe their experience in the classroom utilizing personalized learning (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). The teacher plays a key role in providing strategies for students, and student success relies heavily upon these strategies. This chapter reveals the gap in the literature, showing that middle school social studies teachers creating personalized learning classroom do not have a voice to describe their experiences (Lodico et al., 2010).

Theoretical Framework

Discovery Learning Theory

The discovery learning theory has guided the study regarding the experiences of middle school social studies teachers creating personalized learning classrooms. In 1961, Jerome Seymour Bruner introduced this theory, which allowed students to practice problem solving by discovering new information based on their prior knowledge. During discovery learning, the role of the teacher is to instruct students to a certain point, then allow the students to seek out the remaining information on their own once formal schooling has ended (Bruner, 1961). The discovery learning theory is based heavily upon intrinsic motivation, which will vary from

student to student, although it encourages all students to actively engage in the content material, naturally promoting motivation. Students must be motivated to complete the tasks provided by the teachers in this setting. Teachers need to be creative in finding strategies to motivate those students who lack the ability to stay motivated while completing tasks. The strategies used by teachers create a sense of independence and responsibility within the student. Students will become accountable for their assignments and will hopefully be able to work at their own pace. This type of independence is referred to as an autonomy, which means that students have the freedom to make their own choices in learning (Bruner, 1961). Students are able to make connections based on their prior knowledge of the content (Bruner, 1961; Costello, 2017).

The main difference between the discovery learning theory and other learning theories is the fact that in discovery learning, students not only actively participate, but also construct new ideas or concepts based on what they have learned in the past. The idea that a student constructs knowledge based on presented information paired with the knowledge they already hold, may be completely different from the idea that a student combines new and prior knowledge. One can take new information presented and pair it with what is already known, creating one's own individual understandings and perspectives on a topic within the assigned curriculum. A student must be willing to learn and have an interest in the content to really be motivated in this learning process (Bruner, 1961). Because of this, some learners thrive in this type of classroom setting, while others must be provided with a bit more scaffolding from the teacher or motivation from peers. The pace assignments are completed will vary from student to student based on their level of knowledge of the material. Some students are motivated to work ahead while other students will need more time and extra time to complete their assignment (Costello, 2017).

In the discovery learning theory, there are several learning experiences that a student will naturally create for himself. These experiences include: an increase of intellectual potency, a shift from intrinsic to extrinsic rewards, learning the heuristics of discovery, and memory processing (Bruner, 1961). Intellectual potency occurs once a student has achieved mastery in problem solving and is cognitively prepared to apply that same information to another topic that builds upon the first, or another situation altogether. For a student to achieve intellectual potency, a student must have a willingness to learn in addition to having the expectation within himself that there is outstanding information that would be valuable to obtain. Intellectual potency allows students to be actively involved in the learning process (Mirasi, Osodo, & Kilbirige, 2013). The student must be intrinsically willing to achieve his or her personalized goal of finding the information needed (Bruner, 1961). Students need to take the focus away from receiving extrinsic rewards for success and shift the focus to obtaining intrinsic rewards. Historically, children have always been given some type of reward for good behavior or completing tasks or even assignments correctly by their parents. In discovery learning, the reward should be intrinsic: the information or new findings that was sought out. The reward is the ability to find the information and the eagerness to seek out new information (Bruner, 1961). When learning the heuristics of discovery, a person will find out that he or she has the ability to enjoy the process of guiding one's own learning and the ability to find needed information independently. Memory processing is the ability to retrieve stored information without receiving any clues or information that may trigger that memory. With discovery learning, information is organized, and a student will automatically be able to retrieve the information needed out of the files within his or her mind (Bruner, 1961).

In the discovery learning theory, there are three levels or stages of representation: enactive, iconic, and symbolic (Brahier, 2009). In the enactive stage, a student will learn from hands-on experiences that support touching or feeling. This is the case with algebra or any mathematics class where students are using their hands to touch manipulatives, such as algebraic tiles, paper cones, money, or anything that is tangible (Brahier, 2009). Another example of enactive learning in the social studies classroom might include children holding and inspecting items from a certain time in history (Brahier, 2009). In the iconic stage, students will use visuals by drawing or being able to picture the objects in their heads. Tools could include shapes, diagrams, or graphs. The iconic stage of learning is typically seen in the mathematics classroom when students are encouraged to utilize scrap paper to solve problems through drawing pictures, where eventually, as the student becomes more advanced, he or she creates more and more pictures in one's mind rather than on the scrap paper. In the symbolic stage, students will take images that are shown and turn them into words or symbols (Brahier, 2009). For example, when a child is shown nothing but a photograph of a kangaroo, he or she immediately opens up a file in their mind that contains information regarding the continent of Australia. Everything that one has ever learned about the geographical region moves to the forefront of their thinking. The symbolic stage allows students to organize the information in their minds so that they are able to easily put concepts together (Brahier, 2009).

Personalized learning is a form of discovery learning that allows students to individualize a learning routine based on needs and ability levels. Whenever a teacher introduces a new unit in the classroom, students select a pathway based on the results of a pretest that is administered to them. If, according to the pretest, a student has mastered a section of a unit, the student will be able to skip that section of content, so that he or she is able to focus on portions of content not

yet mastered. If students has mastered the entire pretest, they will be able to take the information they have displayed proficiency with and receive tasks that require them to perform deeper levels of inquiry. Those students must apply the information they have shown mastery with to both verbal and written presentations that require them to utilize higher-level thinking skills independently (Brahier, 2009).

Personalized learning allows students to individualize their education with the help of many resources and approaches to the curriculum. In a study on discovery learning in the geometry classroom, students were given a problem and asked to find a solution without the help of a teacher. Results showed that students are able to learn and master the content by active participation (In'am & Hajar, 2017). This style of instruction where the teacher assigns a task for students to complete independently is manageable in small groups but can be extremely difficult in large classrooms with 20–30 students (Cavanaugh, 2014).

One resource that is commonly used as a personalized learning tool is technology. An individual piece of technology or software can empower not only teachers, but, more importantly, students to achieve their learning goals. Teachers can expand their ability to include personalized learning in their classrooms with by giving a choice of educational software that will hopefully allow learning to be fun for the students (Cavanaugh, 2014). Teachers can include possible technology sources that students might utilize on their learning pathways within their lesson plans. Technology allows students to become empowered when making choices regarding how they want to move forward with their individualized unit of study. In society today, technology plays a vital role in the learning process that will continue to grow as improvements are made. Not only will students need to grow as the improvements are made, but

educators will need to continue to familiarize themselves with technology as long it is utilized in the classroom.

The discovery learning theory guided the research because the study is focused on personalized learning for students in the middle school social studies personalized learning classroom. The study gives a voice to middle school social studies teachers who are creating personalized learning classrooms. This study allowed middle school social studies teachers to share their personal experiences of teaching students in a personalized learning classroom. Geometry teachers have been able to voice their experiences with discovery learning to help the students find the solution to geometry problems (In'am & Hajar, 2017). Studies have described different types of personalized learning environments that integrate technology and its uses in other content areas (Thiessen, 2016). Personalized learning often includes project-based learning, differentiated instruction, and blended learning.

Project-based learning, a form of personalized learning, allows students to take an active role in the learning process by setting goals, monitoring, reflecting, and sustaining their motivation from the beginning of the project until the end (English & Kitsantas, 2013). Project-based learning is a teaching model that allows students to engage and find solutions to real-life questions (English & Kitsantas, 2013). Project-based learning allows students to take an active role in exploring real-world challenges and problems to seek out a solution (Longo, 2016).

An additional form of personalized learning is differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction is the process of teachers reorganizing their lessons, or in some cases restructuring an activity on the spot, to reach an individual student's current ability level for the task at hand (Morgan, 2014). Differentiated instruction also addresses a student's learning styles and talents by allowing the teacher to pair additional supports or change the format of the learning activity

with them. By differentiating a student's learning, the students in turn can take responsibility for their learning since it has been paired to their instructional level and learning preferences. With those supports in place, one is able to move forward and successfully master content required of them at one's own pace. This type of learning can reach the diverse learner and modify the instruction so that all students can learn (Morgan, 2014).

Blended learning is a style of personalized learning that includes direct instruction and online learning. Blended learning enables students to have control of their learning while still being able to receive facilitation from the teacher if needed. The use of technology in the personalized learning classroom is not a new concept in education. According to Skinner (1958), teaching machines (as he called computers) could be used to support increased learner independence, allowing students to complete tasks independently and at their own pace. Teachers confirmed that blended learning plays a role in cultivating a student-centered environment, describing their role as facilitators of learning (Kellerer et al., 2014). This is the same approach that personalized learning provides in the personalized learning classroom (Kellerer et al., 2014). These are all examples of what the discovery learning theory entails when describing students who take an active role in the learning process. Students must be motivated and engaged when working in a personalized learning classroom. It is the responsibility of the teacher to be creative when planning lessons for the personalized learning classroom.

The discovery learning theory guides this study by ensuring that that middle school social studies teachers who are creating personalized learning classrooms have a voice in describing their experiences. The literature shows that personalized learning is effective and widely used across the country (Kellerer et al., 2014). Students were given a voice to describe

their experiences in the personalized learning classroom. A review of the literature reveals a gap in that middle school social studies teachers do not have a voice in sharing their experiences in creating a personalized learning classroom.

Related Literature

Personalized Learning in Schools

Personalized learning is a type of learning that is adapted to each individual student. This type of learning creates personalization, allowing a student's individual needs are met in a way that is different from the traditional style of teacher-directed instruction. In personalized learning, a student's task or learning activity may look completely different than the work that the person beside him is advancing through. The concept of personalized learning has existed for some tie in various forms, with teachers crafting their methods of traditional instruction to meet the individual needs of each student. For example, social studies teachers may provide direct instruction at the beginning of a unit and then give the students choices of activities to enhance their growth of knowledge of the content. Personalized learning has been touched on, even if unintentionally, within the traditional styles of instruction that a teacher implements in their classroom. Even though this style of adjusted teaching may or may not have been labeled as personalized learning, students have been delivered content to their own style of learning at some point or another (Cavanaugh, 2014). Since learning is a process that not only happens within classrooms, but also outdoors within the natural environment in our world, students are always learning, regardless of whether they are in a formal or informal learning environment (Prendes, Castañeda, Gutiérrez, & Sánchez, 2017). For a school district to claim that one or all schools within their district are using personalized learning, each school must be able to revamp how they implement instruction in every classroom. Although simply stated, achieving this

endeavor involves quite a lengthy process. Schools are not able to immediately transition into personalized learning schools, but they can rather take small steps to ensure that the succession is both gradual and effective. When this transition occurs, the overhauling of classroom structures and schedules must fit the mold of a personalized learning school (Prendes et al., 2017). Teachers with experience in the personalized learning classroom begin mentoring other colleagues as personalized learning coaches so that the transformation is both uniform and successful across the entire school.

Since the growth of the students is the priority within a personalized learning school, all teachers must be trained both systematically and with intention so that the best outcome lies ahead for the students. The result is an environment that is centered around the facilitation of the students and the direction they determine their learning will move based on their specific learning needs. When the student advances academically at a pace that is determined by their readiness and motivation, they are able to reach a deeper level of understanding that the traditionally paced class may hinder due to a pace that is either too slow or too quick (Prendes et al., 2017).

Since teachers must use different instructional approaches to facilitate personalized learning effectively, they serve in a role that appears as if they are a coach or facilitator of learning (Cavanaugh, 2014). Education preparation courses traditionally lean heavily upon teaching strategies in which content knowledge is delivered by the teacher to the student. This typically occurs as the teacher stands at the front of the room presenting information while the students are busy jotting down notes.

Personalized learning instructional strategies point the student in different directions to discover new information based on prior knowledge. In a school district located within a suburb

of Milwaukee, students were accustomed to the high standards that were set, and successfully achieved within a content area that had been both set by school leaders (Cavanaugh, 2014). District leaders within the system eventually decided to make a change because they believed that students were focused more on simply achieving standards and making good grades rather than setting their own learning goals and having the desire within them to surpass standards that were set forth by district leaders. The school system was a high-performing system that used a traditional style of learning with the teachers utilizing direct instruction. The leaders felt that it was time to transfer the ownership of learning from the teachers to the students, who were more than capable of adapting and responding to this challenge (Cavanaugh, 2014).

For personalized learning to be successful, the teacher must be able to judge what types of processes and learning paths might work well with the students based on the learning styles they have helped students discover. Teachers have the ability to identify their students' needs and which specific materials and project styles will help promote learning within their classroom (Sota, 2016). Schools that develop a personalized learning system can teach students how to learn and develop a critical skill that will last beyond the school years. Whenever a student is learning to obtain transferrable learning skills that will allow them to become a lifelong learner, knowing how to set individual learning goals and applying learning to situations beyond the classroom, then true learning has occurred (Sota, 2016). Helping a student personalize the context of whatever content standards one is working on and supporting the focus toward one's own interests and experiences makes the classroom become alive and interesting to the student. Teachers are using this method to create situations that are not within the science and social studies classrooms that lend themselves to a hands-on student led approach, but also the more

step-by-step, cut-and-dry subjects such as mathematics (Walkington, Petrosino, & Sherman, 2013).

In other parts of the world, countries that have implemented personalized learning classrooms are now building schools with open-style classroom plans. This means that their personalized learning schools now have the freedom to group multiple grade levels relating to one particular subject near one another, rather than clustering classrooms simply by grade level, as traditionally done in schools. With this style of setup being centered around particular subjects, students who are prepared to advance their learning paths might head to a grade level that is above their current one to accelerate their experience on a particular unit. This has been shown to be successful, since content will often build in complexity as grade levels advance (Shoulder, Inglis, & Rossini, 2014). A student requiring more time to master a concept might require prerequisite skills to be reviewed with them on a topic before moving into the next step on their learning pathway (Shoulder et al., 2014). The student may stay in their current classroom or visit the classroom of a grade level below their own. This type of flexibility and grouped learning allows students to either prepare themselves for the content they are required to learn or move ahead if they have already mastered required content to continue learning at their own pace. Thus, "pods" or classrooms clustered by subject rather than grade level in open-style schools are becoming more popular and useful in schools that are adopting personalized learning.

Clustering classrooms is just one example of how administrators and teachers can facilitate personalized learning environments that offer the freedom students desire (Shoulder et al., 2014). This allows the students to claim a space as their own and do with it whatever they need to so that they may work productively (Shoulder et al., 2014). These open classrooms accommodate the personalized learning concept to allow the students the ability to move freely

throughout the classroom and school if necessary. These classrooms set up with flexibility in mind allow both the student and teacher to be able to communicate freely, while at the same time supporting the computer learning environment, which supports personalized learning (Deed, Cox, et al., 2014). While school districts and personalized learning pilot schools are open to this new concept, it has become apparent that these districts and local schools are unsure of how to design and implement this program into their schools at times (Patrick et al., 2013).

Research has shown that well-designed personalized learning classrooms can transform the behavior of both teachers and students. This transformation can also encourage the students' academic growth in a way that might not have been seen in a traditional classroom (Basham et al., 2016). Students who enjoy being independent are well suited for this type of learning, and those students not accustomed to being independent can learn to become independent learners. Developing the habit of independence creates successful individuals not only within the students' current environment but prepares them for the future when initiative in the workplace is expected. Schools are beginning to offer personalized learning centers that are open both after school hours and in the summer. These centers offer the students a type of learning support that utilizes technology as well as opportunities that will enhance personalized learning (Basham et al., 2016). Students are not only supported academically with their personalized learning endeavors but are able to access an additional safe learning environment outside of the school day (Basham et al., 2016). These centers give students an option once the school day has ended that that may not have been available to them otherwise. Students can use these support centers to engage in virtual courses, complete their homework, or work on summer assignments through courseware and other learning platforms. Teachers can use the centers to personalize their professional development by setting goals for themselves and the learners in their classrooms.

Teachers will be able to create plans that will improve their instruction of students in a personalized learning environment (McCarthy & Schauer, 2017).

In research completed on personalized learning that occurred within the high school geometry classroom, students were given a problem and asked to find a solution without the help of their teacher (In'am & Hajar, 2017). Students had to utilize their resources, whether it involved their notes, memory, or other students as resources, and take what they had already learned to apply to the questions at hand. This research has shown that students are able to learn and master the content by active participation (In'am & Hajar, 2017). Active participation must be kept in mind whenever designing a learning environment, in addition to the characteristics of a learner. The different characteristics that need to be considered include student learning styles, student approaches to tasks, and student motivation and interests. When these characteristics are valued and learning environments are created with them in mind, effective learning is promoted (Özerem & Akkoyunlu, 2015). Personalized learning in schools utilizes several methods, or components of personalized learning, because all students are different and require different approaches. Utilizing a variety of approaches that will ensure that each student in the personalized learning classroom is given the opportunity to be engaged within the required curriculum.

Components of Personalized Learning

There are several types of personalized learning that are connected to the idea of having students take ownership of how they wish to learn. Differentiation, personalized learning, individualization, customization, tailoring, adapting, and accommodating are some of the terms used in the past and present. They describe models within personalized learning that address each student's strengths, needs, and interests (Johnsen, 2016). These concepts include blended

learning, project-based learning, differentiated instruction and the flipped classroom. Blended learning and the flipped classroom allow for online and face-to-face interaction with the teacher.

The flipped classroom is a new concept that has become popular recently, and it involves direct instruction that is done not in the classroom but in the privacy of the student's home (Cargile & Harkness, 2015). With blended learning, educational technologies are incorporated in the classroom to provide opportunities for student learning to be independent, personalized, and sustainable (O'Byrne & Pytash, 2015). Students participating in blended learning often view content online before meeting with the teacher in person to discuss the information learned. Students are expected to make sense of the information viewed online through videos and other delivery methods (Miles & Fogget, 2016). Both blended learning and flipped classrooms allow teachers to find effective ways to motivate and spark student interest in the content. These two types of learning allow the students to become engaged and make learning fun when the student takes an active role in the classroom setting.

Blended learning has become more prevalent in higher learning within university systems than ever before. Teachers are using blended learning in the classroom, although the research is limited to studies of blended learning within the college and university setting (Longo, 2016). With the use of blended learning becoming more widespread within secondary education, it makes sense for schools to implement this type of learning and prepare students for what they will eventually encounter at the post–high school level. According to Longo (2016), middle schools that now utilize blended learning as a tool for instruction have aligned with research-based strategies. Guided inquiry lessons that are paired with blended learning teach the students and foster critical thinking skills needed for life (Longo, 2016). The development of critical thinking skills that occurs within the use of blended learning consists of lessons that are problem-

based and encourage students to use real-life skills to motivate themselves as well as their peers (Longo, 2016). Blended learning is often recognized as an instructional approach that includes instructional technology and is delivered to students either online or face-to-face to address all student modalities (Kuo et al., 2014). The flipped classroom is a new concept that has become popular the last few years, and it involves direct instruction that is done not in the classroom but in the privacy of the home of a student (Cargile & Harkness, 2015).

Project-based learning is a student-centered environment where the students have the independence of learning by doing. Their assignments are written in a way that allows for the student to collaborate with other peers, creating a finished product that is finalized by both cooperation and application. The main goal of project-based learning is for the student to use critical thinking based on prior knowledge in the subject (Tilchin & Kittany, 2016). Project-based learning allows the students to research topics that are relevant in their lives and required to be mastered by them by the end of the school year. This means that a teacher might have many different topics within an overlying subject that contains many different perspectives and directions. For example, if the student must master a content standard in social studies regarding the many different figures that affected World War II, the teacher would allow students to pursue information on each of the important people in a way that suited them. The student might collect information through the use of books from the library available in the classroom. The student may also be able to use technology or computer tablets to access information online, such as previewed video clips or informational websites via QR codes or by searching through assigned links. Another option to collect the information a student needs might be to use a textbook or a set of guided reading books checked out from the library that could be read in a group with peers who wish to collect the information in the same format. Once information has been gathered,

students use a similar process to guide learning during the assessment phase. Students may wish to show what they know over a unit or assigned topic through a traditional, formatted test. Others may wish to use a rubric and write an essay or create a photo book with both written explanations and pictures (Tilchin & Kittany, 2016). Designing pamphlets, creating video presentations, or putting on a live play in front of the class are also options that students may select in order to display the content knowledge that they have learned. At one particular high school, students in an environmental science class selected topics that they could relate to and then showcased their knowledge on a public display. This allowed for the school to see how engaged these students personally were in the environmental science course. Teachers in this class facilitated and guided the students through their project by answering any questions that they had along the way. They did not give answers but rather pointed them in the direction of a source that might answer their questions or used higher-order questioning to help pull the information from the student's brain, which would then help the student figure out the answer to his or her own question (Tilchin & Kittany, 2016). This type of teaching, where the teacher acts as a guide on the side, helps the student as they show their engagement of critical issues in science by using scientific methods (Tilchin & Kittany, 2016). Students are motivated with a subject when there is a connection made between the content and what they have experienced (Garn & Jolly, 2014). That is why the beginning of a unit within a project-based learning classroom is so important. The teacher must engage the students on a topic by using a hook to interest them in the content that is being presented (Tilchin & Kittany, 2016). This will help build background knowledge so that students have a strong basis for the learning pathway that they will take over and independently navigate from that point.

Research within social studies classrooms that has been completed regarding project-based learning involved the creation of a mock community within the school that allowed students to act as they would if they were adult citizens within their own town (LeCompte & Blevins, 2015). Students were treated as actual citizens when they came to school by being given the choice as to what days of the week they wanted to hold their re-created town hall meetings. Students participated in these meetings with the facilitation of their teachers and discussed real situations going on in their communities, such as traffic problems, and the effects of that issue.

Real solutions were discussed, with consensuses reached for those issues that the children saw daily in their real lives. Students worked in groups and came up with different scenarios regarding how the traffic problems could be fixed. Some suggested that a stoplight be purchased and implemented, while others took the stance that a traffic director should be hired. Some suggested that families should take different routes during times of traffic (LeCompte & Blevins, 2015). All student-led groups could see that most of the solutions required financial support, thus opening up a new topic for them to understand and explore. Students also created their own elections and voted on their own leaders, just as adults in the community would. Before these project-based learning activities took place, students prepared for them by completing research, then completed reflections on issues inside their own communities (LeCompte & Blevins, 2015). This activity helped gear their knowledge and interest in the lifelike setup the students participated in.

Project-based learning ties in with personalized learning, since students use problems that they see and that are real to them. Then, solutions are based off of the prior knowledge held. Both project-based learning and personalized learning go beyond the traditional paper packet of

information that students are often given to this day and expected to understand and reiterate for an exam. The prior knowledge activated within the students does not mean that students have exact previous experience with the given topic or scenario, but rather they have an awareness of the topic based off the situations displayed to them by the teacher and discussed within their classroom. Previewing activities helps prepare students for whatever learning path they decide upon. By using prior knowledge activation from the teacher as well as consulting with peers and provided resources, students are able to come up with a solution. In social studies, students study different regions of the world in order to help them learn about different systems of government, economies, histories, and geographies; however, that concept is not limited to that content area alone. For example, students can see real-life situations in an environmental science class through project-based learning.

Project-based learning allows students in an environmental science course to see how the environment is today, based off the effects of what has been done in the past to our earth. It is a different approach for students to read about environmental issues and then be expected to fully understand the severity of the issues, without seeing the issues up close and personal. When students can see the problem and realize that they will have to come up with a solution, a bigger impact is made on the student, one that they will remember for the rest of their lives (Genc, 2015). It is important that prospective teachers who are planning to teach environmental science classes are trained in active tasks, so that they are fully aware of environmental issues and environmentally literate (Genc, 2015). This requirement allows students to pursue project-based learning in all or most units they are expected to master throughout the course of the year, instead of just one or two that have been implemented for them to experience.

Science teachers are becoming more and more creative in personalizing the vocabulary that students are required to learn in the science classroom by using symbols to help students remember words. Students who struggle to memorize the essential vocabulary for a unit need strategies to make the words meaningful and memorable. Students who struggle to remember vocabulary should write the definition of a word down and pair it with another word that helps the student remember the vocabulary word. This allows the student to have word association with the vocabulary word and its definition. In the classroom students are asked to draw and color a symbol that helps them understand the word. Lastly, the students are asked to write about something in their life that connects them to that word (Chesbro, 2016). In this activity, students are bringing personalization to learning in that they are drawing connections from prior knowledge or experience. While this may seem tedious, it is more frustrating for a student to later stare at a page of words that they know they have seen and studied yet struggle to remember. In some cases, the student confuses the definitions of the words since no personal connections were made. This type of support for vocabulary words is another way that a student's learning can be personalized, allowing them to be successful with the upcoming personalized or project-based topics and activities that require the application of vocabulary words.

Differentiated instruction has been linked to both personalized learning and project-based learning since it has been used by teachers in both styles of learning whenever a student does not understand the material (Jacobs, 2014). Differentiated instruction requires teaching students with an array of different achievement and ability levels who are in the same class (Jacobs, 2014). Teachers can change the way the information is presented to the student based on the interest of the child. Students will become more motivated and engaged whenever they find the

content interesting to them, even if the subject is one that they have found to be difficult for them in the past. Differentiated instruction is much like personalized learning in that its approach to the material is changed in order to engage the student. When defining differentiated instruction, it is important to know that teachers should be able to recognize and teach according to the different talents and learning styles of the student (Morgan, 2014). For example, differentiated instruction occurs when the teacher is going over a topic from a book and allows the students to get into groups based on their interests from the book (Parrott & Keith, 2015). The strategies of differentiated instruction are like the strategies of personalized learning. The teacher needs to emphasize the interests of the student, use the right starting point in a lesson, and most importantly, allow the students to work at their own pace (Morgan, 2014). Differentiated instruction is designed to help all students, but it requires hard work by intelligent and well-prepared teachers (Morgan, 2014).

Integration of Technology in Personalized Learning

While many different components of personalized learning must be considered, educators must continue to integrate technology into the personalized learning classroom by using various modes and strategies to engage the students. The classroom is a learning environment that is used to educate students and to allow them to grow as individuals. Learning environments can be enhanced based on the resources that the teacher has available to provide for students. Personalized learning is an approach that considers the different characteristics of each learner in addition to the types of technology available, while also considering the context in which the learning takes place (Muhammad, Mitova, & Woolridge, 2016). To meet the needs of today's knowledge economy, education needs to move beyond the industrial age approach of treating all learners as if they are the same. A learner-centered model of education must be adopted for the

information age teacher's work with today (Watson, Watson, & Reigeluth, 2015). To accomplish this, many lower-performing schools are using online learning as a tool to improve student achievement (Corry & Carlson-Bancroft, 2014). Teachers have found that in today's society, students are engaged in the new technology available to them, especially with online gaming and mobile devices being so popular. Technology in the classroom can be incorporated through one of two pathways.

First, the teacher may lead technology integration in the classroom and instruct the students in content using instructional technology. The technology is an aid to the teacher and serves as another tool to help the teacher present content to the students to reach them effectively. In the second pathway, the student is able to use technology provided to them in order to demonstrate what they know and are able to complete based on what they have learned from the content that was provided to them by the teacher (Hamilton, 2015). Both ways of using technology have traditionally been seen in the school setting and continue to be seen in the personalized learning classroom.

In the personalized learning environment students are fascinated with technology; students feel as if it is entertainment, but they are also engaged with the required content. Social studies teachers in a middle school provided their students with a game called of Empires II: The Age of Kings (Maguth et al., 2015). This game showcases events from the medieval period, and players build empires based on their available resources. In this game, the students must make decisions that are extremely critical, including locating resources that are scarce while learning how to interact with neighboring kingdoms. Teachers have experienced success by integrating social studies video games into the curriculum based on the curriculum standards for the social studies course (Maguth et al., 2015).

While technology used to be an enhancement to the instruction occurring in the classroom, it is almost a necessity today. Students today are actively engaged in their personal mobile devices. Data have shown that 75% of teens have a cell phone that is used to communicate and access information online (Maguth, 2013). Most schools still do not permit students to use these personal technology devices, such as cell phones or tablets, while on campus. Schools or school systems that do permit the use of personal technology for educational usage have adopted specific rules regarding instances where personal technology use is appropriate that students must sign and agree to (Maguth, 2013). A student not adhering to the rules for personal technology use can incur the suspension of privilege or a loss of privilege altogether. These consequences not only hold students accountable for their learning through use of the technology but also set rules so that students can use what they are interested in while still learning objectives set forth for them academically. In scenarios where personal or classroom technology is available and allowed to be used in social studies classrooms, the students are able to do Google searches to find information and maps related to the topic instead of accessing maps from the research section of the library that either cannot be checked out or only checked out for a short period of time (Maguth, 2013). Rather than viewing personal technology devices as a distraction or a negative presence in the classroom, teachers can now embrace these devices and allow students to utilize use them so that students can dig deeper into the content and use them as appropriate research tools as well as access games and software that either remediate or enrich the material.

Many schools that encourage students to bring their devices to school call this incentive that they have adopted BYOD, or bring your own device (Wang, 2015). It is essential that schools taking on this initiative review Internet safety and hold students accountable for what

they should or should not be doing with their technology, just as traditional rules in the classroom are reviewed and adhered to. College professors are now implementing mobile devices in their modern language classrooms (Tuttle, 2013). This allows the students' learning to become more active and personalized. The educators' use of mobile learning promotes language communication instead of discrete learning (Tuttle, 2013). With the latest technology, mobile devices now include applications (apps) that support learning and keep learning fun for the student. Students are able to access a game or a website n a smaller technology device that, with the push of a button, takes the student directly to the source. Students can avoid trying to type a long Internet address into a search box, which would be easy on a desktop or laptop computer but more difficult on a smaller handheld device. Mobile apps not only make accessing a website or game easier for the student but also promote learning. At school and at home, students can use these apps, which provide necessary games and other educational resources not only to support the student, but also the teacher (Leinonen, Keune, Veermans, & Toikkanen, 2016).

Digital learning games are becoming more widespread. They often teach facts by using multiple-choice questions. These games can also teach skills that students need to develop or polish, such as the use of judgment in time-sensitive situations, in addition to supporting other student behaviors that include: reasoning, processing, utilizing learned procedures, creativity, language, systems, observation, and communication by using various approaches (Wang, 2015). One game that has gained popularity that requires students to utilize the aforementioned skills is called KAHOOT! (www.kahoot.com). This game is educational for students and allows the teacher to personalize the instruction according to the students' needs. The teacher is able to enter into the game, content-related questions that they write themselves as well as the specific

answer choices for each question. Students enter the game on their personal device with a code that has been shared with them by the teacher. They create their own screenname and compete against their classmates by submitting responses to the questions the teacher presents to the class on the board. Students and teachers can see in an anonymous fashion how many students got the question right or wrong, and the game tallies the answers that were submitted by the personal handheld devices in the room anonymously. This game allows the student to stay engaged and motivated while learning at the same time (Wang, 2015). It allows the teacher to see which concepts appear to be mastered and provides the child the immediate feedback they need to see. They know that if they got the question correct, they should focus on other topics of study, and if they miss the question, they need to continue working and learning on that specific concept and seek more support. This learning game is fun for the students and allows them to understand what they need to address in regard to the content that is being covered.

Teachers are using computers in the classroom to personalize student learning under what is now called Web 2.0. It consists of various search engines that people are able to use to find information on topics, with the most popular search engine being Google. In the 21st century, more people are using the web more than ever before for personal usage, employment, educational purposes, and entertainment, as well as for social interaction. With Web 2.0 now available, users can broaden their horizons through the resources they are able to find. Web 2.0 can assist with simple questions such as finding out the weather forecast and with locating more complicated research information for a course of study. This new search for information is a style or concept that opens communication between everyone in the world that has access to technology (Jimoyiannis et al, 2013). Students are already prepared for this new technology due to the schema that they already have since they are a part of the 21st century learning

environment. Web 2.0 is available for teachers not only for their personal usage but also to help supplement instruction in the classroom. The use of Web 2.0 in the classroom is expected to have a big impact on instruction and learning. This tool will provide multiple opportunities for students to become engaged as well as communicate with their teachers and peers. Students will continue to be active and self-direct their learning. The Web 2.0 tool also promotes learning in that it offers educational content along with multiple resources that promote collaborative learning (Jimoyiannis et al., 2013). This technology allows the students to extend the classroom past the walls of a school building. Students will be able to access Web 2.0 physically and virtually from school, home, and their community. The teachers in Web 2.0 environments act as learning designers so that they are able to provide learning support to their students by facilitating, scaffolding, and mentoring. Teachers will use blended learning and personalized learning principles to open the door to a wider community that will promote lifelong learning (Jimoyiannis et al., 2013).

Education in the 21st century is not about students working independently but using tools to collaborate with other students and teachers to expand their knowledge. This shows how a shared learning experience that is created and will prepare learners for the future. Teachers are also able to develop themselves professionally through this initiative by taking advantage of the technology that is available for use in their classroom. In a shared learning experience, students and teachers are not simply looking for answers to questions but are looking for solutions to a problem that is both relevant and real to them (Dill, 2015).

Personalized learning is a new strategy in schools that applies different components of learning, including the integration of technology in both traditional and new ways. While the perspectives of students should continue to be taken into account, it is equally important to learn

about and display the different perspectives of teachers in the personalized learning classroom. These perspectives not only allow one to learn from their experiences, but also enable other teachers, administrators, and parents who are a part of personalized learning to make both valued and justifiable decisions. By including the teacher perspective, decisions made regarding what will work not just for the students but for the teachers supporting the implementation and changes in the classrooms will be revealed. For those school systems that have already implemented personalized learning, knowing what needs improvement and what needs to remain from the teachers' perspective will provide new insights and support any changes that need to be made for the success for students.

Perspectives of Personalized Learning

In the personalized learning classroom, there is a sole person responsible for putting together the pieces necessary for student success, to create a different and unique learning environment where students are vested in their own education. That person is the teacher; both creativity and intelligence are needed to make the classroom an environment one that works for all that support the initiative. There are many students with whom a teacher must form relationships in their classrooms each year, all bringing different goals that create different learning pathways. Teachers must be creative to be able to develop learning pathways that will encourage learning for all levels of students in their classroom. The learning environment and learning process should be designed not to enable students to learn in the same manner or at the same level, but rather created with thought given to students' existing learning styles (Özerem & Akkoyunlu, 2015). The teacher in the classroom needs to be a person that is mindful of the needs of their students. Research has shown how teachers are able to adapt their classrooms into personalized learning spaces when traditional classrooms are not conducive to a project-based

approach. This allows students to work in groups, alone, and on different tasks all at the same time (Deed, Lesko, et al., 2014). In one specific research scenario, it was discovered that teachers and students had differing values, expectations, and interests related to student choice regarding the personalized learning classroom (Netcoh, 2017). Those different opinions contributed to a struggle of power and struggle toward the initiative of personalized learning and affected its success (Netcoh, 2017).

Teachers participating in personalized learning initiatives should be sure to coordinate with not only students to collect their preferences, but also administration since they oversee the school space and physical structures within the school that might be needed to effectively implement personalized learning. The use of empty classrooms, tables, chairs, and other resources that support student work must be reviewed by those responsible for it. Receiving administrators' input and permission to adjust or add to the existing classroom setup will support the needed spaces that allow for game-based and self-directed learning so the students at the different stations do not end up interrupting one another (Deed, Cox, et al., 2014). Teachers involved in personalized learning want to receive advice and support regarding how to create a more open space for their students, whereas in the conventional-style classroom, they stand at the front of the classroom and instruct with desks aligned in rows or in small groups. The open space classrooms are more personalized-learning friendly, and having stations where students can do their assignments makes the personalized learning initiative much easier to all trying to make it work successfully. Students are able to choose the area to work in depending on if they are working alone or in groups (Deed, Cox, et al., 2014).

Research collected from a science-based personalized learning classroom revealed that teachers felt it was best not to dominate the learning process through their instruction. These

teachers believed that it was best to give students control when it came to the choices of science topics and times of the year they would be addressed, based on the units they were required to study by their assigned curriculum standards. The students were also encouraged to choose topics based on their own interests and items in their life (Prain, Waldrip, Sbaglia, & Lovejoy, 2017). This research shows that students play an important role in personalized learning. Students are able to make choices when given several different assignments to choose from. Allowing students to take an active role regarding what they are working on and when helps develop their skills as a learner. It is important for those leading the charge in personalized learning classrooms to know what best fits their students in the classroom environment. This allows their students to feel that their opinions are valued and that their learning is truly being personalized in the way they wished for it to be.

Most of the research on the subject shows the perspectives of teachers and students regarding blended learning, which is a component of personalized learning (Kuo et al., 2014). Blended learning occurs when the student receives face-to-face interaction with the teacher to help facilitate what the student is working on independently in the online setting. In an inquiry with university students, a researcher received positive feedback from the students using the blended learning approach. The students enjoyed the flexibility of choosing between the learning environments and being able to receive support when necessary or move straight ahead independently with no one stopping them. This approach to learning allowed the needs of the individual student to be met based on his or her learning styles (Waha & Davis, 2014). Students enjoyed learning since learning to slowly or too rapidly do not hinder them from working through a topic they required more support with. In order for a student to be successful within a blended learning environment, there must be both interaction and satisfaction (Kuo et al., 2014).

Interaction between the student and the teacher in a blended learning environment is helpful. The satisfaction of accomplishment is valuable for the success of the student. The teacher is able to see progress firsthand from the student, and the interaction allows the instructor to see the valuable information regarding each student's individual learning style they possess (Kuo et al., 2014).

Students' perception of learning will impact their individual motivation; they will become engaged in the learning process on their own or not based on the way they see an experience (Redding, 2013). Studies have shown that university students who have been a part of a personalized learning environment are much more positive about flexible learning environments than they are when presented with traditional classrooms. Students in personalized learning classrooms have felt more confident and motivated in learning than those placed in traditional classrooms (Şahin & Kisla, 2016). Teachers observed those students who were actively engaged and those who were not. The behavioral engagement of students at schools with blended learning classrooms is revealed when students listen carefully, while at the same time showing effort and being persistent with the given academic activities. The students were choosing to participate in class discussions.

These observations show school leaders and teachers that if students have an interest in the subject matter, they will be motivated to learn (Şahin & Kisla, 2016). Students will seek out help from teachers and peers that they are working with. It is the responsibility of teachers to make decisions regarding how to best engage students. Teachers will have strategies that will keep the students engaged in the learning process. This will include making big changes regarding how they deliver, or more importantly, facilitate instruction (Beck et al., 2015).

Some of the greatest challenges regarding the implementation of personalized learning in schools is keeping up the level of commitment, motivation, and rigor regarding the curriculum (Personalized Learning Environments, 2014). If personalized learning is implemented correctly, students will achieve academic success and be both college and career ready. Students will be actively engaged in the planning of their learning and will receive the support needed at both home and school if all stakeholders have a common understanding (Personalized Learning Environments, 2014). For personalized learning to be successful in schools, there are several strategies that need to be put into place (Effects of Personalized Learning, 2016). Students need to be given a learning pathway that will allow them to make choices about the content they are responsible for learning and its structure. The teacher will need to create instructional approaches to meet the needs of the student. The student and the teacher will need to be flexible when it comes to available learning spaces and the resources that are readily available. The emphasis of college readiness will need to be in place for the students so that they may develop necessary skills to ready themselves for college or a career of their choice (Effects of Personalized Learning, 2016).

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to review the literature and find the gaps that support the study of middle school social studies teachers' experiences creating personalized learning classrooms. The theoretical framework that is guided this study is from the discovery learning theory. This theory coincides with personalized learning in that students are using prior knowledge to solve practice problems by discovering new information. The literature has shown that personalized learning is a concept that has been a part of learning for quite some time but only in small quantities. Schools and districts are now implementing this system. The literature

does show that personalized learning is popular in European and Asian countries where students have found success with this system of learning (Byrne et al., 2013; Chen, Huang, Shih, & Chang, 2016). The only time that a teacher's voice is accounted for in the literature is when the perspectives of a teacher concern blended learning (Kellerer et al., 2014; Kuo et al., 2014). The literature shows technology's massive contribution to personalized learning, especially with the presence of mobile devices in the hands of students daily (Hamilton, 2015; Maguth, 2013).

Student perspectives of the personalized learning environment is shown in the literature, which gives the student a voice in blended learning (Gyamfi & Gyaase, 2015). Blended learning is defined as a mixture between traditional instruction in a classroom and online learning (Chen et al., 2016). Other literature was introduced to define personalized learning (Basham et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2016; Deed, Cox, et al., 2014; Devlin & McKay, 2016). The literature described the personalized learning environment and the different types of learning that are facilitated by technology (Del Barrio-Garcia, Arquero, & Romero-Frias, 2015; Devlin & McKay, 2016).

The empirical gap in the literature shows there is no research that gives a voice to middle school social studies teachers to allow them to describe their experiences in the personalized learning classroom. The literature has shown that geometry teachers have been able to voice their experiences with implementing the discovery learning theory by engaging the students to find solutions to geometric problems by using a scientific method (In'am & Hajar, 2017). Science teachers are having students draw symbols and write how a science vocabulary word is connected to them and their lives (Chesbro, 2016). Case study research has been completed on the experiences of middle school teachers with personalized learning (Taylor, 2016). However,

there is no research that gives a voice to middle school social studies teachers in creating the personalized learning classroom for their students.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Personalized learning is a style of learning that allows students to have a choice in how they learn and learn at their own pace. Personalized learning gives the student an opportunity to take ownership of their learning (Cavanaugh, 2014). Teachers in these classrooms are considered facilitators in that they provide resources for the students and mediate when students are unable to complete a task. Teachers can use a variety of resources that include technology, small-group instruction and, when needed, large-group instruction (Basham et al., 2016).

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of middle school social studies teachers creating personalized learning classrooms. Recent research on the topic of teachers and the personalized learning classroom has only focused on the learning spaces in the personalized classroom and the perspectives of the students in the personalized learning classroom (Deed, Cox, et al., 2014; Gyamfi & Gyaase, 2015). This chapter provides an overview of the design, research questions, setting, participants, procedures, role of the researcher, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations as they pertain to this study.

Design

In this study, this researcher described the experiences of middle school social studies teachers creating personalized learning classrooms through the phenomenological transcendental approach to qualitative research. Qualitative research, with its origins in the work of early17th century ethnographers, has a long history in social sciences, health sciences, and humanities. This type of research began with the researchers observing the customs, practices, and behaviors of "primitive" societies (Given, 2008). According to Lodico (2010), Qualitative research is defined as collecting data by observing, interviews, and analyzing documents. The researcher

summarizes his findings through narrative and verbal means (Lodico et al., 2010).

Qualitative research is appropriate for this study because in qualitative research the researcher is required to collect data in a natural setting by examining documents and conducting interviews based on a problem or issue that needed to be explored (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the phenomenon of the experiences of middle school social studies teachers in creating the personalized learning classroom was explored. The approach that is appropriate for this qualitative research is phenomenology. Edmund Husserl was the first to introduce phenomenology, as he believed that knowledge comes from a person's experiences (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Husserl's phenomenology is a transcendental approach in that it is a discovery of one's experience. Additionally, it provides a methodology to gain knowledge from that experience (Moustakas, 1994).

In a phenomenological research, there are several procedures that must be followed to ensure a proper investigation of the research question. Phenomenological researchers generally agree that the central concern is to return to embodied, experiential meanings to obtain fresh, complex, rich description of phenomena as concretely lived (Finlay, 2013). The phenomena of phenomenology are to be understood in a deliberately broad sense as including all forms of appearing, showing, manifesting, making evident or "evidencing," bearing witness, truth-claiming, checking, and verifying, including all forms of seeming, dissembling, occluding, obscuring, denying, and falsifying (Vagle, 2014). These procedures include the following: identifying a topic that has personal and social significance, selecting appropriate participants, interviewing each participant, and analyzing the interview data (Gall et al., 2007). In this study, the researcher learned from the experiences of middle school social studies teachers in the personalized learning classroom. In this approach to phenomenology, the researcher used a

method of reflection that provided a way to describe the experiences of participants (Moustakas, 1994). The transcendental approach is appropriate for this topic in that the researcher received data from the participants of this research through interviews.

According to Moustakas (1994), the purpose of transcendental phenomenology research is not for the researcher to be able to interpret experiences but to focus on the actual experiences of the participants. As a middle school social studies teacher currently in a personalized learning classroom, the researcher did not use the experiences from his own classroom but the experiences of the participants in the study. Moustakas (1994) suggests that researchers bracket their personal experiences in what is called *epoche*. Epoche is setting aside prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas (Swezey, 2014). This allows the researcher to bracket any bias toward the topic, so it does not influence the participants and their experiences.

Research Questions

CQ. How do middle school social studies teachers describe their experiences while creating personalized learning classrooms?

SQ1. How do middle school social studies teachers motivate students in the personalized learning classroom?

SQ2. How do middle social studies teachers relate to the students in a personalized learning classroom?

SQ3. How do middle school social studies teachers identify ways to adjust learning in the personalized learning classroom?

SQ4. How do middle school social studies teachers describe the student's ability to achieve autonomy in the personalized learning classroom?

Setting

The setting for this study included three middle schools located in a southern suburb of a city in Georgia. According to Creswell (2013), the use of multiple middle schools allows the researcher to receive a solid representation of the participants involved in the study. Creswell (2013) recommends selecting several sites and individuals as this allows for extensive research. There were three schools in this area that utilize personalized learning classrooms in all academic classes. Due to the focus of this study, participants were middle school social studies teachers for Grades 6–8.

The schools are known as Middle School A, Middle School B, and Middle School C. The middle schools are in District A, which is in a southern suburb approximately 50 miles from a major city in Georgia. In these schools, the class size ranges from 15–18 students. Students are engaged in personalized learning settings in all their academic classes. The middle schools in this study have a student population of approximately 1,000 students per school. In every middle school in this study is a personalized learning coach who is solely dedicated to the implementation of successful personalized learning in each middle school. The personalized learning coaches have previous experience in the classroom utilizing personalized learning and were able to share their experiences and provide resources that were helpful to the participants. Following is a table of students' race/ethnicity in the district and at each of the middle schools from where the participants were sampled from for this study (The Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017).

Table 3.1

Percentages of Students by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	District A	Middle School A	Middle School B	Middle School C
Black	52	53	24	60
White	32	33	65	25
Hispanic	8	10	7	11
Multi-Racial	4	2	3	4
Asian/Pacific Islander	3	1	0.7	0.4
American Indian/Alaskan	0.1	0.3	0.1	0

Participants

The participants for this study were chosen by purposive sampling. This type of sampling allows the researcher to reach out to participants who have experience in the phenomenon. The researcher uses purposeful sampling to gather key information from individuals who have specific knowledge about the topic that is studied (Lodico et al., 2010). The participants were middle school social studies teachers that currently teach in a middle school social studies personalized learning classroom. The sample consisted of 11 females and 4 males from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds with ages ranging from 22 to 65 years. Creswell (2013) states that purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select individuals and sites to be able to understand the research problem and the central phenomenon in the study. Maximum variation sampling was also used for this study. This type of sampling provides a variety of individuals and sites based on their specific characteristics (Creswell, 2013). Marshall and Roman (2010) explain that participants should come from the place in which they are experiencing the phenomenon. For this research, the participants came from three different middle schools that provide a social studies personalized learning classroom to their students. Criterion sampling was used to select middle school social studies teachers in a personalized classroom in the suburb of a major city in Georgia (Creswell, 2013). The researcher sent a letter

via email inviting middle school social studies teachers who teach in a personalized learning classroom to participate in the study. Snowball sampling was used to identify interest from individuals who know other individuals that will provide cases that are information rich (Creswell, 2013). The researcher kept the participants to a minimum of 15 teachers or until data saturation was attained (Creswell, 2013).

Table 3.2

Participant Demographics

Name	Age	Teaching Experience (years)	PL* Experience (years)
Amy	45	2	2
Beth	35	15	4
Cathy	45	15	4
Janice	35	10	5
Jack	43	20	4
Kim	34	12	5
Leila	36	14	2
Mark	40	15	2
Nancy	32	8	5
Penny	45	12	2
Sam	50	23	5
Stacey	47	25	2
Todd	23	1	1
Wendy	32	1	1

*Personalized Learning

Procedures

This study started after receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix A for IRB approval). Once approval was granted, the researcher followed the sampling procedures that were introduced in the previous section. After the researcher received approval from the IRB, the next step was to seek approval from the school district where the study took place. After approval from the school district, the researcher reached out to the principals of middle school social studies teachers who teach in a personalized learning classroom in middle schools that are in the district by sending them a formal letter via email.

The email was used to request principals to seek out participants for the study. After coordinating with the principal, the researcher sent out a formal letter via email inviting the teachers who are currently teaching middle school social studies in the personalized learning classroom. The researcher had a response rate of 50% from the teachers contacted to participate in the study. Once the participants were identified based on the criteria set for the sample, the researcher began to set up interviews with the participants. After the interviews were arranged, the researcher gave the participants a consent form that protects their identity in accordance with Creswell (2013)'s recommendations (see Appendix E for participant consent/assent form). The researcher began research with interviews with open-ended questions and followed up with focus groups and then document analysis.

The Researcher's Role

The researcher has taught in Georgia for 11 years and is certified in history, geography, law and justice, special education, and health and physical education. Since the researcher is a personalized learning teacher, bias was accounted for through the process of including information given by the participants. The researcher was not included as one of the participants. As a middle school social studies teacher attempting to create a personalized learning classroom, there was substantial information supporting this phenomenon. New strategies that will work with the students were sought by the investigator. There are strategies that apply to all academic content areas, but there is none that focuses on just middle school social studies in the personalized learning classroom (In'am & Hajar, 2017). In'am and Hajar (2017) express their experience of reaching out to their geometry students and share the progress of how their students have improved through discovery learning in the classroom. Chesbro (2016) states that when doing a study on learning vocabulary in the middle school classroom

setting, the researcher was able to go back to his experience as a student struggling to learn new vocabulary words. His relationship with the participants in his study was enhanced because he could relate to their difficulty in learning new vocabulary. In this research, the researcher can relate to the participants because they share the same experiences in creating a personalized learning environment in the middle school social studies classroom.

The researcher's role in this transcendental phenomenology was to interview the participants and analyze documents that came from the middle school social studies personalized learning classroom. In the phenomenological study, the researcher was able to bracket out his personal experiences and collect multiple data from those who have experienced the phenomenon without making personal judgements (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). Bracketing of information in a study allows the voices of the participants to emerge authentically. This allows the researcher to set aside his or her own experiences to be able to learn from others and their experiences with the phenomenon. In research the word used for bracketing is *epoche*, which comes from the Greek word *epock*, defined as a check or pause (Bednall, 2006). In modern English, epoche is defined as a time marked by a distinctive event that a person or persons have experienced (Bednall, 2016). The researcher made a conscious effort to focus intently upon the information that was gathered from willing participants in the study. This means the researcher tried to determine if information strictly from interviews and focus groups was included, leaving out past experiences that the researcher unintentionally could include subconsciously. According to Bednall (2006), there are six stages of bracketing: flagging items of relevance to the study or leaving special indicators on items, establishing topics of significance based on the flagged items, establishing common themes that are linked to one another, examining the flagged items for meaning, bracketing the information to check for authenticity, and fashioning the unity of the

study. Bracketing was appropriate for this study because the researcher has prior experiences that relate to personalized learning, and it is essential that an unbiased study is conducted.

Data Collection

This study used a transcendental phenomenological approach to research. This research utilized multiple data collection techniques that included interviews, focus groups and document analysis. According to Creswell (2013), it is important when thinking of data collection to focus on the actual types of data and the procedures for gathering them. Data triangulation is used in qualitative research to collect data from different participants to gain their perspectives and to check for validity of the data (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). Data triangulation in the study was achieved by interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. Data collections required gaining permissions to collect data for the research, a good qualitative sampling strategy, and ways to collect data whether digital or handwritten. The researcher found ways to store the data and anticipate any ethical issues that arise during the study (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell (2013), data collections are interrelated activities that are used to gather information for the emerging research questions. The interviews were conducted first so that the researcher could get the bulk of the information for the research and have time to analyze the transcripts after all the interviews were complete. The focus groups were conducted after the interviews so that the participants were able provide insights into how people think and provide a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied (Nagle & Williams, 2013). The analysis of documents, which came from the teachers showing the lesson plans that they use in their classroom, completed the data collection.

Interviews

Upon completion of the purposeful sampling for the participants for this study and after the consent forms were signed, the interview scheduling began with the first participant that turned in the consent form. According to Creswell (2013), there are multiple steps that the researcher must follow to ensure proper collection of data when conducting interviews. These steps include deciding on research questions, identifying interviewees, determining the type of interview, adhering to adequate recording procedures, establishing interview protocol, refining interview questions, determining a place for the interview, obtaining consent, and using good interview procedures. Before using the questions with the participants, the researcher refined them by using pilot questions from the list below on teachers from the researcher's current school who did not participate in the study. This ensured that the interview questions would yield unbiased data (Gall et al., 2007).

The questions that were used for the study are as follows:

1. Please introduce yourself and your connection with personalized learning.
2. How long have you been utilizing personalized learning in education?
3. How long have you been teaching in a social studies personalized learning class at this middle school?
4. Please tell me your experience in creating a personalized learning classroom since you have been at this school.
5. Explain what a normal day is for you in a social studies personalized learning classroom.
6. Explain how you motivate students in the social studies personalized learning classroom.
7. How are you able to relate to the students in the social studies personalized learning classroom?

8. What ways do you adjust learning in your social studies personalized learning classroom?
9. How do the student's response to the adjustments made in the social studies personalized learning classroom?
10. How do students achieve autonomy in the social studies personalized learning classroom?
11. Explain the benefits of personalized learning in your social studies classroom.
12. Explain the challenges you face with personalized learning in your social studies classroom.

Questions one through four were designed to get to know the participants and to understand their involvement in creating a middle school social studies personalized learning classroom. Questions five and six asked the participants to reflect on personalized learning and their day-to-day duties in the classroom. These questions allowed the participants to explain a normal day and how they motivate students in a social studies personalized learning classroom (Lodico et al., 2010). The seventh and eighth questions allowed the participants to describe how they related to the students and how they adjusted learning in the social studies personalized learning classroom. The ninth question asked the participants to discuss the response of the students when their learning is adjusted in the social studies personalized learning classroom (Lodico et al., 2010). The tenth question allowed the participants to explain how students achieve autonomy in the social studies personalized learning classroom. The teachers elaborated on whether the students were able to work independently while having the freedom to make their own choices in learning (Bruner, 1961). Questions eleven and twelve allowed the participants to explain the benefits and challenges of the personalized learning approach in the social studies classroom.

Focus Groups

In the focus group, the purpose of the planned discussion was to obtain perceptions of the topic being studied in a relaxed, comfortable, and nonthreatening environment (Gall et al., 2007). The participants in the focus groups for this study were selected by purposive sampling. The reason purposeful sampling was used was that the goal was to select participants who were likely to be able to provide information that was valuable to the purpose of this study (Gall et al., 2007). The participants who were selected for the focus group were individuals who were knowledgeable and had experience in a middle school social studies personalized learning classroom. The focus group allowed the participants to discuss their experiences with other middle school teachers who had experience in creating a social studies classroom in a personalized learning setting. The groups were able to share their experiences online using various methods which were selected based on accessibility (Creswell, 2013). The questions used for the focus groups were as follows:

1. What initially attracted you into the field of education and teaching?
2. How many years have you taught and at what grade level?
3. What are your basic thoughts and beliefs about how children learn?
4. What is your definition of personalized learning in the classroom?
5. What strategies do you use to engage students in this learning environment?
6. How often do you utilize direct instruction instead of personalized learning?
7. What has your school done to develop teachers in a personalized learning classroom?
8. What has the district done to develop teachers in a personalized learning classroom?
9. In your school, do teachers collaborate with one another regarding development of personalized learning in the classroom?

10. What training do you still desire or need?
11. What other information concerning the personalized learning classroom would you like to add?

The first three questions allowed the participants in the focus group to talk about their background in education and their beliefs regarding how children learn. This allowed for the focus group to become comfortable in opening the discussion (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Questions four and five focused the group's definition of personalized learning and the strategies that they used in the classroom. Question six inquired about the teachers going back to utilize direct instruction in cases that they needed to introduce new material for their content (Barbour, 2007). Questions seven through ten focused on professional development by the district or school or if the teachers collaborated with others who taught the same content or with those who teach different content but have helpful strategies that can be utilized in their classroom. Question 11 allowed the focus group to add any other information in regard to creating the personalized learning classroom in middle school social studies (Gall et al., 2007).

Document Analysis

Document analysis was used with the lesson plans that were provided to the researcher by the participants that were interviewed for this study. The lesson plans came with a narrative that was written by the participant explaining how they were implemented in the personalized learning classroom (Creswell, 2013). These documents were representatives of the phenomenon (Gall et al., 2007). The documents were compared with the transcripts of each participant to gain an inside look at their personalized learning classroom. These documents included the standards for each lesson and strategies that were utilized for students to learn the material. These documents showed what students were working on while in the middle school social studies

personalized learning classroom. In qualitative research, the researcher often studies the written communications found in natural situations (Gall et al., 2007).

Data Analysis

The guidelines that were used for this transcendental phenomenological study are in accordance with the guidelines set forth by Moustakas (1994). To code the data, the researcher set the transcribed interview data in front of himself and began the phenomenological analysis methods. To prevent bias in this study, the researcher used what Moustakas (1994) calls the epoche process or bracketing his experiences as a personalized learning middle school social studies teacher. The word *epoche* stems from the Greek word meaning to stay away or abstain (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing prevented the researcher from using any type of persuasion or influence to direct the study in the way he wanted it to go. The researcher analyzed the data reported by the participants through the interviews and focus groups. This allowed the researcher to bracket the experiences of the participants from the researcher (Gall et al., 2007). The discussion stemming from the questions only followed the direction that the participants were willing to lead the discussion. According to Moustakas (1994), the phenomenological epoche will not eliminate everything because it does not deny reality. As one who has experience creating personalized learning classrooms, the researcher did not bring any experiences to the study. The researcher was able to block out his experiences, be open to the experiences of the participants and conduct this phenomenological study with objectivity and lack of bias.

The interviews in the study was recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure the accuracy of the interview. The transcription was completed by the researcher. Horizonalization was pertinent to this study in that it opened new horizons and themes in the study that had not been

seen before. Horizonalization is a process that lays out all the data for the researcher to examine. The researcher treated all the data as equal parts of the study until the data were organized into clusters or themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The Van Kaam Method of Analysis was appropriate for the phenomenological data in this research. This method allowed the researcher to eliminate any experiences that did not pertain to the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994). The first step of the Van Kaam Method of Analysis is to group every expression that is relevant to the experience. Following the grouping, begins the process of reducing and eliminating expressions that are deemed unnecessary or insufficient to the study. This allowed for determining the invariant constituents. If expressions had no relevance, they were eliminated. Other expressions that were eliminated were ones that overlapped, were repetitive, and were vague (Moustakas, 1994). Once the invariant constituents were determined, the constituents were labeled thematically based on the experiences into clusters. The core themes of the experiences were clustered and labeled and made ready for final identification in the next step (Van Manen, 2016). In this step, each invariant constituent was validated by comparing its theme to the participant in the research. The themes were checked by the transcription to see if the expression was compatible or explicitly expressed (Van Manen, 2016). Testing themes against the transcript allows the researcher to determine whether the expressions are compatible with what the participants shared and then eliminate expressions that were not compatible or relevant to the experiences of the participant (Sullivan & Bhattacharya, 2017). The fifth step was to take all the relevant and validated invariant constituents, including the themes, and create a textural description of the participants and their experiences. Included with the textural description was a copy of the transcripts that showed verbatim examples of each participant's interview (Moustakas, 1994). In the sixth step, the researcher looked at the experiences of each

participant and created an individual structural description that included the imaginative variation. Creating a description based on the information from the transcriptions allows the creation of the structure from the phenomenon that involves codes and categories (Sullivan & Bhattacharya, 2017). The final step of the analysis was a textural-structural description of each participant in the research that included each one's meanings and essence of the experiences. Included in the experience was the invariant constituents and themes of the study (Van Manen, 2016).

Trustworthiness

In a transcendental phenomenological study, trustworthiness is important because it creates confidence for the researcher and the participants. Trustworthiness ensured that the study will be done correctly with all fairness to those involved (Creswell, 2013). This study ensured trustworthiness by establishing credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. To achieve trustworthiness, the researcher ensured that the following were achieved: triangulation, member checks, peer and expert review, and external audit (Creswell, 2013). In triangulation, the researcher sought out different types of sources, methods, investigators, and theories to ensure that all evidence was corroborated with the other evidence (Creswell, 2013). In member checking, the researcher showed the participants the results of the study to ensure the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Creswell, 2013). The researcher used peer review to keep the study and research honest in that this person played "devil's advocate" by asking questions regarding the methods, meanings, and interpretations (Creswell, 2013). Through an external audit of these methods, the researcher was able to perform accurate and trustworthy research for the study. This trustworthiness ensured validation of the research to the participants and the readers (Creswell, 2013).

Credibility

For this study, data triangulation, member checking, and peer and expert review (Creswell, 2013) were used. This allowed information to be cross-referenced to validate the information received from resources. The data received from interviews, focus groups, and documents were analyzed and check with one another to ensure accuracy. This gave the researcher credibility in that all information from the study had been checked for accuracy and no data had been made up for the study. Member checking gave the researcher credibility in that it showed honesty and an unbiased approach to the study (Creswell, 2013). This process validated the accuracy and credibility of the research (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). The researcher gave the participants the opportunity to check the transcripts of their interviews to make sure the data were accurate. The participants informed the researcher of any errors that needed to be addressed. The researcher was able to correct factual errors and, if necessary, collect more data to ensure that there were not any discrepancies in the research (Gall, et al., 2007).

Dependability and Confirmability

According to Creswell (2013), the data obtained should provide rich, thick descriptions that will dependability and confirmability. Member checking was allowed so the participants could review transcripts from interviews to ensure the accuracy of the data. Confirmability was determined by peer and expert review of the research to check for any careless mistakes that may have occurred during the study. During this study, an audit trail was conducted from the data collection, and an external auditor who did not have an interest in the topic was able to conduct an audit of the findings (Swezey, 2014).

Transferability

Findings from this research can be transferred to other settings because of a rich, thick description found in the study (Creswell, 2013). Transferability allows the reader to decide if the findings can be used for other studies (Swezey, 2014). In future studies, researchers will be able to take these findings and apply them to other studies that pertain to personalized learning. These studies can include other academic content and school settings.

Ethical Considerations

In this transcendental phenomenological study, all ethical considerations were made to protect the participants and the researcher. The first step was to receive IRB approval for research methods and practices. The IRB helped the researcher apply the Belmont ethical principles for this study. According to Garzon (2014), the Belmont ethical principles gives guidelines to research when involving human subjects. These guidelines insure that the researcher shows respect for all participants involved. The second step was to seek approval from the school districts that were participating in the study. The researcher presented documentation to the IRB showing that the researcher had received permission to conduct the study (Garzon, 2014). In the third step, the researcher received informed consent from participants and assured them of confidentiality. The researcher informed the participants that participating in the study was strictly voluntary and that they may withdraw from the study at any time (Gall et al., 2007). The fourth and final step was to protect the data by keeping them in a locked filing cabinet or in password-protected electronic files. Every measure took place to ensure that the confidentiality of the participants was protected. This included storing the data in a locked cabinet for paper documents or with password protection for digital transcripts. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the participants and the settings of the study

(Creswell, 2013). For example, participants were identified as Amy, Sam, etc., and locations as School District A and Middle School A.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore teachers' experiences of personalized learning in the social studies classroom at several middle schools in a suburb of a major city in Georgia. The research design showed the reader the approach that was used for this study. The phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to analyze the experiences of the phenomenon using the data collected for the study. The data were collected through interviews, focus groups, and document analysis (Creswell, 2013). Trustworthiness and credibility gave the study validity in that nonbiased approaches took place within the study. The methods used to ensure the validity were data triangulation, member checking, peer and expert review, and external audit (Creswell, 2013). This chapter presented the methods that guided the study upon approval by the IRB and the school district where the study took place. Every measure was in place to ensure that the confidentiality of the participants was protected. This included locked storage for physical data and password protection for digital transcripts. The identities of the participants were withheld by using pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality (Creswell, 2013). In this chapter, the following were discussed: research design and questions, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of teachers creating middle school social studies personalized learning classrooms. It is important for this study to uncover how these classrooms are created and what the process of creating a personalized learning classroom for middle school social studies entails. This chapter will begin by describing the participants based on the age, ethnicity, and gender. The participants were involved in interviews and focus groups for this study. The participants submitted artifacts that include district or school policies and procedures that included documents relative to the inquiry between teacher and student. The next section in this chapter provides the results of the findings based on the interviews, focus groups, and artifacts. From these results, this researcher was able to develop themes based on the data that were analyzed. These results provide insight to the research questions that were developed for this study.

The central research question guiding this research is as follows: "How do middle school social studies teachers in Georgia describe their experiences creating personalized learning classrooms?" Sub-questions used to further refine the central question were: (1) How do teachers motivate students in the personalized learning classroom? (2) How do teachers relate to the students in a personalized learning classroom? (3) How do teachers identify ways to adjust learning in the personalized learning classroom? (4) How do teachers describe the student's ability to achieve autonomy in the personalized learning classroom? This researcher utilized a transcendental phenomenological approach that allowed separation of any opinions or judgments that would prevent him from interpreting the participants' lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990). This chapter presents the key findings from the in-depth interviews, focus groups, and artifacts.

Participants

The participants for this study were selected by using purposive criterion sampling. According to Creswell (2013), purposive sampling allows the researcher to select individuals to understand the research problem and the central phenomenon in the study. Each participant was selected from the same school district located in the southern part of Georgia approximately 35 miles from a major city. Each participant was currently teaching in a middle school social studies personalized learning classroom. There were 15 participants total, which included 12 females and three males. The ages of the participants ranged from 23 to 50 years. The participants had one to 25 years of experience in education. Pseudonyms were used for each participant, district, and middle school. To establish credibility, the participants were sent the transcriptions of their interviews and the themes and codes that were developed from the interviews, focus groups, and artifacts.

Amy

Amy is a 45-year-old female who has made education a second career choice and has taught in the classroom for two years. Amy has taught in the personalized learning classroom for two years as well. She feels that at times teaching in the personalized learning classroom is "exasperating and daunting." She went on to state that students often made comments such as "Why can't we all just work on the same activity together?" or "I like when you teach the class and we follow along." She did explain that after she is able to explain the assignment and show the students what is expected, they become engaged and begin to advocate for themselves. Amy motivates the students by developing activities that are challenging as well as engaging. She allows the students to help create the rubric and suggest activities, which helps to motivate the students in her classroom.

Beth

Beth is a 35-year-old female who has taught for 15 years. Most of those years were in a traditional classroom where she stood up in front of the classroom and delivered instruction related to the content and students used textbooks to complete their assignments. Beth has been teaching in the personalized classroom for four years and has enjoyed her experience. She did state that "in the beginning, the task of trying to incorporate personalized learning to the students was a slow process." She started by focusing on the strengths and weakness of the students based on the data received from pre-assessments given to the students at the beginning of a unit. She would then begin to have the students to focus on their weakness in an area, and once the students were able to master that area, they were able to move forward to the next area that was a weakness for them.

Cathy

Cathy, a 45-year-old female, has utilized personalized learning in her classroom for four of the 15 years she has been in education. Cathy's first experience with personalized learning in her classroom was using an online platform that assigned lessons to the students and allowed students to move at their own pace within the program. She stated that she enjoys seeing a child's true passions and creativity come out in their projects and classwork. She said, "Students can have their own voice when working on assignments." She did state that having enough time to create assignments and for students to finish each assignment presents a big challenge for her and other teachers who utilize personalized learning. Some students finish way ahead of the rest of the class while others' pace of finishing assignments is "no pace at all."

Janice

Janice is a 35-year-old female who has been teaching for 10 years. She has been utilizing personalized learning in her classroom for fve years. Janice describes a normal day as follows:

> A normal day I may have some kids, usually, unless we're in between countries, usually we're in the same country, but one may be doing geography, some kids may have moved on to economics or government or moving into history. They're just in different areas of the unit of a country.

She stated that motivating students is not difficult, and she will conference with each student individually to see where he or she is on the learning pathways and guide the students who seem to have difficulty in an area. The students in her class love competition, so before each test, the students study by competing in an online game called KAHOOT! (2013). The students answer questions through the game that she has gathered from the test. Janice enjoys personalized learning, but she did admit that there are some challenges. She stated, "One big one is there's one of me and there's kids at a bunch of different spots, so sometimes I kind of feel like an octopus with all the different arms being pulled in different ways."

Jack

Jack is a 43-year-old male who has taught in the personalized learning classroom for four years. This past year was his first year teaching in the personalized learning social studies classroom. His first experience with personalized learning began with blended learning. He created a social studies class through an online platform called ANGEL. Jack enjoys using technology in his classes, which he believes allows the students to progress at their own pace. When asked about how he motivates his students in the personalized learning classroom, Jack stated,

> Motivation comes through having a choice of which level to start at on the playlist. Motivation also comes through having options and choices of assignments that appeal to the students on the playlist. Allowing the students to work at their own pace knowing they can work on other classwork, and still knowing they need to manage their time to meet the deadline, will motivate some students.

Jack allows his student to redo assignments or retake assessments that they did not do well on motivates the students to continue trying and to not give up easily.

Kim

Kim is a 34-year-old female who has been teaching for 12 years. She has been at her present school for eight years. She has witnessed the transition of the school from a traditional teaching style to a personalized learning model over the course of the last five years. Kim was able to describe that experience:

> We have shifted our mind set a little every year since we began. At first, we focused heavily on pacing and allowed students to work with a computer program. The next year we continued with the program but knew that students needed more individualized time with the teacher, so we built that into the schedule. The next year we made sure the teacher saw the students every day, both while working as individuals online and in the classroom. We have shifted away from requiring the computer program for all students, because how personalized is that? We have since worked to create units that are not just provided to administrators, but also to the parents, and the students themselves.

Kim uses this method to allow the students to see the big picture and know what the end goal is for the content. Kim stated that they have worked harder to personalize the units by allowing for student agency and options for students to show mastery that are embedded within the unit.

Leila

Leila is a 36-year-old female who has been in education for 14 years. She was in her second year utilizing personalized learning in the social studies classroom. Leila stated that creating a personalized learning classroom is a lot of upfront work by the teacher. She said,

> The students seem to enjoy it, but sometimes it's hard for me; I just want to revert back to my old habits as a teacher. I feel like I just need to set [*sic*] my students down and present information to them. So, it's kind of hard working backwards and keeping the end in mind first.

Leila described a normal day in the personalized learning classroom:

> My students come in and they have choice boards, and if it is a new choice board or a new unit which is really like a learning pathway in my eyes or in a teachers eyes' but they view it as a choice board, and sometimes if it's something new that they haven't been working on if the choices are all new to them or if it's a new unit, we'll talk about not the content per se, but this is what this activity looks like, this is where it's located in the room, these are the things that you need to complete it. It may be similar to this or this that you've done before, but normally they just come in and grab their choice boards and get started on whatever they're doing.

Leila admits that personalized learning is hard because the students can be working on several different things at the same time. She believes that autonomy comes from the students being able to come together and take a unit test over what they have just learned.

Mark

Mark, a 40-year-old male, has been teaching for 15 years. He has been teaching in a personalized learning classroom for the last two years. He admits that the change from the

traditional classroom where he is in the front of the classroom delivering direct instruction most of the day to a classroom where each student is in charge of their learning has been challenging. Mark stated,

> Before I got to this school, I always did direct instruction, and I never knew what personalized learning was before I got to this school, and at first it was kind of rocky getting the kids to personalize their own learning, but now I've got everything in a place that it's easy for me to use it year to year.

At the beginning of each year the classroom, is new and confusing to Mark's students. After the first couple of weeks, the students know where to find their assignments on his Google Classroom page. The students will go to their individual assignments based where they are on the unit learning pathway. Mark admits that motivating his students is challenging at times, but he stated,

> I try to make it fun, the activities fun, that it's something they can be engaged in instead of the same old. We don't have textbooks; I try to use videos, and things like that that are interesting and fun.

Mark enjoys teaching social studies and remembers his social studies teachers who made the class fun and exciting.

Mary

Mary is a 35-year-old female who has been teaching for two years. She was also in her second year teaching in a personalized learning classroom. Mary creates learning pathways that the students can follow at their own pace. A normal day for Mary begins with direct instruction, and then she allows the students to begin on their learning pathway. Mary states that to build students' autonomy in completing the assignments, she chunks the information and begins with a

lower-level activity and build from there so the students can achieve mastery. Mary states that she enjoys personalized learning because it builds the students' confidence to achieve independence in the classroom and in life. Mary states that there is challenges with personalized learning, with the biggest challenge being having the students on different levels. She stated that for a teacher in a personalized learning classroom, it can be difficult to keep up with the students and to reach students who are falling behind.

Nancy

Nancy is a 32-year-old female who teaches seventh-grade social studies. She has been teaching for eight years and has been involved with personalized learning in her classroom since 2013. Nancy shares her experience with personalized by stating the following:

> I would say that our journey in personalized learning has evolved each year since inception. When I first started incorporating personalized learning into my classroom, we did so using a blended learning method. This allowed me to really equip each of my students with a "personalized" path and coursework. As we have continued down the PL journey, we moved away from blended, and each student now has their own technology device. Now, I have a personalized learning pathway for each of my students, and I am able to work more closely with them using tools like Google Classroom. I can collaborate and provide feedback on assignments. I am also able to assign online work as each student has a device.

Nancy admitted that it is difficult to motivate her students, but she motivates them by allowing them to move ahead or, for those who need extra time, stay on an assignment a little longer so that they are able to grasp the material. Nancy stated that as a teacher in a personalized learning

classroom, one must be able to adapt and be very flexible because what works with some students may not work with all students.

Penny

Penny is a 45-year-old female who has been teaching for 12 years. She was in her second year creating a personalized learning classroom. A normal day for Penny is allowing the students to have choices in their assignments, and she did admit that it can be a little chaotic if the teacher is not organized. Students in her classrooms are able to move ahead on work on assignments that are on their learning pathway. Penny stated, "It is important to try to engage them in little short meetings regarding what they are doing and where are on their pathway—daily if possible—but not always possible." Penny did state that personalized learning can be difficult for students who need a more structured environment to complete assignments. She admits that students do appreciate when she adjusts the assignments to cater to their needs.

Sam

Sam is 50-year-old male who has been in education for 23 years. Sam has been teaching in the personalized learning classroom for the past five years. Sam's experience with personalized learning began with his students sitting in front of a computer and completing the lessons online. In regard to his early experiences with personalized learning, Sam stated,

> I would conference with kids that were having problems or falling behind. After about a year of that, we started to put our lessons on a platform. I used Blackboard to house my lessons and units. Students would go to Blackboard complete the lessons I designed for them and turn them in. Now I use Google Classroom. I house my playlist, which is kind of like a choice board, on Google Classroom. Students go to Google Classroom to see what choices they have to complete for the standards we are working on. I at times offer

> direct instruction to students that are falling behind or are having some problems with the material. I also do a lot of counseling with students as they work through our lessons.

Sam did admit that it seems that it is getting harder and harder to motivate students to do the work. He tries to motivate students by relating the information to their everyday lives. If the students do their work, he gives them an opportunity to listen to music while they work.

Stacey

Stacey is a 47-year-old female who has been in education as a teacher for 25 years. This past year was her second year teaching in a personalized learning classroom. She admits it has been hard to make that transition from the traditional style to the personalized learning classroom. She stated,

> I must admit it has been tough switching from a traditional classroom to a personalized learning classroom. Letting go of the reins, so to speak, took some getting used to. Students take a pretest for each concept to determine if they can move on to higher-order thinking skills or if they need to begin with basic skills. Students normally sit in groups, and the groups are constantly changing based on the skills they need.

Stacey has found that there are challenges in this type of setting with students who have trouble completing the assignments and work at a slower pace. She stated,

> At times I have to cut out a few assignments for some students who work slowly. With everyone working at their own pace, there are times when there needs to be a quiet class period for students to complete quizzes or tests while others are completing group work. It can become difficult at times keeping up with everyone's progress. Class size is a huge factor. I don't feel like I am able to conference which each individual student when needed. Much planning goes into having a successful personalized learning environment.

Some students have difficulty following the learning pathway and staying on task.

Having too much freedom can be detrimental to learning.

Stacey felt that some students would not be able to handle the freedom of picking and choosing their assignments and would look for the easiest assignment to complete instead of choosing a challenging assignment that would eventually help them in learning the material.

Todd

Todd is a 23-year-old male who is starting his first year teaching in the classroom and teaching in a personalized learning environment. Todd collaborates with other teachers in social studies, and they put together assignments that students can choose from for a unit. Students begin each day with a warm-up assignment to get them prepared for the class. Todd stated, "Many students really enjoy the personalized pathways because they are able to choose how they complete their work and choose what they like best and build off of their own strengths." Todd admitted that this style of learning that is difficult for students who are auditory learners and yearn for direct instruction. He stated that he adjusts learning for these students by putting them in a small group and giving them direct instruction and then letting them complete the assignment.

Wendy

Wendy is a 32-year-old female who has chosen teaching as a second profession. This her first year as a teacher and in a personalized learning classroom. Wendy stated that her school follows a personalized learning model in which students are encouraged to become active participants in their educational experiences. Wendy described her experience with personalized learning with the following statement:

> This year has been a very interesting experience. I went from not understanding personalized learning, to being all for it, to feeling like it is an amazing model to use if boundaries are placed appropriately. Personalized learning really is a wonderful tool, but I have learned that it must be used carefully, as too many students will take advantage of the inherent leniency. Once I realized this, I made some adjustments to the types of opportunities that I gave to my students. I realized that personalized really does mean student-by-student. If there are students who need structure and hard deadlines, you must provide those for them. If there are students who need more fluid work schedules and deadlines, you must provide those within reason.

Wendy stated there are challenges with personalized learning, which include ensuring students are not able to take advantage of flexible deadlines. She believes if deadlines are not given, then students will struggle to complete the assignment.

Results

To learn the lived experiences of the participants, open-ended questions were used in interviews and focus groups. Artifacts were used to understand the data and determine the meanings of the experiences lived by the participants. Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach, which includes epoche, horizonalization, and synthesizing "meanings and essence" (p. 100), was used to analyze data. From the data, three major themes emerged: teacher experience, positive aspects, and stressors. At the beginning of reviewing the data, it was not clear how many themes would emerge. Over 50 codes were produced from the interviews, focus groups, and artifacts (see Appendix H). After analyzing each code, the researcher was able to narrow the codes and synthesize the data, so the themes would allow the phenomenon to be seen from the data in the research.

The first theme, teacher experiences, occurred from participants sharing their involvement and experience with creating personalization in the classroom. The next theme centers around the participants' statements regarding positive aspects of creating a personalized learning classroom by sharing the benefits of students being able to move at their own pace, student motivation, autonomy, and adjusting for students when needed. In the last theme, called teacher stressors, several factors were introduced that the participants considered barriers in creating a personalized learning classroom. These barriers include lack of resources, planning, teacher availability, time management, and content-based professional learning. Each theme is discussed in detail as well as the responses of the participants as they relate to the research question and the themes. Appendix H shows the initial codes and occurrences that developed from the interviews, focus groups, and artifacts.

Table 4.1

Description of Themes

Theme	Description
Teacher Experience	Participants sharing their involvement and experience with creating personalization in the classroom
Positive Aspects	Sharing benefits of students moving at their own pace, student motivation, adjusting when needed, and autonomy
Stressors	Lack of resources, planning, teacher availability, time management, and content-based professional learning

Theme One: Teacher Experiences

In the description of themes (Table 4.1) teacher experiences was identified as a theme that describes the participants' involvement with creating the personalized learning classroom for their social studies class. Twenty codes were used to describe their experiences in creating these classrooms for their students (see Table 4.2). The codes evolved from participants' responses in the interviews and focus groups that were completed during the research. The participants

shared the positive and negative aspects of developing the personalized learning classroom. All participants agreed that the beginning of developing this classroom was very challenging until they were able to resolve any setbacks and develop the classroom to their liking. Amy stated in her interview that "there were times when the experience has been exasperating and daunting." She went on to point out that students say, "Why can't we work on the same activity together?" or "I like when you teach the class and we follow along." Amy stated that she has been able to model and coach the personalized learning model to the students, and she has noticed that the students have been able to advocate for themselves and took ownership of their learning. Janice stated that each year gets easier and easier once the teacher can figure what works and what does not. Jack, a teacher that started with blended learning, did not feel that the switch to personalized learning was that difficult. He was able to use prior assignments and assessments to personalize the students' learning. Kim stated that she has witnessed the evolving of personalizing at her present school since its introduction five years ago as she stated,

> We have shifted our mind set a little every year since we began. At first, we focused heavily on pacing and allowed students to work with a computer program. The next year we continued with the program but knew that students needed more individualized time with the teacher, so we built that into the schedule. The next year we made sure the teacher saw the students every day, both while working as individuals online and in the classroom. We have shifted away from requiring the computer program for all student, because how personalized is that? We have since worked to create units that are not just provided to administrators, but also to the parents, and the students themselves. This way students can see the big picture and know what the end goal is for the content. We have

worked harder to personalize the units by allowing for student agency and options for students to show mastery that are embedded within the unit.

All the participants agreed that developing a personalized learning classroom is difficult in the beginning since one has to find what will allow the students to become successful. Once success is reached by the students, it becomes easier to implement personalized learning strategies to the students. Leila stated that often she feels the need to go back to her old habits of direct instruction so the students can understand the material. The participants did say that when new content is introduced, they often give the students direct instruction to give them some background knowledge of the material. Nancy stated, "I would say that our journey in personalized learning has evolved each year since its inception." She went on to say,

> When I first started incorporating personalized learning into my classroom, we did so using a blended learning method. This allowed me to really equip each of my students with a "personalized" path and coursework. As we have continued down the PL journey, we moved away from blended, and each student now has their own technology device.

Nancy described each day as different depending on where the students are on their learning pathways (see Appendix J). All participants agree that in a personalized learning classroom, the students may not always be on the same assignment or activity, so teachers must be ready for students to advance to the next level. Penny stated, "It is important to engage them in little short meetings or conferences to see where they are on their pathway, daily if possible but not always the case."

Sam, who has the most experience teaching in a classroom but has only been utilizing personalized learning for the last five years, uses Google Classroom. Sam stated, "I use Google

Classroom. I house my playlist, which is kind of like a choice board, on Google Classroom" (see Appendix K). He went on to describe what the students do:

> Students go to Google Classroom to see what choices they must complete for the standards we are working on. At times, I offer direct instruction to students that are falling behind or are having some problems with the material. I also do a lot of counseling with students as they work through our lessons.

Stacey, who is in her first year of teaching in a personalized learning classroom, admitted that it has been hard to change from a traditional classroom to a personalized learning classroom. She is like the other participants who follow this routine when students enter her classroom: "Students will check their learning pathway for mastery and completion of concepts. They figure out what the next step is in completing the unit. They will then begin working on the activity."

Todd and Wendy are first-year teachers, and both agreed that it was difficult to understand the concept of personalized learning but felt it was beneficial to collaborate with other content teachers to establish the learning pathway and decide on assignments and activities for the students. Todd said,

> Many students really enjoy the personalized pathways because they can choose how they complete their work and choose what they like best and build off their own strengths. I can provide them with insight and examples of problem solving skills that help them work to mastery on a concept.

Wendy stated that personalized learning really does mean "student-by-student." If students need structure and hard deadlines, then the teacher must provide that to them. She mentioned that for

students who need more fluid work schedules and deadlines, the teacher must provide those within reason. In the focus group, Leila stated,

> Personalized learning is a route a child takes to get to a goal, or end-in-mind. The route is up to the child with the guidance of the teacher, and the route or path may change depending upon what a child does or does not experience along the way toward meeting their goal.

Stacey concluded in the focus group that "personalized learning in the classroom—to me—is all about promoting agency and offering variety."

The first theme of teacher experiences showed that all participants shared the same belief that creating personalized learning classrooms can be overwhelming in the beginning. In their words, it is a daunting task and a lot of work on the front end. In all situations, the participants stated that in the end they were able to find a way to make personalized learning work in their social studies classroom. The experiences of teachers did vary, and it was revealed that the inexperienced teachers were able to collaborate with other teachers in the same content area to find tasks and other activities for the students to be engaged. All the participants' responses focused on what will work best for the students who are working on various tasks at different times and what will work best for the teachers to be able to manage students in different areas of the content. All the participants were able to find what works best for them and their students in their respective personalized learning environment.

Table 4.2

Codes Used in Developing Teacher Experience Theme

Teacher Experience	
Advocacy from students	Google Classroom
Blended learning	Hard deadlines for students
Collaboration with same content teacher	Learning pathway for students

Conferencing with students	Managing different levels
Daunting task for teachers	Mastery of content
Depth of Knowledge (DOK)	Overwhelming for teachers
Direct instruction	Playlist for students
Evolving from indoctrination	Pre-assessment to determine mastery
Feedback to students	Structure for students
Fluid work for students	Work upfront on teacher is tremendous

Theme Two: Positive Aspects

The second theme identified was the positive aspects of creating a personalized classroom for middle school social studies teachers. To identify this theme, sixteen codes were developed from the participants' interviews, focus groups, and artifacts. In response to the questions, the participants revealed that personalized learning can allow for independence and help develop a positive rapport between the student and the teacher. The participants believed that this type of learning can show a child's true passion and develop the creativity of the students. Personalization of student learning has a positive relation to the learners' creativity in a solid learning setting (Zhai et al., 2017).

Teachers are able to share their experiences with the student, which the student a voice in the learning process. Amy revealed in her interview that she enjoyed having the students move at their own pace and, given the chance, the students can decide how they would like to study and be assessed to determine mastery of the content. Cathy stated in her interview that she truly enjoyed seeing the passion of the students and their creativity come out in their projects and classwork. According to Cathy, "Students are able to have their own voice when working on assignments." Janice reiterated the positive aspects by saying,

> I think kids are more successful than with the old-fashioned method of, well, okay you failed you moved on you're stuck with that 50. With personalized learning you can remediate; they have a chance to learn the material instead of just moving on and leaving

> them behind—there's less failures as a team. We have a lot less failures than we did before. Parents don't really have a lot of complaints when you can redo and remediate with their kid to help them get the material, so that has really taken a lot of the burden off parents from being ugly; they really don't have a lot to say when they can do all these things.

Nancy stated in the focus group that she enjoys the idea of personalized learning because it incorporates the means of finding a path to success for each student. She said, "It means that every student in my room is different and their learning is different" and added, "It means that each student will have the opportunity to master the content in a way that works specifically for them." Sam stated in the focus group Voice and Choice, "Students are making decisions and planning how they are going to learn the material." In analyzing the documents (see Appendix J and Appendix K), it became apparent that students are able to work at their own pace and are able to complete multiple assignments. The playlists and learning pathways allow the students to work independently and gives the teacher an idea of who the self-starters are in this learning environment.

Jack mentioned that this concept allows for students to show growth and maturity:

> The biggest benefit of personalized learning in my social studies classroom is that it allows for the students to show maturity and growth through their choices and through their learning. Students are given and can show autonomy through the choices they make in relation to their organization, time management, work habits and study habits.

The participants seem to agree that personalized learning creates an environment in which students can learn a valuable lesson as they move forward in education and in life. According to Leila, this is positive for students with special needs.

> Like I said before, I think the benefit is definitely for students with special needs because it's all different and nobody knows, of course they know what they're working on, but if someone were to walk in, you wouldn't know who the special ed learners are or the general learners are because they all have their own path and choice board of things they need to be working on, so I think it's definitely a benefit for students with special needs. Everything they could do in resource in social studies they could do in the personalized learning classroom because it's not the direct instruction in the front of the room.

Mark likes the idea that students do not have to rely on a textbook as their only resource but have the option to use the World Wide Web to search for anything they want in regard to what they are working on at that time. He stated,

> Since its social studies, we're learning about different parts of the world; you know the Internet has all sorts of information where they can search on their own. If we had a textbook and that's all that was used, we'd be stuck in the textbook, but with the World Wide Web, they are able to look up all parts of the world.

Mary stated that giving students the opportunity to become independent and giving them the ability to take ownership of their work allows teachers to help mold the obvious self-starters in the classroom. Nancy enjoys the benefit of not having to stand up every day to give direct instruction. This gives her an opportunity to be very creative as a teacher. She elaborated,

> I love that my students are more engaged with the learning in class versus doing worksheets every day. Most of all, I love that the work we are doing is meaningful and authentic. I think that my students will walk away with a skill set that will help them be productive in high school and beyond.

The participants were in consensus that personalized learning students enjoy working at their own pace and gain a boost to their self-confidence. Students do not feel the pressure to rush through the assignments and can work off their own strengths and interests. Sam stated, "Personalized learning makes students more responsible for their learning and . . . students are able to make choices on assignments based on their abilities and comfort levels." Wendy followed up with, "Personalized learning allows students try new ways of achieving goals with opportunities to improve on previous work."

The theme of positive aspects was supported by the participants' data from the interviews, focus groups, and artifacts. The participants enjoy watching an individual grow from a shy student who does not interact with the learning to a student who is confident in his abilities and shows pride in his work. The positive aspects of personalized learning provided the participants with a great rapport with the students and also garnered success with this newfound confidence of the student. The positive aspects of personalized learning in the end allow students to take control of their learning and be able to have the satisfaction of being in control and having success.

Table 4.3

Codes Used in Developing Positive Aspects Theme

Positive Aspects	
Abilities and comfort level	Multiple learning opportunities
Boost confidence level	No pressure to hurry
Creativity of student	Play to strength and interest
Develop rapport with students	Self-starters are seen
Independency	Skill set for productive citizens
Maturity and growth	Student engagement
Meaningful and authentic	Study habits improved
Move forward with less assistance	Special needs students can move at own pace

Theme Three: Stressors

The final theme, stressors, was identified through participant interviews, focus groups, and artifacts. Eight codes were used to identify stressors as a theme (see Table 4.4). All participants described at least one issue that would causes stress in creating a middle school social studies personalized learning classroom. Wendy stated that the biggest stressor that she incurs in her classroom is students failing to complete assignments in a timely matter: "There are students who rely on hard deadlines, and there are students who take advantage of flexible guidelines. If these are not provided, those students tend to struggle to get their work completed." Todd faces an issue with students who need direct instruction and are unable to work independently on their assignments. Stacey mentioned that there are assignments that she has to remove from some students who work slowly and are unable to keep up with the rest of the class. She followed up by saying,

> With everyone working at their own pace, there are times when there needs to be a quiet class period for students to complete quizzes or tests while others are completing group work. It can become difficult at times keeping up with everyone's progress. Class size is a huge factor!

The stressor for Stacy expressed in her interview is that her students are in different areas of their learning pathway (Appendix J), and it is difficult for her to manage a class that is large. There are students that work slowly, and it is hard for those students to keep up with the rest of the class. All participants have met many students in their classrooms that are just not motivated. Sam stated, "We get more and more students who are not motivated to learning. It gets hard at times to find ways to motivate these students to get the work done." Penny also struggles with students who need a more structured environment, and it is difficult for her to manage all

students at various skill levels when completing assignments on the students learning pathway. Cathy is concerned with having new students transferring in who are ahead of her students due to the district not implementing pacing guides for the teachers to follow. She said, "Pacing guides are not followed, so if new students move into our district from other schools in our county (especially the ones not doing personalized learning), they are much farther ahead of where my class usually is." Amy mentioned the same stressor in keeping up with the students: "Monitoring students as they work on multiple activities in the classroom was my greatest challenge. For instance, there have been times in a classroom where students were working on different units."

All participants also agreed that keeping up with all of the students' assignments on different levels causes' difficulty keeping up with grading each assignment. Kim pointed out the challenge of "staying organized and keeping up to date on grading and entering assignments into the gradebook. When you have 130 students all in different places, staying aware of how each one is progressing can be exhausting!"

Mark and Leila agreed that obtaining the materials and resources needed from the district is somewhat difficult. Leila stated,

> We do not have enough supplies for the students, especially for our students with special needs who need pictures and tangible items. It's really hard to find materials; we have the Internet, we have some old books, resources that I try to find for them, but for our nonreaders or students who struggle in reading, it's really hard because everything we find is in print.

Mark believes that training is necessary on all levels for teachers to fully understand personalized learning and see if it has evolved into what the district is looking for in the classroom. Speaking

on that same topic of training, Nancy mentioned she faces the same issues with the implementation of a personalized learning classroom in a district setting. She stated,

> We are a state-funded, public school that is still bound by the state curriculum and state mandated tests. It is difficult for our students to really be flexible in their learning when they have to show mastery by a specific date set forth by the state. I also think that PL works best in an environment where the students are selected to go to that particular school—like a charter, magnet, or private school. PL is a really innovative approach to education, but I believe it works best for my higher-achieving students.

The scarcity of resources and training were a big stressor for the participants in creating and fully utilizing a personalized learning classroom for their students. It was a consensus of all the participants that it is extremely difficult to manage larger class sizes when students are working on different levels. The large classes were often the reason why some students are not able to be self-motivated to complete the assignments in a timely manner. The participants would like more training to be able to bring those students lagging behind to a level that is consistent with the other students. In the focus group, several participants mentioned that resources were not available to create the personalized learning environment. Janice stated, "I do not desire or need any training in a personalized learning classroom but would enjoy training where materials and resources are available to develop all the needed lessons." Sam mentioned in the focus group, "I would like to be left alone to practice the techniques I've already learned."

Table 4.4

Codes Used in Developing Stressors Theme

Stressors	
Balance skill levels	No available resources/materials
Class sizes	Pacing guides to follow
Keeping up with grading	Staying organized

Central Question

There were three themes that were developed from the data for this study. The themes revealed school social studies teachers' experiences in creating a personalized learning classroom. In this section, the researcher will show the themes that were developed to answer the five sub-questions of the study. The central question used for this study is as follows: How do middle school social studies teachers in Georgia describe their experiences creating personalized learning classrooms?

In theme one, teacher experiences revealed what exactly goes into creating a personalized classroom. The teachers' experience in the classroom varied from less than a full year to over 25 years. Most participants creating a personalized learning classroom had between one and five years of experience. Some participants revealed that it was a struggle in the beginning in creating a personalized learning classroom. There is a lot of work upfront, and it does take some patience in making sure that everything is in place for the students. Many of the participants were quite used to the traditional classroom setting where the teacher stands in front of the classroom and uses the direct instruction method of sharing the content with the students. One participant introduced personalized learning to her students by using the blended learning method: "This allowed me to really equip each of my students with a 'personalized' path and course work." The participants believed that once one has a system in order, the personalized learning classroom works well. Having students in different areas is difficult, but it allows for one-on-one conferencing with students who are struggling and need extra help.

Theme two, positive aspects, revealed that the participants found that personalizing learning does have aspects that can bring success for the students. Personalized learning can

reveal who the self-starters are in the classroom. These students, who were discussed by the participants in their data, have no problem going through the assignments that are presented on their learning pathway. Janice and Amy revealed that personalized learning allows for creativity from the students whether they are working on an assignment or a major project. They acknowledged that personalizing learning allows the student to become independent and will boost their confidence when successful. Sam shared that the learning environment will teach students to advocate for themselves and become productive citizens in society. Leila and Janice suggested that this learning environment allows the teacher to develop a rapport with the students in that it allows a one-on-one relationship in the classroom based on the student's strengths and weaknesses.

The third theme, stressors, revealed what struggles the participants encounter in creating a personalizing learning classroom for their students. The participants revealed that balancing the skill levels of each individual student is difficult for the teacher in a classroom with students at different levels. Some stated that the class sizes are too large to be able to manage each student. The participants were unanimous in their belief that the lack of training and classroom materials makes their job creating a learning environment that is personalized for their students very difficult. The participants all agreed that it is hard to manage time and stay organized for each student depending on where each is on his or her learning pathway or playlist. Students are in different areas, which affects grading the assignments "in that the teacher must stay on top of it or they will fall behind."

Sub-Question One

The first sub-question for this study was: How do teachers motivate students in the personalized learning classroom? Several participants offered at least one suggestion regarding

the motivation of students. For example, Jack found that allowing students to listen to music while completing work motivated them toward personalized learning. Jack and Janice both found that allowing students to retake assignments, as well as providing them with choices regarding the type of assignments, served as student motivators. Leila and Penny both provide examples of what was expected for each assignment and encourage students to present their activities to the whole class upon completion. Amy stated that she develops activities that are engaging and challenging. She also allows students to help create the rubric and suggest activities to motivate them in the personalized learning classroom. Another participant stated, "Sometimes the students just need something to spark their interest, which is a traditional way to hook the students, but the trick has the power to motivate."

All the participants agreed that in social studies, the history books reveal true stories, and the students can relate these stories to their own experiences. One participant said, "Social studies is shared stories in countries that are real places that students are learning about, and these are places that students can possibly go to one day." The participants agreed that social studies is a subjects that addresses real people and places, and it is easy to make learning fun with activities that the students can be engaged in and actually learn from. Students like to play games and be active with projects and other activities that allow them to be creative. The participants revealed that making learning fun is good so the students can enjoy themselves and be able to learn at the same time. Nancy revealed how she motivates students in her classroom:

> Motivation is always hard in a middle school classroom! I try to keep them motivated by letting them move ahead or stay on a certain unit longer if they need that time. Letting them work a pace that is guided really allows them to truly master the concepts. It is motivating because if they finish early they can work on something "fun" or even bypass

> other material if they have shown mastery. Students are often motivated by having choices.

One participant stated, "Motivation also comes through having options and choices of assignments that appeal to the students on the playlist."

This participant often allows students to work at their own pace and allows students to redo assignments that they do not do well on. He stated, "This motivates students to continue trying and to not give up easily." Sam said,

> It's getting harder and harder to motivate students who just don't want to do the work. A lot of times I try to compare the information to their lives today and show them how this stuff has impacted their lives today. If students are all caught up, I might let them listen to their music as they work.

All participants agreed that motivation is hard for students in middle school, so they try to give the students incentives to complete their work in a timely manner. The participants give the students grades for their assignments, and they revealed that this encourages the students to give their best effort. According to Todd, "Many students really enjoy the personalized pathways because they are able to choose how they complete their work and choose what they like best and build off of their own strengths." Another participant stated,

> I have watched students go from bored, sleepy-eyed kids to excited and curious to know more over the course of one group discussion. It is important to engage your students, but also show them that you are also interested in the content.

All the participants agreed that showing interest and being engaged as a teacher is an effective proactive step in creating a fun and exciting classroom in the personalized learning setting.

Sub-Question Two

The second sub-question for this study was: "How do teachers relate to the students in a personalized learning classroom?" In theme two, positive aspects, it was revealed that the participants felt that developing a rapport with the students by working one-on-one or through conferencing was helpful in getting to know the students and gave them the ability to relate to them on a personal level. Students who are engaged in the material and the class are more open to move on to the next assignment without any prodding or encouraging, but the participants felt that it is important to check on them periodically to make sure that they are heading in the right direction. One participant stated, "I am able to provide them with insight and examples of problem solving skills that help them work to mastery on a concept."

One participant said he loves to share about the many places that he has been to, especially on the topic of geography and the various countries covered in the sixth-grade social studies curriculum.

He stated,

> Well, since social studies is my favorite subject, and I really enjoy sharing the history of it, I like sixth grade social studies because you talk about Australia, Canada, Europe, and Latin America. I have been to a lot of those countries. So, I can share my experiences, and that is how I relate to the students.

Leila, who teaches special education students in a social studies personalized learning classroom, stated, "I just try to remember what it was like when I was their age." She spoke of how difficult it was at their age to remember basic map skills, and she knows she must be patient when helping students who are at a lower level of learning. Nancy feels that this was a way for her get to know the students in that she will tie the lesson or assignments to what they already know:

> I tie the concepts in social studies into their everyday lives. We look at places on maps and use our 3D goggles to travel to those places. It is relatable to them because some students have actually been to those places and others are intrigued! Personalized learning allows me to get to know my students interest and help direct the content to them.

Other participants mentioned that they try to build a rapport from the very first day of school by getting to know the students and understanding their likes and dislikes. One explained, "It is important to try to engage them in little short meetings regarding what they are doing and where are on their pathway—daily if possible." Amy stated, "By developing a rapport with the students, a teacher has a personal insight into relating the topic to the student's interest." The participants all felt that having a rapport with the students will encourage the students to be engaged and motivated in the classroom.

Sub-Question Three

The third sub-question for this study was: How do teachers identify ways to adjust learning in the personalized learning classroom? Overall, the participants agreed that adjusting learning for the students depends on the skill level of each child. If one student can move forward in the learning pathway, then that student is welcomed to go as far as the pathway will take them. Other students who do not have the skill set to move at a rapid pace can receive help through one-on-one conference or group work. Wendy stated that she understands that she must present the information in different ways so that the students are all able to grasp the material. She explained, "I try to always present information in two to three ways, if needed. This may mean that I use numerous examples, or it may mean that I provide a variety of resources and formats."

Stacey and Janice adjusted learning based on information received from conferencing with the students, and how quickly the students complete their work determines how classroom activities need to be adjusted. Both Janice and Stacey stated that adjusting the student work often depends what the student knows. As Stacey explained, "Most standards can be relatable to any topic that a student may be interested in, allowing the student to have ideas as well as . . . show what they have learned." According to Nancy, "Utilizing personalized learning in the classroom forces you to be adaptable and flexible." She followed up with, "Sometimes I let my students who have mastered content to teach a lesson to his/her peers." This allows the participants to hear their students' voices and get their input on what works best for them. It was unanimous amongst participants that personalized learning allows them to utilize various methods of instructional strategies. An example of the strategies included differentiated small groups based off student test data results. This allows the participants to hear their students' voices and get their input on what works best for them.

Mark stated that he will adjust learning by breaking down the material and assignments in small clusters so that it is not overwhelming for the student. Leila who has special needs students in her classroom will give these students different assignments based on their learning level. In most cases, the assignments could be different than those for the rest of the class, and the other students would not even know. Kim said,

> I adjust learning by allowing students to come up with new ways to show mastery. Kids know the program and have insight to things that I have no knowledge about. They can then show mastery in the content while at the same time teaching me about a new program or website.

Cathy stated that students in her classroom can choose their own projects as long as they are approved by her. This allows the students to take ownership of their learning and gives them a sense of pride when they are successful. All the participants agreed that the adjusting of the assignments begins with the student. The contributors to the research give pre-assessments to determine mastery of the content, based on school district policy. If the students have achieved mastery on a topic, they can become exempt from that unit or assignment and move forward. Many students enjoy this opportunity to skip assignments, but according to the participants, many middle school students find that their knowledge of social studies is very vague due to the material being brand new to them.

Sub-Question Four

The fourth sub-question for this study was as follows: How do teachers describe the student's ability to achieve autonomy in the personalized learning classroom? Personalized learning encourages autonomy by the students, and the participants described how it is achieved in their classrooms. All students are encouraged to create their own products or assignments. The students are also encouraged to move at their own pace and can choose their partners or groups when completing projects. In Amy's classroom, her students achieve autonomy by monitoring their own grades, establishing academic and behavioral goals, comparing their pre- and post-assessments, and communicating with the teacher via Google Classroom. Kim stated the following regarding her students achieving autonomy in her classroom:

> I give them choices within the unit pathway to show mastery. This way students can play to their strengths. I might allow them to write a poem or draw a picture. These two choices speak to very different types of learners. As the year goes by students become more comfortable requesting different ways to show they know something. I had one

> student animate her stance as a patriot during the American Revolution instead of doing the debate in the classroom or recording her answer as herself.

Ensuring that students are put in the position to make their own choices, and utilize their teacher as a guide, was shared as a commonality amongst research findings. For example Mark stated, "Most of the students can come into the classroom and go directly to their classroom page and find out where they left off or find the new assignment." Nancy and Jack agreed it does take time to get the students to that point of being independent enough to start their assignment on their own. Nancy allows her students to design their learning pathway, and she stated,

> Sometimes items are specifically given by me, but others I allow for student input and choice/voice. Students are learning to fully advocate and tell me what they are learning and explain the "why" versus just saying "because my teacher says so."

Jack mentioned that students achieve autonomy in his class through what he calls "voice and choice" on the assignments and playlist. In "voice and choice" students have input on what task assignments they can complete for each unit. He also stated that students can show autonomy by moving at their own pace and redoing or retaking assignments and assessments. The participants all believe that some students do very well in achieving autonomy and other students struggle immensely in trying to complete a task independently. Stacey mentioned that when she gives her students choices, some thrive while others are confused and frustrated. Sam, who has been in education for 25 years, has his students follow the unit playlist in order. He stated that next year, he plans to have the students keep track of their grades and achievements so they will know what they need to improve on. All participants stated that they encourage the students to work independently when they feel ready and that they are encouraged to work with their peers when

they encounter problems. If the students encounter a roadblock or issues, then then they are asked to seek a teacher for help.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of middle school social studies teachers creating personalized learning classrooms. Three key themes were established while examining the experiences of 15 participants: teacher experiences, positive aspects, and stressors. These themes allowed the participants to share their lived experiences of creating a personalized learning environment for middle school students in social studies. During this study, the participants shared similar experiences in creating the personalized learning classroom. The participants seemed to all understand the concept of personalized learning and what it entails. The teachers explained the struggle of the beginning of creating these classrooms and the work it takes to establish a learning environment for the students. The experiences of each teacher varied, with some only teaching from one to five years. The teachers explained how it was a change from teaching in front of a classroom to having students working on different levels and assignments.

Some positive outcomes of personalized learning were that teachers unanimously enjoyed the aspect of students working independently and be creative. They felt that this environment boosts the confidence of their students and teaches valuable skill sets that can be used later in life. Motivation is a key factor in student success in the learning process. Some students are highly motivated, while others need encouraging. There were challenges that the teachers agreed upon and since personalized learning is constantly developing, the teachers felt that their training was not adequate and that they lacked resources. Managing the classroom was a crucial factor in the teachers' ability to keep up with the students who are at higher levels of achievement. One

of the participants mentioned that the class sizes were too large, and that personalized learning works best in smaller groups. The participants believed that personalized learning is beneficial for students who are highly motivated and engaged. To reach students who are not engaged, they recommended that the teacher do one-on-one conferencing or utilize small groups.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of middle school social studies teachers creating personalized learning classrooms. Middle school social studies teachers had an opportunity to share their experiences in what creating the classrooms that are geared for personalized learning entails. A summary of the findings of the study and a discussion of implications of these findings in relation to literature and theory are presented, followed by the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications and the delimitations and limitations of the research as well recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The setting of this study was a school district located in a suburban area outside a major city. The 15 participants came from three middle schools from the school district. The participants were able to share their experiences of creating a social studies personalized learning classroom through interviews, online focus groups, and artifacts. Three major themes were found from the data that outlined the textural and structural manner the participants' lived experiences and perceptions. The themes were: teacher experiences of creating a personalized learning classroom, positive aspects for students and teachers in a personalizing learning environment, and stressors of creating a classroom culture that includes personalized learning.

The central question framing this study asked the following: How do middle school social studies teachers in Georgia describe their experiences creating personalized learning classrooms? The participants shared many experiences, with most of their experiences being positive. The participants did mention that in creating this learning environment, much work must be invested up front, but once a system is put in place, then creating this classroom

becomes easier year after year. They felt that once the students have a good sense of what personalized learning entails, they can work at their own pace and be able to move from assignment to assignment. The teachers allowed the students to have some input in what assignments and projects are used. This allows to the students to take ownership of their learning and gives them a sense of accomplishment.

The first sub-question in this study is as follows: How do teachers motivate students in the personalized learning classroom? The participants agreed that trying to motivate students in middle school can be challenging at times. Many gave examples of what is expected for each assignment and encourage students to present their activities to the whole class upon completion. Overall, the participants believed that giving the students choices is one way to motivate them to complete their assignments. Another incentive for motivating the students is allowing them to work at their own pace and move on to the next assignment. Making the assignments fun and enjoyable will also motivate the students to learn and complete each assignment. The participants agreed that social studies focuses on real people and places and therefore it is easy to make learning fun with activities that the students can be engaged in and actually learn from. It is important for the student to be engaged in this learning environment and for the teacher to show interest and become an active participant in the success of the student.

The second sub-question asked: How do teachers relate to the students in a personalized learning classroom? The participants felt that developing a rapport with the students by working with the students one-on-one or through conferencing was helpful in getting to know the students. Teachers enjoyed getting to know the students on a personal level and discovering their likes and dislikes. This was helpful in planning the learning pathway for the students in their class. One participant shares his experiences of traveling to the many countries that are

mentioned in the sixth-grade social studies curriculum. Knowing that the teacher has lived the experiences by traveling to the various countries around the world keeps the students engaged. This participant said, "I am able to provide them with insight and examples of problem solving skills that help them work to mastery on a concept."

The third sub-question asked: How do teachers identify ways to adjust learning in the personalized learning classroom? All the participants agreed that the adjusting of the assignments begins with the student. The participants give pre-assessments to determine the level of mastery of the content. If a student has achieved mastery on a topic, then the student can be made exempt that topic and move forward. Many students enjoy this opportunity to skip assignments, but according to the participants, many middle school students find that their knowledge in social studies is very vague due to the material being brand new to them. Overall, the participants agreed that adjusting learning for the students depends on the skill level of each child. If one student can move forward in the learning pathway, then that student is welcomed to go as far as the pathway will take them.

The fourth and final sub-question asked: How do teachers describe the student's ability to achieve autonomy in the personalized learning classroom? Personalized learning, according to the participants, encourages autonomy for the students. Teachers stated that there are students that are self-starters and will move along the learning pathway or playlist on their own. The teachers acknowledged that majority of the students need to be taught where to start and how to pace themselves when doing the assignments or projects. Some participants allow the students to have a choice in what activities that they would like to start on, while other teachers have their students complete the assignments in a particular order.

Discussion

Research on creating personalized learning in the middle school social studies classroom is limited. This research was completed to understand the lived experiences of middle school social studies teachers creating a personalized learning classroom for their students. In this study, the researcher learned that creating a personalized learning classroom for social studies does come with its challenges but can work if the teacher is ambitious and willing to keep up with the pace with of varying levels of students. The students must also be motivated to complete each task or assignment at their own pace. The findings from this research support the discovery learning theory introduced by Bruner (1961). The discovery learning theory promotes active engagement and motivation by students in the learning environment. This is the same concept that is used in the personalized learning classroom. Personalized learning allows the student the ability to be active and motivated on how they will learn. Students will use prior knowledge to develop creativity and problem-solving skills (Bruner, 1961).

Theoretical

This research shared the lived experiences of middle school teachers creating personalized learning in their social studies classrooms. For this research, a transcendental phenomenology was used, which is a research design that focuses on lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990). The first theme of this study, teacher experiences, centers on the process of creating a personalized learning classroom. This study found that creating a personalized learning classroom requires the teacher to be very creative and willing to put in the extra time at the beginning of the year when creating assignments for the students. The discovery learning theory pertains to the teacher in that the teacher must be able to use prior knowledge to be creative in developing a personalized learning classroom based on the needs of each individual

student. The teacher must be highly motivated and be able to make changes as they are needed throughout their classroom. Some students could be working at a pace that is far beyond the rest of the classroom, while others could still be working on the first or second assignment that is on their learning pathway. Teachers shared that there is some difficulty in managing a classroom where students are in different areas but that it gets easier to manage once a system is in place.

The second theme, positive aspects, revealed the positive side of creating the personalized learning classroom for social studies students. Students who are highly motivated will see instant success in completing their assignments on their learning pathway. Students are free to move at their own pace. The study showed that students who are motivated tend to have prior knowledge of the content or be eager to learn by discovering the information on their own. This follows the principles in the discovery learning theory in that a student can problem-solve by discovering new information based on prior knowledge (Bruner, 1961). In other research using the discovery learning theory, teachers created a personalized learning classroom for geometry students. In this classroom, students were given a problem and asked to find a solution without the guidance of the teacher. This method of learning has shown that students are able to learn and master the content by active participation (In'am & Hajar, 2017). In creating a personalized learning classroom, teachers shared that students who are self-starters will have success, but those who are not self-starters, once they are taught how to move on their own, will have a boost of confidence in moving forward in following the learning pathway. Teachers were able to follow the guidelines of the discovery learning theory by encouraging active engagement and promoting motivation, autonomy, responsibility, independence, creativity, and problem-solving skills (Bruner, 1961). The research showed that personalized learning aligns with

discovery learning in that it promotes motivation and autonomy. Through personalized learning, students can discover what best works for them in how they learn.

Empirical

There were no studies found that qualitatively researched the experiences of middle school social studies teachers creating personalized learning classrooms; however, there was research that was closely related to this study. Previous research has been conducted on personalized learning within the high school geometry classroom, where students were given a problem and asked to find a solution without the help of their teacher (In'am & Hajar, 2017). Students had to utilize their resources, whether it involved their notes, memory, or other students, and take what they had already learned to apply to the questions at hand. This method of learning has shown that students will be able to learn and master the content by active participation (In'am & Hajar, 2017). As with the geometry students finding solutions to a geometry problem without the aid of a teacher, social studies students are given the task to search for different parts of the world based on their prior knowledge. Even the students who are not familiar with other parts of the world are tasked to seek out those countries that are described in the curriculum.

Participants of this study, as described in Theme One, were able to describe their experiences in creating a personalized learning classroom. In other studies, participants were in agreement in that they suggested that adjusted teaching may or may not have been labeled as personalized learning, but students have been delivered content at their own level of learning at some point or another (Cavanaugh, 2014). Teachers with experience in the personalized learning classroom can function as a personalized learning coaches for their colleagues to cause a uniform and successful transformation throughout the school.

Research that focused on personalized learning spaces has shown that well-designed personalized learning classrooms can transform the behavior of both teachers and students (Deed, Lesko, et al., 2014). This aligns with Theme Two, the positive aspects of creating personalized learning classrooms for students. The same positive aspects are shown with participants in one study stating that the transformation to personalized learning can also encourage the students' academic growth in a way that might not have been seen in a traditional classroom by giving students a choice on the effective way the learn (Basham et al., 2016). Research on learning environments shared that active participation must be kept in mind whenever designing a learning environment, in addition to the characteristics of a learner (Özerem & Akkoyunlu, 2015). The different characteristics that need to be considered include student learning styles, student approaches to tasks, and student motivation and interests. When these characteristics are valued and learning environments are created with them in mind, effective learning is promoted (Özerem & Akkoyunlu, 2015). In this study on teachers were creating social studies personalized learning classrooms, the participants, in accordance with Theme One, shared the same belief in that there must be active participation from the students for them to be successful.

While sharing their experiences with creating a personalized learning classroom, the participants reflected on how they started with blended learning in preparing their classrooms for a personalized learning environment. Most of the research shows the perspectives of teachers and students regarding blended learning, which is a component of personalized learning (Kuo et al., 2014). In the literature, research has shown that middle schools that now utilize blended learning as a tool for instruction have aligned with research-based strategies (Longo, 2016). Guided inquiry lessons that are paired with blended learning teach the students and foster critical

thinking skills needed for life (Longo, 2016). Blended learning is often recognized as an instructional approach that includes instructional technology and is delivered to students either online or face-to-face to address all student modalities (Kuo et al., 2014).

Flipped learning is another concept that the participants have used in preparing their classrooms for personalized learning. In the flipped classroom model, the pedagogical paradigm is reversed, and the students learn the class lesson at home and do homework in class (Rivera, 2015). The flipped classroom is a new concept that has become pretty popular the last couple of years and involves direct instruction that is done not in the classroom, but in the privacy of the home of a student (Cargile & Harkness, 2015). In the flipped classroom setting, students are able to use the class time with the teacher to apply what they have learned at home while reviewing the teacher's direct instruction (Gunyou, 2015). In Theme Two, the participants agreed that they enjoyed that students are able to go home and still work on their assignments and complete projects while the teachers follow their learning. The participants shared their experiences of integrating technology in their classroom that will personalize the learning of each student. The teachers use Google Classroom to share the assignments and the learning pathways or playlists to the students. Research has shown that technology is an aid to the teacher and serves as another tool to help the content being presented to the student. The students are able to use technology provided to them in order to demonstrate what they know and are able to complete, based off what they have learned from the content that was provided to them by the teacher (Hamilton, 2015). Personalized learning can create a classroom with technology that will nurture creative and critical thinking (Bloom & Doss, 2017). Many schools are providing their students Chromebooks, which allows the student to connect to technology in the classroom (Armstrong, 2014). These devices are inexpensive and allow the school systems to stay within

their budgets. Students are typically allowed to use the Chromebooks in the classroom and bring them home when needed (Armstrong, 2014),

In Theme Three, the participants shared the stressors that come from trying to implement personalized learning. Studies have shown that the greatest challenges regarding the implementation of personalized learning in schools is keeping up the level of commitment, motivation, and rigor regarding the curriculum (Personalized Learning Environments, 2014). Participants agreed that not having resources and needing to manage the students at different levels is a big factor in students not having success in the personalized learning classroom. Research has shown that students must be to be actively engaged in the planning of their learning and will receive the support needed at both home and school if all stakeholders have a common understanding (Personalized Learning Environments, 2014). There were other stressors that the participants revealed in this study, but none were mentioned in other research. The biggest stressors not found in previous literature included training, time management, and organization. Participants mentioned that training, time management, and organization is crucial for creating a personalized learning classroom, especially for those who are switching over from a traditional classroom to a classroom that is created for personalized learning.

This study was consistent with other studies in revealing that there are challenges in creating a personalized learning classroom. The only differences between this study and other studies are the content areas and grade levels investigated. Other studies did include technology as a big influence in creating these environments but mentioned blending learning instead of personalized learning. Participants in this study revealed that blended learning did help in creating the personalized classroom in that it allowed students to retrieve information from their Google Classroom from anywhere the Internet was accessible. This study did not extend on any

other research in creating a personalized learning classroom because little to no research has been done on the experience of creating a personalized learning classroom for middle school social studies. Other research focused on creating a personalized learning environment that involved the setup of a classroom geared for personalized learning and research on the discovery learning theory included a high school geometry class. This research contributed to the field of personalized learning in that it revealed the experiences of middle school teachers creating personalized learning classrooms.

Implications

The results of this study provided valuable theoretical, empirical, and practical implications on the lived experiences of middle school social studies teachers creating personalized learning classrooms. This information allows other teachers, administrators, and parents to learn from the experiences of teachers in a middle school social studies personalized learning classroom.

Theoretical Implications

Results provided by the research validated the information presented in the literature that was mentioned in Chapter Two. For example, both discovery learning and personalized allows the student to take ownership of their learning. In this environment students are able to choose how they are assessed; paper and pencil test, oral presentation, or a project that is related to a social studies topic. The discovery learning theory has guided this study in that it explains that students need to be motivated to find information on their own based on prior knowledge (Bruner, 1961). Discovery learning theory allows the teacher to introduce the content and gives the students the ability to seek out more information based on what resources the teachers have given them. According to Bruner (1961), the discovery learning theory is based heavily upon

intrinsic motivation, which will vary from student to student, although it encourages all students to actively engage in the content material, naturally promoting motivation. Students must be motivated to complete the tasks provided by the teachers in this setting. Based on the discovery learning theory and previous literature, it was revealed that motivation was a key factor in success in a personalized learning classroom. In the discovery learning theory, teachers must be motivated and willing to keep up with the pace of students at various levels. Teachers need to be creative in finding strategies to motivate those students who lack the ability to stay motivated independently while completing tasks. This allows for the independence of the student and creates a role in which the students have autonomy. This gives the students the freedom to make their own choices in learning (Bruner, 1961). The research showed that personalized learning in another sense is discovery learning. According to the theory of discovery, students must be motivated and have prior knowledge in order to seek out new information based on the topic that is being investigated. This study adds to the literature in that it gives a look into the experiences of a middle school social studies teacher creating a personalized learning classroom, which has not been available before. The information learned from this study will give educators, parents, and students an inside look into a personalized learning classroom and an idea what to expect from this type of learning environment. Value is given to the public though the experiences that came from a middle school social studies classroom, because the experiences can be applied in any educational setting where learning is taken place.

Empirical Implications

The literature from this study is significant, due to crafting and serving as a basis of a personalized learning classroom in a middle school setting. Valuable information from this study corroborates with other literature concerning personalized learning. It adds to the literature

in that it gives middle school teachers a voice in sharing their experiences in creating personalized learning classrooms. In previous literature, personalized learning was mentioned in various ways, such as creating the learning environment in a geometry classroom and setting up personalized learning classrooms (Basham et al., 2016, Cavanaugh, 2014; In'am & Hajar, 2017; Walkington et al., 2013). Corroboration from the findings of this study and other studies shared the experiences of creating personalized learning classrooms were all similar and the classrooms were set up in a way the students were able to learn. These studies also shared the positive and negative aspects of creating the personalized learning classroom. Motivation was a big factor that was mentioned in all these studies in that it is important for a student to be successful. These studies mentioned that creating this environment was a tedious task because it requires a teacher who is highly motivated and intelligent. This study proved that it takes work up front for the teacher to be able to facilitate their students' success. By using the phenomenological approach, this study found useful information that adds to the body of the literature.

Practical Implications

Personalized learning is the ability to tailor learning to each learner's interest, strengths, and needs (Patrick et al., 2013). Personalized learning has been of interest in education since as early as the 1700s when Jean-Jacques Rousseau started advocating for schools to allow the students to individualize their learning to capitalize on what motivated the students to learn (Zmuda et al., 2015). While many in the field of education are used to the traditional style of learning where the teacher stands in front of the class and delivers the material by direct instruction, personalized learning allows the student to take control and make choices on how they will learn. Practical implications from this study for students, educators, parents,

administrators, and the public in that it provides an option for a different style of learning for the student.

Educators currently creating a personalized learning classroom will find that the experiences shared by the participants in this study will contribute to their success in creating the classroom for students. Educators trying to figure out where to start in creating a personalized learning classroom can look to this study for guidance. This study will give other teachers a look at what it takes to create a personalized learning classroom. It is important for educators to know where to begin especially if this is their first time in creating a learning environment that is personalized for each student in the classroom. Administrators can benefit from this study in that they will be able to provide support for teachers creating the personalized learning classroom. If administrators can understand what goes into creating these classrooms, then they will have compassion and understanding of the stress that goes into creating these learning environments.

Parents and students can also gain valuable information from this study of creating the personalized learning classroom. The information received from this study will give parents and students an idea of what to expect as they enter a school that implements a personalized learning classroom. The findings in this study will give parents an inside look into how a personalized learning classroom is created and what is expected from the students. The parents will understand that their child needs to be motivated and ready to become a self-starter in this learning environment. If the students are not motivated, the parents can support their children by helping them learn creative ways to be motivated. Parents can become interested in what the students are learning and offer to help them to understand the content at home. If parents show interest, their child can gain confidence knowing there is support at home. Students will be prepared to ask their teachers for support in that they can become successful.

As the student advances through the education system from middle school to high school, he or she will learn valuable experiences in advocating for themselves as they prepare for college or a career of their choice. Related literature states that if personalized learning is implemented correctly, students will achieve academic success and be both college and career ready (Personalized Learning Environments, 2014).

The public will benefit from this study because they will gain understanding of the methods behind personalized learning and effective personalized learning classrooms help students become self-starters and gain valuable skill sets that will benefit them in the workforce. Students will be highly motivated and have a creative side that will benefit the careers they choose in the future. Employers will be able to understand how personalized learning works and can utilize it on the job site where it may aid the success of their employees in their company.

Delimitations and Limitations

In this phenomenological study, the participants were limited to teachers who are currently teaching in a middle school classroom that was created to personalize the learning of the students in social studies. The study was limited to these teachers so that they could have the opportunity to share their experiences on the specific phenomenon being researched. This allows for future research in other content fields and grade levels. These participants were all from the same district that currently utilizes personalized learning in its schools. Three middle schools were used in the study. One of the schools had significantly different demographics, including a lower socioeconomic status, than the other two. Future research might include another district that utilizes personalized learning not only in the middle school but also in the elementary and high school settings. Participants from other school settings and other content areas could

produce results that are quite different that the results seen from middle school social studies teachers.

The participants for this study were chosen because they were currently in a personalized learning classroom for middle school social studies. The lack of experience of teachers in creating a personalized learning classroom was a limitation in this study. The experience in creating a personalized classroom ranged from one to five years, even though most of the participants have been teaching in a classroom for over 10 years. It seemed that the teachers who were in their first year of teaching in a classroom were able to acclimate to the personalized learning classroom more easily than those who had to transition from a traditional classroom to a personalized learning classroom.

Another limitation to this study was the number of participants who participated in the online focus group. Out of the 15 participants who participated in the interviews, only 10 accessed the online focus group even though the participants were sent a link via email to access to the group discussion. Additionally, time constraints were a limitation in this study due to scheduling conflicts and the need to finish the interviews and focus groups before the schools let out for the summer.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future research include recreating the same study at a personalized learning school to include a different content area and grade level such as creating a personalized learning science classroom in a high school setting. The research could take place in the same district or in a new district that also utilizes personalized learning. The research could be replicated in an elementary school, and the focus could be on one grade level creating a personalized learning classroom. Replication of the study could focus on the students'

experiences in the personalized learning classroom. Additional research could compare schools that have personalized learning classrooms to schools that utilize the traditional approach to teaching. A study that compares the two approaches could provide beneficial information into what is the most effective in the classroom. It would also be appropriate to do a study to compare teacher experiences in creating a classroom that is personalized for the student. The focus could be on comparing teachers with less than five years' experience to teachers with five or more years of experience in creating a personalized learning classroom.

Future research could be done as a quantitative study where the data from assessments are used to determine the effectiveness of personalized learning. Another quantitative study could compare the effectiveness of personalized learning to the traditional style of learning. Another option for a qualitative approach would be a case study. In a case study, the researcher could follow one school or class throughout the school year as it creates personalized learning classrooms and completes the year utilizing them.

Summary

The findings revealed that teachers are willing to work hard to create a learning environment that personalizes the learning of each student in their classroom. The participants did have positive experiences even though they did admit to the struggles of creating this type of classroom. While the participants did struggle at times, there was never a hint of reluctance on behalf of the teachers to do what is best for the student. The participants always made sure that the needs of the students were met and that each student could feel that they could come to the teacher at any time for help. The participants often held one-on-one conferences with the students to see where they were in their learning pathway. During these conferences, the students could share with the teacher any problem they had maneuvering through the lessons and

assignments. The teachers would then give the student updates on their grades and feedback on anything that was pertinent to the lessons and assignments. The participants agreed that in the beginning, keeping up with students on various levels is overwhelming, but when they were organized and had a system in place, it became easier to manage. The participants mentioned that it is easier to when the students are self-motivated and eager to move along on their learning pathway to advance to the next lesson. They do find it difficult when a student is not motivated and they must find tactics that will motivate these types of students. There many tactics that were used in motivating the students, including letting the students listen to music while they work or letting them work with partners. Often the participants used games as incentives for students to complete their assignments in a timely manner. When introducing a new unit, the participants stated, that they use direct instruction to introduce the material. According to the participants, this is necessary for students who were not self-starters and needed a boost to complete tasks and assignments. Even though the participants felt that at times creating these personalized learning classrooms can be uncomfortable, they are very eager to learn and do what is best for the success of the students.

One of the important aspects of this study is that the teachers can use motivating strategies to give the students confidence to excel in this learning environment. The teachers must enjoy what they are doing and show a positive attitude and interest in the content that is being presented. The participants seemed to enjoy their jobs and were eager to create a learning environment that is fun and enjoyable. The administration seemed very involved even though the process of developing these learning environments was strenuous and time consuming.

The most significant element in the creation of a successful personalized learning classroom for middle school social studies is that the teachers care about the success of the

students. There were three major themes that described the lived experiences of the participants: teacher experiences, positive aspects, and stressors. Participants were able to share the benefits of personalized learning and creating these classrooms. Participants shared what they needed in order to be successful in creating the personalized learning classroom. In the end, the participants wanted their students to be successful even though the workload could be exasperating and irritating.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 9, 2018

Robert L. Carlyle III
IRB Approval 3105.050918: Understanding the Experiences of Middle School Social Studies Teachers Creating Personalized Learning Classrooms: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Robert L. Carlyle III,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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APPENDIX B: SUPERINTENDENT LEVEL PERMISSION

Date

[School District]
[Address Line 1]
[Address Line 2]

Dear Superintendent:

As a graduate student in the Education Department of Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctorate degree in Curriculum and Instruction. The title of my research project is "Understanding The Experiences Of Middle School Social Studies Teachers Creating Personalized Learning Classrooms: A Phenomenological Study," and the purpose of my research to understand the teacher's experiences of creating personalized learning in the social studies classrooms at middle schools in Georgia.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research with teachers in the [School].

Participants will be asked to give a personal interview, and participate in a focus group discussion, all of which will be used to describe the phenomenon of interest. The data will be used to understand the experiences for middle school social studies teachers in creating personalized learning classrooms, identify the professional development processes that lead, and inform educators and educational leaders in the selection of professional development programs that will lead to future improvements in creating social studies personalized learning classrooms in middle school. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by emailing signed approval on district letterhead to [redacted].

Sincerely,

Robert L. Carlyle III
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX C: PERMISSION FORM FOR PRINCIPALS

Date:

Dear [Principal]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I have recently been granted permission through the [redacted] Superintendents' office to conduct research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction. The title of my research project is "Understanding the Experiences of Middle School Social Studies Teachers Creating Personalized Learning Classrooms: A Phenomenological Study," and the purpose of my research is to understand teachers' experiences of creating personalized learning in the social studies classrooms at middle schools in Georgia.

I am writing to request your permission to identify qualified participants in your school. Participant requirements are as follows: (1) the teacher must teach social studies at the middle school level, and (2) the teacher must teach social studies in the personalized learning classroom.

Participants will be asked to give a personal interview, participate in a focus group discussion, and provide documents that explain district and school policies for the personalized learning classroom, all of which will be used to describe the phenomenon of interest. The data will be used to understand the experiences of middle school social studies teachers in creating personalized learning classrooms, identify the professional development processes that lead to future improvements in creating social studies personalized learning classrooms in middle school, and inform educators and educational leaders in the selection of professional development programs. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by emailing signed approval on district letterhead to [redacted].

Sincerely,

Robert L. Carlyle III
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear [Teacher],

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my study is to understand the experiences of middle school social studies teachers creating personalized learning classrooms. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are 18 years of age or older, are currently teaching middle school social studies in a personalized learning classroom, and if you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

(1) Participate in an interview session where I will ask 12 questions related to your experiences of creating middle school social studies personalized learning classrooms; and
(2) Participate in a focus group discussion regarding these same topics.
(3) Submit artifacts of district or school-based policies and procedures that include documents relative to my research purpose.

All interviews and focus group discussions will be audio recorded for transcription purposes. The interview and focus group sessions should last between 45–60 minutes each. The interview will be scheduled after school by Skype, phone or via FaceTime. The focus group meeting will be scheduled after school by Skype or via an online discussion forum. All procedures will be conducted within a two-week period.

Your name and/or other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential through the use of pseudonyms and codes.

To participate, please reply to this email and sign and return the consent document to me. If selected, you will be contacted soon to schedule your interview.

The informed consent document is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research.

If you have questions, you are encouraged to contact me by email at [redacted].
Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Carlyle
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 5/9/2018 to 5/8/2019 Protocol # 3105.050918

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF MIDDLE SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS CREATING PERSONALIZED LEARNING CLASSROOMS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Robert L. Carlyle III
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to take part in a research study concerning the understanding of the experiences of middle school social studies teachers creating a personalized learning classroom. Your school was selected because of its implementation of personalized learning in the classroom. You were selected because you are 18 years of age or older, you teach at the middle school level, and you currently teach social studies in a personalized learning classroom. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Robert L. Carlyle III, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of middle school social studies teachers who are creating a personalized learning classroom.

Procedures: If you agree to participate in this study, I would ask you to do the following:

(1) Participate in an interview session where you will be asked 12 questions related to your experiences of creating middle school social studies personalized learning classrooms
(2) Participate in a focus group discussion regarding these same topics.
(3) Submit artifacts of district or school based policies and procedures that include documents relative to my research purpose

All interviews and focus group discussions will be audio recorded for transcription purposes. The interview and focus group sessions should last between 45-60 minutes each. All procedures will be conducted within a two-week period.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study: Risks associated with this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks participants would encounter in everyday life. There are no direct benefits to participants, but the results of this study could provide a deeper understanding of teacher experiences as educational leaders move forward in developing future integrations, professional development strategies, and successful pedagogies. In addition, this study may inform educators, parents, and educational leaders in selecting tools of personalized learning, adopting new technologies, investing taxpayer dollars, and developing new and improved personalized learning strategies.

Compensation: The participants will receive $10 Amazon gift cards upon completion of the study.

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 5/9/2018 to 5/8/2019 Protocol # 3105.050918

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report published, no information that will make it possible to identify a participant will be included. Research records will be stored securely, and only I will have access to the records.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym.
- Data will be securely stored. At the end of three years, all related documents and recordings will be destroyed.
- Audio recording will be stored in a secure file cabinet at my residence, thereby limiting access to anyone but me.
- I will not be able to assure participants that other members of the focus group will maintain subject confidentiality and privacy during this study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with your school or with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Robert L. Carlyle III. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him by email at . You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Carol Gillespie, at .

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Green Hall Ste. 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or by email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

☐ ***The researcher has permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.***

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please introduce yourself and your connection with personalized learning.
2. How long have you been utilizing personalized learning in education?
3. How long have you been teaching in a social studies personalized learning class at this middle school?
4. Please tell me your experience in creating a personalized learning classroom since you have been at this school.
5. Explain what a normal day is for you in a social studies personalized learning classroom.
6. Explain how you motivate students in the social studies personalized learning classroom.
7. How are you able to relate to the students in the social studies personalized learning classroom?
8. In what ways do you adjust learning in your social studies personalized learning classroom?
9. How do the students respond to the adjustments made in the social studies personalized learning classroom?
10. How do students achieve autonomy in the social studies personalized learning classroom?
11. Explain the benefits of personalized learning in your social studies classroom.
12. Explain the challenges you face with personalized learning in your social studies classroom.

APPENDIX G: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What initially attracted you into the field of education and teaching?
2. How many years have you taught and at what grade level?
3. What are your basic thoughts and beliefs about how children learn?
4. What is your definition of personalized learning in the classroom?
5. What strategies do you use to engage students in this learning environment?
6. How often do you utilize direct instruction instead of personalized learning?
7. What has your school done to develop teachers in a personalized learning classroom?
8. What has the district done to develop teachers in a personalized learning classroom?
9. In your school do teachers collaborate with one another regarding development of personalized learning in the classroom?
10. What training do you still desire or need in creating a personalized learning classroom?
11. What other information concerning the personalized learning classroom would you like to add?

APPENDIX H: INITIAL CODES WITH SOURCE OF DATA IN WHICH IT WAS FOUND (INTERVIEWS, FOCUS GROUP, ARTIFACTS)

Codes	Interviews	Focus Groups	Artifacts
Exasperating	X		
Daunting	X		
Overwhelming	X	X	
Same Activity	X		
Advocacy	X	X	
Pathways	X	X	X
DOK Levels	X	X	
Levels	X	X	X
Different areas	X	X	
Blended Learning	X		
Pacing	X		
Co-create	X		
Playlist	X	X	X
Units	X	X	X
Mastery	X	X	
Work upfront	X		
Direct instruction	X	X	
Google classroom	X		X
Fun activities	X		
Evolving	X		

Manage	X		
Conferencing	X	X	X
Pre-assessment	X	X	X
Collaboration	X		
Pick and choose	X		X
Structure	X		X
Hard deadlines	X		
Fluid work	X		
Develop rapport	X		
Communication	X	X	
Move at own pace	X	X	
True passion	X		
Creativity	X		
Own voice	X		X
Real world experience	X	X	
Remediation	X		X
Parent complaints	X		
Sharing experiences	X	X	
Redo assignments	X		X
Student appreciation	X		
Maturity and growth	X		
Organization	X	X	
Strength and interests	X		X

Students can blossom	X		
Less assistance	X		
Special needs students	X		
Teach independence	X		
Self-starters	X		
Learning opportunities	X	X	
Creativity	X		
Engaging	X		
Meaningful/authentic	X		
Skill sets taught	X		
Boost confidence	X		
Abilities	X		
Comfort levels	X		
No pressure	X		
Opportunities to improve	X		X
Maintain progress	X		
No direct instruction	X	X	
Balance different levels	X	X	
Show mastery	X		X
Lower achieving	X		
Depleted resources	X	X	
Reuse materials	X		
PL developing	X	X	

Staying organized	X		
Grading	X		
Aware of progress	X		
Managing students	X	X	
Time management	X		
Assessing students	X		
Lack of training	X		
Poor data	X		
Class sizes	X		
Consistency	X		
Learning coaches	X		
Work and study habits	X		
Navigate	X		X

APPENDIX I: NARROWED CODES WITH SOURCE OF DATA IN WHICH IT WAS FOUND (INTERVIEWS, FOCUS GROUP, ARTIFACTS)

Teacher Experiences	Interviews	Focus Groups	Artifacts
Advocacy from Students	X		
Blended Learning	X		
Collaboration	X	X	
Conferencing with students	X	X	
Daunting task for teachers	X	X	
Depth of Knowledge (DOK)	X		X
Direct Instruction	X	X	
Evolving from indoctrination	X		
Feedback to students	X		X
Fluid work for students	X		X
Google classroom	X		X
Hard deadlines for students	X		X
Learning pathway	X		X
Managing different levels	X	X	
Mastery of content	X		X
Overwhelming for teachers	X		
Playlist for students	X		X
Pre-assessment	X		X
Structure for students	X		X
Work upfront	X	X	

Positive Aspects	**Interviews**	**Focus Groups**	**Artifacts**
Abilities and comfort level	X		
Boost confidence level	X		
Creativity of student	X	X	X
Developing rapport	X		
Independency	X		X
Maturity and growth	X		
Meaningful and authentic	X	X	
Less assistance	X		
Multiple opportunities	X	X	X
No pressure to hurry	X		
Strengths and interests	X	X	
Self-starters are seen	X		
Skill set for citizens	X		X
Student engagement	X	X	
Study habits improved	X		
Special needs students	X		

Stressors	**Interviews**	**Focus Group**	**Artifacts**
Balance skill levels	X	X	
Class sizes	X	X	
Keeping up with grading	X		
Lack of training	X	X	
Resources/materials	X	X	
Pacing guides to follow	X		X
Staying organized	X		
Time management	X		

APPENDIX J: LEARNING PATHWAY

7th Grade SS/ELA Utopian/Dystopian Society Project
2 weeks class time to work/finish
1 week to revise
1 week to present

My Goals (established via teacher conference)

My personal goal for this project:

My academic goal for this project:

Graduation Competencies - Government, Economics - SS and ELA

GOVERNMENT

Apply understanding of the ideals and purposes of founding documents, the principles and structures of the constitutional government in the United States, and the American political system to analyze interrelationships among civics, government and politics in the past and the present, in Georgia, the United States and the world.

ECONOMICS

Apply the concepts and processes from economics to issues of personal finance and economic issues in local, state, national, and global markets.

LANGUAGE ARTS

Construct task-appropriate writing for diverse purposes and audiences. Write effective arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence. To develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well structured event sequences.

Performance Task (evidence to prove mastery)

I will create and develop my own community that will represent either a utopian or dystopian society. I will create all of the aspects of my community using my knowledge from the readings in ELA and the discussions in SS. Once I have developed a functioning community, I am going to work with a group to create a breakout room with the ultimate goal of persuading my peers to join my community. I will use my escape route in the “breakout room” to present to my peers.

	Other things I'll learn along the way
	Graduation Competency: Communication Communicating written, spoken, and artistic language to convey meaning and understanding to a variety of audiences. **Graduation Competency: Collaboration** Collaborating with diverse teams to accomplish a common goal **Graduation Competency: Creativity** Demonstrating originality and innovation **Graduation Competency: Critical Thinking** Using reasoning skills and multiple information sources to solve problems and make decisions

= sign up for a time frame for small group instruction or conference with your teacher if you need additional support **AFTER** utilizing linked resources.

	Steps for Task	Evidence of Mastery	
	Step 1: Begin by developing the outline of your community. Read over the community project requirements. Work on the Government and Economic system first.	**Checkpoint**: Submit your 10 rules/laws to Mrs. Carter for review. *Remember, your government and economic system MUST make sense*	
	Step 2: Complete the outline of the Economic portion of your community.	**Checkpoint**: Submit economic portion to be checked	
	Step 3: Complete the STEAL paragraph about your assigned roles in the community	**Checkpoint:** Turn your STEAL paragraph into Ms. Franko	
	Step 4: Work on your education and family portion of your project.	**Checkpoint**: Submit your education and family piece to be checked	
	Step 5: Finalize your community creation with the recreation and technology questions	**Checkpoint:** Submit the final piece to your teacher to be checked off	

	Step 6: Draw your map of your community with the requirements listed in the project description		
	Step 7: Develop your poster over government and economics. You must have a rough draft before you get poster board from your teacher.		
	Step 9: Develop your poster over education and family. You must have a rough draft before you get poster board from your teacher.		
	Step 10: Develop your poster over recreation and technology. You must have a rough draft before you get poster board from your teacher.	**Checkpoint**: Have your teacher check over all of your posters and your map of your community.	
	Step 11: Begin working on your preview/promo commercial promoting your community *remember, this will be your intro for your game room*	**Checkpoint:** Turn in essay to Mrs. Franko	
	Step 12: Get the Breakout Game development sheets to start planning your game room	**Checkpoint**: Turn in your sheets to be reviewed	
	Step 13: Have a run through of your breakout room	**Checkpoint**: small group testing of your breakout room	
	Step 14: I will present my breakout/escape room with my group to my peers.		
	Step 15: Do a video reflection and Self Assessment of your		

	work. (Reflect on your work throughout the unit. Self Assess using this rubric and submit to Google Classroom)		

	Learning Targets	Resources for Support	HELP!
	I can explain the difference in the various forms of government	Refer to your government/economics charts we did in class	
	I can explain the difference between parliamentary and presidential democracies	Crash Course - Difference between democracies	
	I can explain the differences in various economic systems.	Crash Course - Economics	
	I can explain the role of currency in a country		
	I can explain how government and economics work together in a country		
	I can explain a utopia and a dystopia		
	I can effectively present an argumentative essay		

	Key Terms You Need to Know by the End of the Unit

	Dictatorship Parliamentary democracy Presidential democracy Unitary government Federal government Economic Systems Bureaucrat Allies Enemies Border Agenda Delegate Economy Autocracy Oligarchy Evidence Statistics Diversity Treaties Constitution Stakeholders (interest groups) Taxes

APPENDIX K: PLAYLIST

Unit 8: Civil Rights

Start Date: **Due Date:**

Unit 8 Standards	Unit 8 Competencies
SS8H11: Evaluate the role of Georgia in the modern civil rights movement. a. Explain Georgia's response to Brown v. Board of Education including the 1956 flag and the Sibley Commission. b. Describe the role of individuals (Martin Luther King Jr. and John Lewis), groups (SNCC and SCLC), and events (Albany Movement and March on Washington) in the Civil Rights Movement. c. Explain the resistance to the 1964 Civil Rights Act, emphasizing the role of Lester Maddox.	**History:** Evaluate a variety of sources to apply knowledge of major eras, enduring themes, turning point and historic influences to analyze the forces of continuity and change in the community, the state, the United States, and the world.

LEARNING TARGETS
➔ I can explain Georgia's response to Brown v. Board of Education including the 1956 flag and the Sibley Commission. ➔ I can describe the role of Martin Luther King Jr., John Lewis, SNCC, SCLC, Albany Movement, and the March on Washington in the Civil Rights Movement. ➔ I can explain the resistance to the 1964 Civil Rights Act, emphasizing the role of Lester Maddox.

PEOPLE/TERMS for Unit 8				
1956 State Flag	Brown v. Board of Education	Sibley Commission	Albany Movement	Civil Rights Act (1964)
Martin Luther King Jr.	John Lewis	March on Washington	Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee	Lester Maddox

Unit 8 Must Do's & Resources!!	
Must Do's ★ Civil Rights PowerPoint ○ Cloze Notes ★ Reading Notes (Read through and take notes)	★ Textbook Glossary ★ Textbook Chapter 12 ★ GPB Online Textbook ★ Georgia Stories SS8H11

Unit 8 LEVEL 3

Pick **ONE** of the following…

- **Time Capsule**
  - Design a Civil Rights Time Capsule
    - 10-15 items that would help someone in the future learn about the movement.
    - Summarize and explain why you chose each item and why it's important
    - 1 paragraph explaining were our society is when it comes to Civil Rights
- **Journal**
  - Write a **SERIES** of journal entries as if you were a student living through these historical events during the Civil Rights Movement. Describe your thoughts and feelings of the events that occurred during this time period.
- Civil Rights A-Z Book
- Body Biography

POST-TEST

★ Take the Post-test
  - You must make an 80% on your Post-Test
    - If not, you will be required to complete an Odysseyware lesson before you can take the retake.