A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS IMPLEMENTATION AND THE INFLUENCE ON ACADEMIC MOTIVATION OF STUDENTS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASSES

by

Susan Diane Wright

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

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Abstract

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of English teachers and determine how implementing Common Core State Standards has influenced student motivation for middle school language arts students at Smith Middle School. Since the implementation of increased testing, changes in curriculum, and mandated instructional strategies, student motivation has declined in secondary students. The theory guiding this study was Dewey's theory of experience which explains that students should have individualized, challenging, real-world learning opportunities. Dewey's theory connected to this study of how the Common Core State Standards have changed the school's instructional model. The sample size was ten teachers at Smith Middle School, and data were collected using observations, interviews, and a focus group. All data was coded and analyzed for themes. The themes of boredom, real-world connections, curriculum narrowing, and the sub-themes of exhaustion, use of computer programs, testing, alternate grading, creativity, and teacher versus student-centered instruction were identified. There is a current need to revise CCSS, student curriculum, and instructional strategies involving real-world instruction based on data analysis and recommendations for future research.

Keywords: high-stakes testing, motivation, Common Core State Standards, curriculum

Copyright Page

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my three children because I want you to always reach for the stars and follow God in all things. I love you more than you will ever know, and I thank you for all of the joy that you bring to my heart each and every day.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to the many people who have guided and encouraged me along this journey. I could not have completed this study without the help of my fellow teachers, the encouragement from my principal, Karen Pittman, and the wonderful professors that I have had at Liberty University who inspired this research and made me excited to learn and grow in order to help students who are in classrooms learning each day.

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Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Students in modern classrooms are placed in the position to acquire high test scores, and teachers are tasked with the incredible job of making all students proficient by the end of the school year. Instructional strategies and test-prep materials are now integrated into an everyday part of the curriculum. Students are ranked according to their test scores, and teachers are expected to push students to a passing score each year. The influence of Common Core State Standards on students is beginning to be seen, and a decrease in motivation in students is also evident based on recent research (Gnambs & Hanfstingl, 2016; Hulleman & Hulleman, 2018; Odanga, 2018; Yu et al., 2018). Chapter One presents background information, the problem, and the purpose statement that shows how motivation has decreased in middle school students. This study is important because there is a need to show the main factors that are responsible for a decline in motivation in students since the implementation of high-stakes testing and Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Research questions and important definitions in Chapter One will reveal the process for understanding and developing a study to assist students, teachers, and school districts in finding out how to increase student motivation. The historical, social, and theoretical context of the research will be examined. The problem and purpose statements will be outlined, and the importance of the research will be explained. Research questions and definitions will lead to a summary of the chapter.

Background

The historical, social, and theoretical context of this research is revealed in this section. Problem development is also described. The background will reveal the stakeholders involved

and explain who is affected by the lack of middle school motivation related to Common Core Standards and high-stakes testing. In addition, other theories surrounding similar research on the same topic have been investigated.

Historical Context

With the passing of The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Lyndon Johnson began a period in history that shifted a federal focus to education; the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was passed by George Bush to make sure that all students were assessed with quality tests and that all schools were held accountable for what students made on the tests (Ellis, 2007). The curriculum was also addressed, and schools had to ensure that all instructional materials were rigorous and based on science (Ellis, 2007). For the first time since the 1960s, the federal government had a say in what was being taught in classrooms (Ellis, 2007). By 2004, the excitement about No Child Left Behind was decreasing since funds were not allocated as they were promised, and many people declared the law ineffective (Hess & Petrilli, 2007).

The main reason that No Child Left Behind was put into law was to close the widening gap of students who were not on grade level, and many supporters thought that an increase in resources would help teachers catch these students up to what the expected performance level was at each grade level (Hess & Petrilli, 2007). In the early 2000s, almost 200 billion dollars was used for school funding. The White House declared a need for increased reading funds, and there was also a call to address school culture (Hess & Petrilli, 2007). LaVenia et al. (2015) discussed that amid the call for change in the 2000s, politicians determined that the United States was not up to par with education as much as other countries were, and they felt that America was behind on education. They made new goals that addressed the need for national standards, and

governors placed the task of nation-wide standards with the individual states (LaVenia et al., 2015).

In 2009, Common Core State Standards emerged, and by 2011, almost all states accepted them (LaVenia et al., 2015). The Common Core State Standards are rigorous standards that students should master in each grade, and the goal of these standards was to raise expectations for teaching and to prepare students for college and careers (LaVenia et al., 2015). High test scores brought money for states after this adoption, and states pushed for more rigor and common assessments (LaVenia et al., 2015). These standards are particularly challenging, but researchers argue that teachers interpret them differently; states are using many assessments to determine if students master standards throughout the year, but reviews have found that these tests often do not match the intent of the standards (Massell & Perrault, 2014). Schools are judged based on the grades that students get at the end of the year on state tests, but the available curriculum does not always match the standards or give students challenging questions (Choppin et al., 2022). Schools whose students do not perform proficiently on tests can be placed on a plan of reform if their scores do not improve (Nahar et al., 2022).

Overall, the change to a more federally mandated education system rather than one controlled by states and school districts led the way for the adoption of the Common Core State Standards. Students are tested more than ever, and schools push challenging standards and more tests on students in order to have high test scores at the end of the school year (Massell & Perrault, 2014). Rebarber and the Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research (2020) discussed that years after implementing Common Core State Standards, schools are showing a decline in learning, and student motivation is being questioned. The decline shows that more educational

reform is needed, yet many reformers are hesitant to admit that these policies do not work for students (Rebarber & the Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research, 2020).

Social Context

Research impacts society as a whole because its implications can have far-reaching effects on the educational system and influence educators, students, and community stakeholders. Education systems are being affected by a lack of motivation in students in academic areas because Common Core State Standards focus on standardized testing and not real-world opportunities for learning (Mebert et al., 2020). Students who are interested and engaged are motivated, and a lack of real-world learning activities and supportive classroom culture can negatively impact student learning. Schools are having to add additional social and emotional learning standards because the current curriculum and instructional strategies that most schools use do not take into account all of the needs of students (Balfanz & Whitehurst, 2019). When students go out into society, they must be able to make connections with real-world situations and be motivated about life to be successful and productive individuals.

Determining the most important motivating factor in middle school students in English language classes will not only help students succeed in school but also help them to be productive members of society. If students move from grade level to grade level each year and never feel motivated or confident, this could translate to future societal challenges. If students are to be lifelong learners and readers, schools must determine the best way to academically challenge students and motivate them to be excited about being in class each day (Wilhelm & Smith, 2014).

Students could risk being sent out into the workforce without the necessary academic skills that they need because they are not motivated in the classroom. Employers have voiced

concern that students are entering the workforce without the necessary skills to interact with others; they also found that they cannot analyze information or synthesize data (Carbone & Ware, 2017). Analysis is an academic skill that students lack, and studies also point out that students fail to connect skills with real-life scenarios (Carbone & Ware, 2017). This deficit could impact society because students will transition from school to job training. If students do not have the ability to analyze and think critically, they could encounter difficulty in obtaining jobs. Teachers and students can benefit from this study because teachers need to know the best ways to motivate students, and students need to feel motivated to do their best in the classroom.

Theoretical Context

Progressivism can be better understood by first looking at the forerunners of this theory, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. John Locke was a philosopher in the 17th century, and he was not a supporter of classical education because he believed that children should be able to value their curious instincts and investigate nature through curiosity and molded learning (Gregoriou & Papastephanou, 2013). Rousseau followed Locke's ideas, and he believed that children were innately born with a natural instinct for learning (Peckover, 2012). He believed that children should focus on specific interests and the combination of nature, man, and knowledge gained from interacting with personal interests (Peckover, 2012). Rousseau pushed the idea that students who used nature as a guide for education instead of what teachers instructed in classrooms were more independent (Peckover, 2012). In the late 1800s, Progressivism was first advocated for by Rousseau, who described progressive education as being focused on the student and based on nature (Garte, 2017). The teacher was a guide to students in Progressivism, and there was a focus on the unique interests of the child by embracing real-world jobs in combination with a college education (Garte, 2017). These

theoretical beliefs empowered men to lay the foundation for more modern-day theorists, and these ideas have sparked much debate between educators and policymakers.

Problem Statement

The problem is that Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and high-stakes testing have challenged students to meet expectations that are unattainable because standards are grade levels off from where they should fall each year; as a result, students would rather drop out and give up than be motivated to try to make good grades (Ogbonna, 2020). The CCSS were executed too quickly, and this rush contributed to inadequate training and mixed messages about how the standards should be used and implemented by teachers. Teaching to the test and focusing on standardized test preparation has helped students only in the short term, and struggling students earn lower grades in college when instructional materials focus on test preparation (Benden & Lauermann, 2022). Jansen et al. (2022) also showed the most important items that affect student motivation are the teacher, classroom management, and instructional methods. Motivation in the classroom is not increased by rewards (Emerson, 2022; Rahiem, 2021). These studies show many possible reasons for a decrease in student motivation in the classroom. There are many studies that show decreased motivation, but not many that identify the exact reasons for a decrease in motivation in the classroom in recent years since common core (Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Hulleman & Hulleman, 2018; Karp, 2020; Polleck & Jeffery, 2017; Wijsman et al., 2016).

This problem impacts teachers because they have less control over their lessons and cannot differentiate to teach all students in the classroom (Padgett, 2022). Students do not have as many chances to experience a lesson that covers the entire scope of their comprehension and understanding (Padgett, 2022). Teacher curriculum options are narrowed by CCSS, and student choice is not included in many CCSS lessons (Padgett, 2022). Common core lessons lack

opportunities for differentiation, and being able to differentiate is a necessary component for meeting all student's needs (Swanson et al., 2020). Failure to address this issue could result in lowered student motivation because many standards are too rigorous and do not allow for teacher expansion or scaffolding.

There is a need for a study focusing on teacher implementation of the CCSS and how that influences student motivation, primarily because of a decrease in students in middle school years in tested areas like English language arts. The problem is that a lack of motivation in the classroom will not be improved unless the reason is determined and corrected. This problem should be investigated because identifying the experiences of teachers and students will help policymakers, departments of education, school districts, individual schools, and all other stakeholders to best determine how to motivate students in middle school English classrooms since many states have decided to keep CCSS for the intended educational blueprint for classroom teachers. Many studies have identified possible ways to improve motivation, but there are few studies that look at the whole picture of CCSS factors that influence motivation, curriculum, instructional strategies, and ways to improve motivation in a combined effort to determine the best ways to help middle school students improve motivation that is in schools where school districts require CCSS (Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Hulleman & Hulleman, 2018).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of English teachers and determine how implementing Common Core State Standards has led to the development of a decrease in student motivation for middle school language arts students at Smith Middle School. At this stage in the research, high-stakes testing will be

generally defined as tests that have a positive or negative result associated with them for students, schools, and teachers (Ritt, 2016).

Significance of the Study

Theoretical

Many theories have influenced modern thinking and led to progressive education and the formation of CCSS. Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection opened the eyes of many philosophers with a connection between learning and the natural world (Popp, 2007). Darwin identified a strong connection between science and nature, and he believed that people were progressive in their connection with learning about nature. Darwin's theory of natural selection focused on how people have grown and changed over time as a result of contact with nature, and the idea of progressivism follows that a connection between meaningful learning and the mind increases academic learning and understanding. William James was another theorist who impacted progressivism. He thought that a link between life and one's own interests was essential to learning and contributing to the world (Türer, 2008). James believed that education should be connected to nature and the interests of the student in order for an authentic learning experience to occur. He also emphasized the connection between education and science that led to creativity and individualistic learning through a connection with the real world. These men helped progressivism to emerge, and they led the way for student-centered instruction and a focus on the individual student.

Later, the theory of change emerged in the 1990s, and it was promoted by Carol Weiss (Weiss, 1995). The theory of change influenced lawmakers to initiate the formation of the Common Core State Standards because this theory focuses on change and mapping out a logical process for change to be researched and revisited as data guides people (Reinholz & Andrews,

2020). The theory of change was used because national policy was enacted to ensure that all students in all states had equal standards; the theory backed the need and process for changing the standards (Deas, 2018). Many plans that are formed on this basis do not succeed because the theory does not refer to already existing ideas that researchers have developed, and the process of including the results of a hypothesis and data that are based on the theory of change in current research can be challenging (Reinholz & Andrews, 2020). Ultimately, this theory can help with change, but using it as a main guiding feature of research is difficult.

Empirical

Many studies have shown a clear decrease in motivation in students when they enter middle school (Gnambs & Hanfstingl, 2016; Hulleman & Hulleman, 2018; Odanga, 2018; Yu et al., 2018). Other studies have shown that high-stakes testing further decreases student motivation and is directly linked with what students learn and how they learn in the classroom (Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Hulleman & Hulleman, 2018; Karp, 2020; Polleck & Jeffery, 2017; Wijsman et al., 2016). There are many reasons why motivation could decline more in students which are directly connected to the school district, teachers, and students themselves (Carrabba & Farmer, 2018). There is a need to determine what has the most influence on motivation between the teacher, curriculum, instructional strategies, and the standards that students learn. This will benefit stakeholders because it will help them to make informed decisions on the best instructional strategies, curriculum, training, and motivational strategies to implement in schools. There are few research studies on the influence of CCSS, high-stakes testing, and instructional strategies connected to motivation, and not much is known about how teachers impact motivation over a period of time for students (Wentzel et al., 2016).

Practical

The knowledge obtained from the study will help school districts, teachers, and students in order to determine how to help students best and inspire them to be motivated each day at school. Middle school reading has shown a decrease in fourth graders and up since 2001 because of a lack of choice and variety in books offered by school districts, and reading has been shown to correlate with motivation and a positive outlook on education (Hooper & International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 2020). Students are also not reading long texts because of the push for short articles and passages that mimic testing passages (Baron & Mangen, 2021). Despite the push for rigor, some teachers now give students reading passages that are not challenging (Baron & Mangen, 2021). Students in English classes should be inspired and motivated, and ways to increase student will and motivation should be researched because students are bored in class (Furlong, 2021). Studies show that middle school students across America are now measured by their test performance instead of who they are as individuals; boredom and a lack of motivation result from the way students are taught (Furlong, 2021; Mora, 2011). This evaluation impacts students in all secondary classes and is spilling into their college experiences because students are entering college without the necessary academic skills to succeed (Lane et al., 2020).

Research Questions

Using the proposed research questions, I sought to describe the reason for a decline in student motivation from a middle school English teacher perspective. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the central research question should be open for revision and should repeat the central purpose of the study. This researcher sought to determine the reasons behind a decline in

student motivation by addressing student motivation, common core testing, curriculum, and instruction.

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of teachers regarding decreased academic student motivation in connection the implementation of the CCSS in English classrooms?

Sub-Question One

How do English teachers motivate students in the classroom while implementing the CCSS?

Sub-Question Two

How does incorporating test-preparation questions and other types of assessments influence student motivation and inclination to learn?

Sub-Question Three

Besides using worksheets, what other methods are beneficial to prepare students for testing?

Definitions

Terms pertinent to the study should be understood in order to fully understand the scope and meaning of the research. The following terms are important and supported by literature:

1. *High-stakes testing* – High-stakes testing consists of tests that have a positive or negative result associated with them for students, schools, and teachers (Ritt, 2016).
2. *Progressive education*– Progressive education is the opposite of traditional instruction that sets standards, topics of study, and instructional strategies (Dewey, 1938).

3. *Common Core State Standards*– Common Core State Standards are nation-wide standards that explain the information, abilities, and topics that all schools should follow to prepare students for the future (LaVenia et al., 2015).
4. *Curriculum*– Curriculum is what students learn and what is communicated by the teacher (Flake, 2017).
5. *Instructional strategies*– Instructional strategies are the methods by which the curriculum is taught to students and actually executed on a daily basis (Flake, 2017).
6. *Cooperative learning*– Cooperative learning is an instructional strategy where students interact and collaborate together to work towards mastery of a task or standard (Sugano & Mamolo, 2021).
7. *Motivation*– Motivation is the rationale for behaviors that are formed because of the perseverance of a person's stamina and drive (Alley, 2019).

Summary

In recent years, student motivation and desire to learn have decreased, and there is a connection between the decrease and high-stakes testing (Amrein & Berliner, 2003). The problem is that Common Core State Standards have challenged students to meet expectations that are unattainable for all students because standards are grade levels off from where they should fall each year; as a result, students would rather give up than be motivated to try hard to make good grades (Headden et al., 2015). The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to determine the lived experiences of English teachers and to discover how the implementation of Common Core State Standards has influenced student motivation for middle school language arts students.

There are many main reasons behind this issue, but the goal was to examine the lived experiences of teachers to determine factors that impart motivation. This study is significant because the decrease in motivation in middle school students in English classes is not improving; in order for students to be proud of their work, they need to be motivated to use higher-level thinking skills and to relate to the world (Wijsman et al., 2016). The theoretical significance of the study was to contribute to the existing literature in support of Dewey's theory of experience and to add key factors about student motivation and testing. The ideas of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau were also crucial to Dewey's ideas of Progressivism; Charles Darwin and William James influenced Dewey in the areas of science and the natural world, leading to his focus on student-centered learning and real-world application. The theory of experience emerged from Dewey's study of the real world, and this theoretical idea guided the study of the lived experiences of teachers to determine motivating factors in the classroom.

The empirical significance of the study was that research has shown that students have a decline in motivation in secondary classes and that the lack of motivation is connected to high-stakes testing (Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Hulleman & Hulleman, 2018; Karp, 2020; Polleck & Jeffery, 2017; Wijsman et al., 2016). If educators know this, there is a need to determine factors for the decrease regarding academics. The practical significance of the study was that if educators do not determine ways to help with student motivation, students will continue to just get by in their classes and be happy with mediocrity. If students are not challenged with things that interest them in the classroom, educators will continue to see a decline in motivation. The research questions were derived from a gap in the literature and helped to enable productive conversation all stakeholders in districts can embrace in order to motivate students now as they are in middle school and to help them be successful members of society in the future.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of the literature was conducted to explore the correlation of high-stakes testing and student motivation. This chapter presents a review of the current literature related to the topic of study. In the first section, the theories relevant to student motivation, the theory of progressivism, and the theory of experience are discussed, followed by a synthesis of recent literature regarding high-stakes testing, factors influencing motivation, curriculum, and instructional strategies. Next, the literature surrounding the factors that lead to the development of successful motivation is addressed. In the end, a gap in the literature is identified, presenting a viable need for the current study.

Theoretical Framework

In order to fully understand the progression of education as a system and the current thought patterns of testing, one must understand the educational theories that have paved the way for modern education. Learning that embraces creativity and connecting to the world began in the early 1900s and still exists today. John Dewey's (1916) ideas of progressivism and his theory of experience focus on the student and his connection with society.

Progressivism

Educational theorists have taught for years that students should learn to be problem-solvers, but the current educational mindset is that students should rise to already set standards; John Dewey argued that students would willingly have a desire to learn if they were able to have some control of their learning and the end goal (Peel, 2014). John Dewey was the founder of progressivism, a theory that embraces the individuality and creativity of the learner. Dewey

(1916) believed that students learned from interacting with the environment socially, and the classroom was a place for students to focus on real-world investigations of interests. In Dewey's original work, he discussed the importance of the student learning by scaffolding and connecting with other information, and he believed that curriculum should be found in the culture of the time period (Dewey, 1916). Williams (2017) pointed out that CCSS brings the focus of progressivism away from the classroom, and he discusses that Dewey thought overloading students with too much work could be considered unethical. The Common Core State Standards and the push for high-stakes testing embrace the opposite viewpoints of this model, and ~~they~~ focus on teacher-centered instruction (Passman, 2000). It is important to examine why education has fallen away from many of his views and the need for change to ensure that students are being challenged to show their creativity and individuality.

Dewey argued that students needed real learning experiences that they could relate to, but the new standards that students are required to master each year are based on activities that do not connect students with these learning tasks in reading and writing (Wright et al., 2020). Schools have been given exemplar texts and writing assignments that guide instruction, but these texts and assignments are not good quality, and they teach students that those models are the only correct way of answering questions, thinking, and writing (Peel, 2014). Now, instead of educating the student, the student is placed in an expected role to perform and attain high scores (Peel, 2014).

Because of an increase in testing and teaching to the test, many educators have reverted back to a more traditional style of instruction instead of embracing Progressivism (Williams, 2017). This study will contribute to the existing literature on Dewey and the need for students to interact socially in real-world learning situations. The research on student motivation contributes

to Dewey's theory of experience because it shows that there is a strong connection between high motivation and learning through real-world experiences. Curriculum and instructional methods could factor into how students respond to the content that they are required to learn (Williams, 2017). Dewey explained with his theory of experience that students in classrooms could have "an experience," or they could just experience instruction by being in the class; the difference between the two was that having "an experience" was a positive, enjoyable moment that resulted in an increase (Stark, 2020). Dewey said that grit resulted from experiences, culminating in greater motivation and belief in oneself (Seaman, 2019). If schools are taking out these experiences because of increased testing, that is one possible explanation for the decrease in student motivation.

Theory of Experience

Dewey's (1916) theory of experience focused on the connection that academics had with the future career and education of the student. Learning should be individualized in the eyes of Dewey, and it should connect with society (Berding, 1997). This theory explains that students should have learning experiences that connect with the real world and tie in with the curriculum that is taught in the classroom (Berding, 1997). Dewey (1916) thought that students should not be forced to learn one set curriculum, and he believed this would grow the individual child. He believed students should actively participate in class and not merely sit at desks all day long (Berding, 1997). Williams (2017) discusses that many of Dewey's ideas increased engagement and excitement associated with learning in the classroom. He thought that life should always progress forward, and this happened in class when students learned new information that was not routine or a forced activity (Dewey, 1916). Experience was seen as something that is not planned, but it was the result of authentic learning by the student (Berding, 1997).

Together, progressivism and the theory of experience form an educational plan to motivate and inspire students in the classroom. Students will not spend the rest of their lives in the classroom and should be taught how to function and work in society alongside academics; this combination increases motivation because students see how the academic part of the class will aid in their lifelong career path. Guo et al. (2016) studied incorporating traditional teaching with a combination of community learning. The study showed that this concept of teaching increased student engagement and motivation because students were actively engaged in problem-solving and real community connections (Guo et al., 2016). Huang and Jiang (2021) also conducted a study to examine assessments that connected with the real world. Their study revealed that authentic assessment gives students a bridge between school and their future involvement in society (Huang & Jiang, 2021). Students should be involved in creating assessments that have authentic connections to society and their future careers (Guo et al., 2016; Huang & Jiang, 2021). When learning is not centered around the student, memorization and test preparation become the focus of the class (Towler, 2014). As a result, students become frustrated and unmotivated to learn and get good grades. The theory of experience can be advanced to reveal how students are affected by high-stakes testing and how the theory could improve schools that focus on teaching to the test and teacher-centered learning since the implementation of Common Core State Standards.

Related Literature

Despite the push for progressive learning, the implementation of Common Core State Standards and increased testing have forced experienced teachers to use a one-size-fits-all curriculum for students that leaves them frustrated and unable to meet the needs of all students (Ellis, 2007). The push for high-stakes testing has led to decreased student motivation and

problems with curriculum (Amrein & Berliner, 2003). Instructional strategies have changed towards more teacher-led instruction, which has caused a decrease in student engagement (Neugebauer & Gilmour, 2020). Even though all of these problems exist, there are many different motivational strategies that could help students in the classroom.

High-Stakes Testing

High-stakes testing is testing that has a positive or a negative consequence attached to it for schools, students, and teachers (Ritt, 2016). For schools, high test scores bring recognition and avoidance of being flagged for improvement by state departments of education. Teachers have found that high scores equal bonuses, better teacher evaluations, and recognition by stakeholders (Ritt, 2016). High test scores mean rewards, avoidance of tier placement for remediation, and good grades for students (Ritt, 2016). Rebarber and the Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research (2020) discovered that since the implementation of Common Core State Standards (2010), the United States now has the first decrease in student progress since the beginning of student testing; students are not learning, and students in the bottom twenty-fifth and tenth percentile are struggling the most. High-stakes testing has not produced an increase in student learning, and the rush to obtain high scores by districts is harming students and education for the future since it is causing a decrease in motivation and students who lack needed instructional knowledge (Amrein & Berliner, 2003). Breiner (2015) discussed the need to investigate how testing impacts student motivation.

Minarechová (2012) conducted a study to look at the negative effects of high-stakes testing. The study showed that high-stakes testing brings the mindset that grades are not important to students, and it causes aggravation and less effort in academics (Minarechová, 2012). High-stakes testing also impacts teachers because it can connect to incorrect test

preparation, and it lessens the value and worth of the teacher as a tool in the classroom (Minarechová, 2012). Moses and Nanna (2007) point out that high-stakes testing causes fewer chances for a good education for some students, and the pressure of the tests results in a lessening of student motivation and worth. Learned et al. (2020) conducted a study for a year that examined viewpoints and experiences with high-stakes testing, and the study showed that the tests stopped progress in literacy and academics. Au and Gourd (2013) discuss that high-stakes testing has stopped some English teachers from being able to encourage free writing in the classroom and has turned writing into forcing students to focus on structured, five-paragraph essays. Testing has also created a disconnect between reading and writing instruction because of the need for drill testing (Au & Gourd, 2013).

Teaching to the Test

High-stakes testing has caused the Common Core State Standards to be seen as less important in terms of instruction and more important in terms of how instruction is driven to look based on standardized tests (Polleck & Jeffery, 2017). A study was conducted that compared English standardized tests of students in secondary education and students in English college classes; results showed that the college-level tests were easier and less rigorous than the tests that students in public school were required to complete (Polleck & Jeffery, 2017). The difficulty of the tests has influenced teaching to the test; Amrein and Berliner (2003) point out that high-stakes testing causes standards not focused on or seen as main standards to be eliminated from the class content. Instructional time is only spent on activities that students will see on a test, and test preparation turns into drills and causes students to have decreased motivation (Amrein & Berliner, 2003). Teaching to the test only provides short-term results, and students who struggle in high school earn lower grades in college (Sonnert et al., 2019). Teaching to the test eliminates

knowledge that is below surface level and focuses on facts that are given by a teacher (O'Connor & McTaggart, 2017).

There are several different ways that teachers teach to the test. First, teachers give assignments and student homework that is in the form of questions that are on tests (Zakharov & Carnoy, 2021). Second, teachers give students practice assessments at an increased frequency (Zakharov & Carnoy, 2021). Third, many teachers are instructed to focus only on big-ticket standards that give students the most points on state tests (Sonnert et al., 2019). Teachers only focus on tested material in lesson plans in some schools, and this is in response to the anxiety and stress that teachers are feeling to have high scores; students are instructed as part of the lesson on how to take a test because surface-level instruction has been taught in class, but the actual process of taking the test requires critical thinking and analysis that students lack (King & Zucker, 2005, as cited in O'Connor & McTaggart, 2017).

Teacher Impact on Student Motivation

Yilmaz et al. (2017) explain that the teacher's instructional strategies influence the classroom culture and also impact student motivation. The teacher should use appealing and interesting teaching methods, and students should have some choice over what they learn in the classroom (Yilmaz et al., 2017). Polleck and Jeffery (2017) discuss that teachers put more importance on tested material and point out that high-stakes tests are often misaligned with the real purpose of the Common Core standards. Teachers feel pressure from administrators on high-stakes instruction, and they cannot build lasting relationships with students (Ritt, 2016).

Teachers can also impact student motivation in other ways. Tam et al. (2020) conducted a study to see if teacher boredom could impact student motivation in the classroom; middle school students and teachers were sampled, and they filled out questionnaires over a period of ten days

that identified teacher boredom, student boredom, and class motivation. Results showed that if the students thought that the teachers were bored, they were also bored in class; there was a direct impact on students from how the teacher was in class (Tam et al., 2020). When students think that teachers are bored, they can view school as meaningless; teachers who do not inspire and engage students can decrease student motivation (Budasi et al., 2020). When teachers are bored in class, student motivation decreases (Singh, 2021; Tam et al., 2020). As one can see, there could be an impact on motivation that stems directly from the teacher.

Testing Impact on Student Motivation

High-stakes testing can have a lasting effect on students; Hulleman and Hulleman (2018) point out that student motivation decreases as students enter secondary education. Motivation predicts what students will achieve in school (Hulleman & Hulleman, 2018). This decrease could be caused by increased high-stakes tests that students are required to take in middle and high school (Amrein & Berliner, 2003). Polleck and Jeffery (2017) showed that students sit in classrooms and work on more rigorous assignments than students in some college classes. Rigor is important, but when assignments are too difficult, student motivation can decline (Karp, 2020). Students need a curriculum that has a connection with their future and the real world (Wijsman et al., 2016). Motivation decreases when students have no interest in the subject; a value intervention at the University of Virginia was developed, and the intervention has shown that if what students learn in the classroom connects with a part of their life, like future plans and passions, motivation ceases to decline (Hulleman & Hulleman, 2018).

Before Common Core State Standards, students were accustomed to taking one big assessment, but now, students in some classrooms work on standards-based material daily; this can lead to a decrease in student motivation because some students lose trust in themselves in

class each day (Harlen & Crick, 2003). Kellaghan et al. (1996) have suggested that the true impact of testing on students is a result of many different complicated components, and they suggest that motivation is not a simple factor to determine. They suggest that motivation is not a one-size-fits-all concept at all, and a strategy used to motivate one student could, in fact, have the opposite effect on another student (Farmer, 2018; Kellaghan et al., 1996). A study was conducted that showed student motivation can decrease because tests can become meaningless through the process of the teacher teaching the test; teachers can actually instruct students on how to correctly answer assessment items without ever having taught the students the actual material that is covered on the test (Gordon & Reese, 1997, as cited in Harlen & Crick, 2003). Tests are ultimately designed to assess students' ability to analyze and interpret information; however, students can be taught how to answer assessment questions without any needed background information (Gordon & Reese, 1997, as cited in Harlen & Crick, 2003). This takes away the need for students to be involved in meaningful instruction from the teacher, and it causes decreased motivation because instruction has no meaning if students can answer questions only from teacher-led methods to master a test (Harlen & Crick, 2003).

Factors Impacting Motivation

There are many different factors that can impact student motivation in the classroom. These factors can lead to a positive experience with good grades and high motivation, but all students are different, and what causes a student to be or not be motivated in the classroom is different for each individual student. One has to take into consideration all of these aspects when investigating student accomplishments and inspiration.

Predictors of Success

There are many factors impacting motivation, and one of them would be student success in school. Bureau et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis of over 144 studies and over 79,000 students that looked at student motivation in terms of needs and the most significant predictors of student success and motivation. High-stakes testing was identified as something that could pressure teachers; this could then limit teacher assistance in the classroom (Bureau et al., 2021). Limited assistance in the classroom can decrease teacher availability, which was identified as a factor for decreased motivation in students (Bureau et al., 2021). Another factor, teacher support, was also identified as being more important than parental support for classroom motivation, and competence was determined as the number one indication of self-led motivation in students (Bureau et al., 2021). Mahler et al. (2018) conducted a study that showed student performance was positively linked to the teacher's eagerness to teach the material, and they concluded that pre-service classes should also work to add to teacher motivation and connection with the subject.

Deci et al. (1996) describe internal motivation and external motivation as indicators of success in school. Intrinsic motivation is when a person does something because they are intrigued by interest and nothing more; they complete a task for amusement and pleasure (Deci et al., 1996). Extrinsic motivation is when a person completes something for compensation or approval (Deci et al., 1996). Predictions of student success in school are based on intrinsic motivation, and when students learn to base motivation on extrinsic motivation, their success decreases (Deci et al., 1996). Research has shown that students who have fully grasped intrinsic motivation have better experiences with learning and higher motivation in learning (Deci et al., 1996). Reeve et al. (2020) discuss that agentic learning is a type of active, intrinsic learning where students take the necessary steps to be active learners who are in control of their

education. These learners have higher motivation and progress better in the classroom (Reeve et al., 2020).

Studies have shown that students in middle school language classes who enjoyed learning scored high on tests, but students who completed work for other reasons did not score high on assessments (Mucherah & Yoder, 2008). Research has shown that having the ability to motivate students should be a top priority for teachers, and when students just complete assignments for no attached reason, they score lower on assessments that are on the same skill (Mucherah & Yoder, 2008). The self-determination theory has been used in previous research; it follows the idea that every person born has the same ability for growth in areas of innate motivation and inquisitiveness that allow for beneficial classroom experiences (Alley, 2019; Carrabba & Farmer, 2018; Gnambs & Hanfstingl, 2016; Kickert et al., 2022).

Determining Circumstances

Student motivation is contingent on many different determining factors. Recently, students have indicated that they remain motivated to learn when they form their own goals, and tangible rewards do not always motivate students to do better in the classroom (Rahiem, 2021). Other students have said that the teacher, the way the classroom is conducted, and instructional strategies are what motivate and drive them to do their best (Yilmaz et al., 2017). Competence has also been identified as the number one indication of self-led motivation in students (Bureau et al., 2021). Teacher support has been identified as more important than parental support for classroom motivation, and high-stakes testing was seen as something that could pressure teachers, lead to less support in the classroom, and cause decreased student motivation (Bureau et al., 2021). For other students, entering middle school begins several years where they feel unattached to the curriculum, and there does not seem to be a connection with the beneficial

subject matter (Wijsman et al., 2016). Students can be motivated to learn in pre-tests, but their motivation has been shown to decrease in high-stakes post-tests because they did not think that the material was a good representation of instruction (Dawadi, 2020).

Middle school girls usually have better performance in school than middle school boys, and the reason for this seems to be that boys in this age category have less control and discipline (Ullah & Ullah, 2019; Wijsman et al., 2016). This is true for boys and girls in this age category globally (Ullah & Ullah, 2019). The ability level between boys and girls did not show variance in research (Wijsman et al., 2016). A study by Wijsman et al. (2016) showed that girls begin at a higher academic level, and both boys and girls decrease academically at the same level. This is what creates higher performance in girls despite an academic decline of the same rate in middle school grades (Wijsman et al., 2016). This decline is the result of a lowering of motivation in middle school in combination with the viewpoint that school is not beneficial to students because it has no relevance (Wijsman et al., 2016).

Grades

Student grades could be a determining factor for motivation; however, many teachers now see students who make good grades experience less motivation than those who make low grades. A recent study showed that higher grades did not increase academic motivation; they enhanced student anxiety and decreased enrollment in upper-level classes (Chamberlin et al., 2018). The narratives showed that strong relationships, good feedback and reflection, and the feeling that students could believe in and trust instructors showed higher motivation in students (Chamberlin et al., 2018). This showed that alternative ways of grading students should be examined and that grades are not necessarily the determining factor for whether students actually learn. Students who make good grades in school because of a teacher who teaches to the test

actually make lower grades in college because they do not remember the material (Sonnert et al., 2019).

The importance of grades in middle school could have a connection with the fact that classes are increasingly teacher-centered in middle school, making students frustrated with fewer options for learning (Kiefer and Pennington 2017, as cited in Morris & Barton, 2022). Students in middle school would rather have grading that allows them to make mistakes and gives them options for learning (Morris & Barton, 2022). When students feel that they can make a grade that is not a one-hundred and have the opportunity to correct mistakes, they feel more motivated and assertive (Chamberlin et al., 2018; Morris & Barton, 2022). Students have also reported not understanding why they were given a certain grade and feeling unmotivated because the feedback on assignments was confusing (Chamberlin et al., 2018).

Learned Helplessness

Learned helplessness that is related to school is when a student is unmotivated and not connected with instruction in the classroom; this could be because the student has experienced failure or a traumatic event (Ghasemi & Karimi, 2021). When a student experiences this failure multiple times, he could relate them to consistent, unmanageable inner characteristics (Ghasemi & Karimi, 2021). All students, at one time or another, have dealt with a bad grade or failure in some way, but some students view the failure as irreparable (Ghasemi & Karimi, 2021). When a student feels worthless and unintelligent over and over, this could cause the student to believe that he is incapable of making good grades and doing well in classes (Ghasemi & Karimi, 2021).

Teachers who recognize this behavior can differentiate lessons in the classroom to allow the student to feel self-worth; this can allow the student to see that he is in control of his learning (Sorrenti et al., 2018). When educators do not see students as stuck in one grade category or

performance level, their views of students do not hinder the self-worth of the students (Ghasemi & Karimi, 2021). Teacher motivation is the top choice for intervention connected to learned helplessness because motivation is the pivotal lost part of learned helplessness (Ghasemi & Karimi, 2021). When standards are being taught in the classroom in a strict, scripted way, students do not have the opportunity to embrace learning and to have fun; the push to teach the test could cause students to develop learned helplessness (Pietromonaco, 2021). Eighty-two students were examined over the course of two years from third to fifth grade using indexes called the Text Comfort Index, Intellectual Achievement Responsibility Scale, Children's Ability-Effort Scale, and a checklist for learned helplessness; these indexes showed that a connection does exist between testing and learned helplessness (Pietromonaco, 2021). High-stakes testing can cause and exacerbate learned helplessness in students (Ghasemi & Karimi, 2021; Pietromonaco, 2021; Sorrenti et al., 2018).

Curriculum

Since the CCSS were implemented and led to an increase of high-stakes testing, the curriculum has changed too. The intent of the standards was for them to be given to teachers who would receive guidance and instructional materials that were aligned with the standards; the problem with this is that many stakeholders did not follow through and guide teachers (Choppin et al., 2022). Many schools do not have updated curriculum that fits the pacing and standards that teachers are supposed to teach during the school year (Choppin et al., 2022; Pak-Harvey, 2015). So, teachers are pulling their own materials and having to write their own curriculum to use. Many districts have told teachers to teach only what will be on the state tests and to focus only on the structure of the questions that students will see when they are assessed (Ritt, 2016). The

entire way the classroom functions has changed recently, and student motivation could be tied to this issue.

Narrowing of Curriculum

Narrowing of the curriculum is occurring in many classrooms because of high-stakes testing. Subjects that are not tested are not being taught, and even tested subject material is narrowed to focus on what will be on a test (Ritt, 2016). Studies show that high-stakes testing causes issues with curriculum because students are taught how to take tests instead of using their creativity and learning how to solve real-world problems (Ritt, 2016). Creativity can be tied with motivation because allowing students to use their creativity in class increases self-motivation. In the English classroom, reading takes precedence, and areas like writing and higher-level skills are ignored (O'Connor & McTaggart, 2017; Ritt, 2016). Narrowing affects students in low-income areas in different ways because, many times, the students in these areas struggle and do not have the necessary background information to understand the grade-level standards being taught (O'Connor & McTaggart, 2017). With standardized testing, the test is often transformed into the material being taught in the classroom (Merchant et al., 2020). Curriculum is not just tested material; engagement is tied to what students learn and their experience in class (Ritt, 2016).

Researchers have found that also narrowing other subjects like social studies and science in order to have more time for math and English actually impacts reading comprehension and makes students further behind in classes (Jerald, 2006). Students gain valuable reading comprehension skills in elementary and middle school science and social studies classes, and taking them away in order to focus on tested areas decreases student vocabulary and reading ability (Jerald, 2006). Psychologists who have studied cognitive skills have found a link that

separates comprehension and working out how to break apart words fluently; these are skills that students gain in classes that are being cut in many schools (Jerald, 2006). Giving students fewer chances to be great at something in school classes decreases student motivation and increases behavior problems (Berliner, 2011). Background information and scaffolded skills are being lost or not retained by students because of a narrow curriculum, and this creates a problem with the future retention of necessary prerequisite skills for completing assignments (Berliner, 2011).

Worksheet Overuse

In order to make sure that standards are being taught, many teachers use worksheets daily; many times, these worksheets are formatted with questions that match the structure of state tests. Teachers use memorization and worksheet overload to teach to the test (Brown, 2019). Worksheets focusing on higher-level skills have been proven to benefit students, but many times teachers do not use them because they are not creative thinkers (Kahar et al., 2021). Worksheets should be used to supplement the curriculum, but many teachers use them as the curriculum (Kahar et al., 2021). Students find too many worksheets boring, and they have no desire to complete them in the classroom (Lee, 2014). Worksheets are often not written to fully help students because they are not put together in student-friendly ways, only skim the surface of a learning standard, and are not fully effective for students to learn (Fajriah & Suryaningsih, 2020). Worksheets that do not go through the entire learning process can confuse students; they can motivate students, but they have to be formatted in a way that makes sense to the student (Fajriah & Suryaningsih, 2020).

Many worksheets that teachers use are inept at fully explaining and covering standards that students have to master, and many teachers do not use them in a way that benefits students (Lee, 2014). Worksheets that are effective function as graphic organizers and scaffolding tools

and have the ability to allow students to move from one task to another without interruption (Lee, 2014). Struggling students will only grow with worksheets if they begin at a low level and increase in difficulty and reading skills as the students show progress (Lee, 2014). Worksheets should cause students to be active learners, and they should embrace constructivism to allow students to use creativity and background knowledge to effectively research and answer questions (Fajriah & Suryaningsih, 2020).

Supplemental Teaching Materials

The Common Core State Standards have resulted in an increase in supplemental instructional websites that offer teaching materials for educators that act as time-savers for classroom planning (Silver, 2022). The largest platform for instructional materials is Teachers Pay Teachers; this site allows teachers to buy and sell instructional materials that match the standards they teach each year (Harris et al., 2021; Silver, 2022). The problem with this site and many other sites is that many of the resources are not the rigorous, standard-aligned materials that they boast to be at all; they are not good quality resources, and many teachers use materials from these sites with the mindset that they are good, standard-aligned materials (Harris et al., 2021; Silver, 2022). These resources are dangerous because they do not align with the standardized tests that students will take throughout a school year; students might have good grades in class but fail a standardized test because they have not been taught the way that the test assesses the skills that students have to know (Silver, 2022). Hu et al. (2019) discuss that materials from these sites are often surface-level materials, and do not create student commitment or connection.

Many teachers report that their classroom books for instruction are monotonous and unmotivating for students, and that is one of the main reasons that teachers visit sites like Teachers Pay Teachers, Twitter, and Pinterest for additional teaching materials (Silver, 2022). Teachers download materials from these sites because they do not have an adequate curriculum to meet the demand of standardized testing requirements, and there is a lack of materials with questions asked in the way that high-stakes tests are written (Harris et al., 2021). Even the materials on Teachers Pay Teachers that are listed as best sellers with great ratings have shortcomings; they lack understandable objectives and explanations of why certain activities are presented to the teacher (Harris et al., 2021). Teachers reach out to find alternate curricula and supplemental materials because the ones they have are often not interesting to students and do not meet the needs of all students (Silver, 2022).

Instructional Strategies

Instructional strategies for students can impact motivation in the classroom. Students learn in different ways, and many students suffer because of a shift back to teacher-centered learning. Students need to feel connected to the material they are learning, and if they are forced to read passages and answer multiple-choice questions in English classes, they might feel unmotivated and unconnected to the content.

Focus on Multiple Choice

Most of the instructional materials used in English classrooms are multiple-choice questions that require students to refer back to the text in order to figure out the correct answer (Kaipa, 2021). Teachers who decide to use only multiple-choice materials to teach reading standards usually feel that they care for their students and want them to do their best on tests; when this method is used, students do not find joy, and they have more negative responses to

class (Merchant et al., 2020). Polat (2020) conducted a study on how students respond to multiple-choice and open-ended questions, and results showed that multiple-choice tests were easier for students, which was why they favored them over other question types of assessments and classwork. This study was also conducted on high school students, and the results were the same; students preferred multiple-choice questions because they had a higher chance of guessing the correct answer out of the four choices given (Turhan, 2020). If students are beginning to favor multiple-choice questions because they are easier, this shows that guessing answers and taking chances on correct choices could have a connection with students just wanting to finish the work and be finished by doing the smallest amount of work possible in class (Polat, 2020).

When teachers do not use multiple choice, student engagement, deeper learning, and motivation increase in students (Kaipa, 2021). Multiple-choice questions are easier to grade, and they also mimic the state tests that students have to take yearly (Kaipa, 2021; Polat, 2020). Multiple choice questions pave the way for students to guess on assessments, and they only test the development of surface knowledge (Kaipa, 2021). Multiple choice tests cost less money but do not assess creativity, critical thinking, student motivation, or persistence (Polat, 2020). These are some of the exact skills that students need in order to be successful in life (Polat, 2020).

Teacher-Centered/Student-Centered Instruction

Student-centered instruction requires the teacher to step back from 100% control of the instruction. It is the idea that learning material and instruction can be combined to better prepare students for the real world (McPherson, 2021). Successful school-wide change to student-centered learning requires teacher training, new class times, alignment with all grades, and preparation in the beginning, which might be rigorous and time-consuming (McPherson, 2021). However, this upfront work allows students to be the writers of their own passage in the

educational journey (Mameli et al., 2020). Student agency, responsibility, and equity grow when student-centered learning occurs in the classroom (Mameli et al., 2020). This type of learning promotes student responsibility and accountability (Mameli et al., 2020; McPherson, 2021). The ability to self-govern oneself is directly tied to motivation (Olivier et al., 2020). Teachers who instill autonomy in students show them a real-world connection to academics, resulting in students who can think for themselves and accept all teacher feedback (Olivier et al., 2020). Olivier et al. (2020) conducted a study that indicates effective student-centered learning has a connection with students who have autonomy and motivation. The study showed that instructional strategies that put students in control and have a connection to their future result in higher student motivation (Olivier et al., 2020).

When students are able to work together and come to their own conclusions in class, they feel more empowered (Budasi et al., 2020). Students have higher motivation and better grades when earning through games and projects (Budasi et al., 2020; Carrabba & Farmer, 2018). Activity-based learning, where students collaborate together, results in higher motivation and a feeling that the student can succeed in the class (Anwer, 2019). Textbooks do not facilitate deep meaning; they are mostly surface-level instruction (Passman, 2000). Students are more interested in a class where hands-on, collaborative instruction takes place because they are able to be more creative and actually use more critical thinking skills (Anwer, 2019).

Teacher-centered instruction forces all students to look and act the same (Passman, 2000). The culture of education has been teacher-centered, and this can influence many teachers to avoid student-centered instruction (Dole et al., 2016). The current push for high-stakes testing has many teachers reverting to only teacher-centered instruction, and students are not being motivated in the classroom like they once were years ago. Teacher-centered classrooms where

direct instruction is the main instructional strategy result in students who cannot make deep connections with the text and become frustrated because of a lack of texts they can form connections with in a meaningful way (Neugebauer & Gilmour, 2020).

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is an instructional strategy where students interact and collaborate together to work towards mastery of a task or standard (Sugano & Mamolo, 2021). Several studies have shown that cooperative learning improves student motivation, encourages critical thinking, and encourages peer support (Sugano & Mamolo, 2021; Tran, 2019). Self-esteem results from cooperative learning because students are in charge of their own learning (Sugano & Mamolo, 2021). A study of ninety-three sixth-graders sought to find out the role of cooperative learning and its connection with motivation, relationships, and instructional strategies; students answered questionnaires and participated in two classes, one that implemented cooperative learning and one that did not (Chen, 2021). Interviews conducted at the end of the study showed that cooperative learning improved student motivation, inspired students to prepare for school, and encouraged peer-to-peer questioning (Chen, 2021). Students who normally were quiet and reserved wanted to participate in cooperative learning activities, and they had a stronger belief in themselves (Chen, 2021).

Cooperative learning activities give students an advantage in preparation for life and contributing to society (Bećirović et al., 2022). Students who participate in cooperative learning have an improved community system, and they have increased interpersonal communication with other people (Tran, 2019). This increases motivation and students' willingness to learn (Tran, 2019). Working together and setting goals motivates social communication and interaction with other students; this teaches students how to work with other people and to

provide their part of the work to ultimately establish a shared product within a group (Chen, 2021).

Reading Strategies

Statistics over the course of a decade report that as students enter middle school, their desire and motivation towards reading decreases; a study of reading perspectives revealed that students reported that instructional materials were boring, unrelatable, and very hard to comprehend (Allred & Cena, 2020). Another study of middle school students found that textbooks and worksheet use correlated with low motivation to read in middle school students (Neugebauer & Gilmour, 2020). Most of the time, when students are given textbook pages to read or specific worksheets to complete, the goal is not a deeper level of analysis; the goal is for students to read a specific text, answer questions that focus on surface-level information, and to complete the task in a timely manner according to the teacher (Neugebauer & Gilmour, 2020). Finding authenticity in the ability to make a connection with the text increases motivation and personal interaction (Neugebauer & Gilmour, 2020). Most

There is a direct connection between reading comprehension and motivation in students (Ferraz et al., 2021). Struggling students often avoid reading because they have a preconceived notion that they will not succeed; many times, students do not learn to read in elementary school because reading is viewed as deciphering words and letters that lack a positive correlation that would make students want to read (Ferraz et al., 2021). When students enter middle school, their desire to read decreases because they view reading as a difficult, unpleasurable job (Allred & Cena, 2020). Rebarber and the Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research (2020) point out that when the CCSS were adopted for English Language Arts, there was a decrease in classic literature and an increase in less challenging informational text that was supposed to assist with

the future position of the student in the labor force. This has resulted in students who are not ready for the future workforce because the interesting and challenging rigor of previous texts that require critical thinking and analytical skills has been removed and replaced with boring text (Rebarber and the Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research, 2020).

High-stakes tests adversely impact reading because they are very restricted in determining reading performance (Afflerbach, 2005). Many times, the reading ability of a student is singularly judged based on one state test score (Afflerbach, 2005). There is more informational text on many state tests, which has caused teachers to focus on informational writing pieces; when more informational text is taught and assessed, one cannot gain an accurate, well-rounded measure of the reading ability of a student (Polleck & Jeffery, 2017).

Writing Strategies

Writing should be a task that is engaging for students; students should be writing for different reasons and in many different ways to achieve mastery (Graham et al., 2015). Writing tasks that are tedious and repetitive do not engage students (Graham et al., 2015). The Common Core State Standards only give writing benchmarks to be mastered, and they do not indicate how teachers should teach writing benchmarks (Graham et al., 2015; Hall et al., 2015). In a survey conducted by Troia and Graham (2016), teachers indicated that one in five teachers explained that they were not fully acquainted with the writing standards because they did not have any training for how to teach them. The standards do not flow in a way that students can easily master; they are extremely challenging for students because some of them leave out critical writing achievements that students should master (Troia & Graham, 2016).

Students do not have the necessary prerequisite skills to master the difficult writing standards (Hall et al., 2015; Liberty & Conderman, 2019). Writing strategies that were used

before the Common Core State Standards were put into place do not correlate with the new rigor of the common core writing standards (Hall et al., 2015). Struggling students will find the common core writing standards very challenging, and an absence of faith in teachers results in students who have no motivation or desire to write (Hall et al., 2015). Teachers do not believe that the new standards are effective; therefore, teachers will most likely fail to implement these new standards in their regular instruction (Hall et al., 2015). Teachers need a better curriculum for writing and help from their administrators on how to teach writing effectively (Hall et al., 2015). With the new standards and a higher demand for rigorous vocabulary usage and identification, students will need increased assistance with writing more difficult pieces because the standards are challenging (Liberty & Conderman, 2019).

Common core writing standards do not encourage individualistic writing, forcing students to focus on prompts for instruction (Nagrotsky & Grullon, 2020). There is a lack of a connection to the real world with the common core writing standards, and the prompts that students are given remove personal thoughts and ideas (Nagrotsky & Grullon, 2020). These issues can lead to students feeling that their writing is not important (Nagrotsky & Grullon, 2020). It is necessary for students to feel that they can be successful with writing, and writing instruction should be fun and exciting for students (Graham et al., 2015).

Common Core State Standards have also created issues with writing because there has not been one set way to implement writing standards. Teachers are not aligned in districts, and many of them teach writing differently, which leads to students having different writing instruction from year to year (Wright et al., 2020). This has led to a disconnect for students, and motivation for writing is attached to the teacher (Wright et al., 2020). A curriculum that is guided by standardized assessments does not help teachers with instruction, and students are no longer

writing for genuine reasons in middle school (Wright et al., 2020). Middle school students have lower motivation to learn, which has been proven in many research studies (Gnambs & Hanfstingl, 2016; Odanga, 2018; Wright et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2018). This decrease has resulted in a lower standard for writing (Wright et al., 2020). One explanation for this might be what previous researchers have called the Stage-Environment Fit; this theory says that when students transition to middle school, the school atmosphere does not address the needs students have, and the result is lowered motivation (Alley, 2019; Wijsman et al., 2016). When students are only allowed to write in response to prompts for assessments, they do not always fully use their creativity and higher-thinking skills (Wright et al., 2020).

Problem-Based Learning

Problem-based learning is student-centered instruction where students investigate real-world problems, think critically, and work together to find possible answers to different situations (Liu et al., 2021). This type of learning gives students the power of learning, improving motivation, student commitment to learning, and grades in the classroom; all students of varied knowledge have shown improvement in academics and motivation with problem-based learning strategies (Liu et al., 2021). Some of the positive aspects of this learning are that students learn that it is good to encounter problems, work through them, and gain skills of reason that might aid when students become frustrated in the classroom in regular, teacher-centered instruction (Hasrawati et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021). Student motivation is directly tied with how a student performs academically, and problem-based learning can help raise and maintain student motivation (Wijnen et al., 2018).

A study by Liu et al. (2021) showed that middle school students who practiced problem-based learning had increased motivation in academics, learning that was not just surface-level,

and deep thinking on areas of study. Haridza and Irving (2017) also conducted a similar study of problem-based learning in middle school students using Problem-Based Learning 4 Core Areas (PBL4C). This model focuses on students actively learning through questioning and the constructivist learning theory that allows students to drive instruction; the results of the study showed that the model improved motivation and student endurance by forty to fifty percent in academic areas of problem and solution (Haridza & Irving, 2017).

Improving Motivation

There are many ways that teachers could try to improve student motivation. Students need to feel inspired and motivated to reach goals. They should feel a connection that what they do in class will have some meaning for them at some point later in life. Many students are not motivated because they feel that they are doing work that wastes time (Chamberlin et al., 2018). This affects motivation because then students could be happy just to pass the class or to make mediocre grades. Students master the material in the classroom when they are connected with and like what is being taught; ultimately, this causes students to be motivated (Kickert et al., 2022).

Relatable Curriculum

In order for motivation to increase, students need a curriculum that they can relate to in class. The curriculum should be relatable to students, but all students are not alike; this is one major challenge in classrooms because every student cannot have an individualized curriculum (Albrecht & Karabenick, 2018). However, the curriculum should have some relevancy for students, and they should feel a connection with their culture and individual experiences in life (Albrecht & Karabenick, 2018). Positive connections to motivation occur when the student has academic work that is relatable (Albrecht & Karabenick, 2018). Students need to feel that school

is useful in what they do in the classroom, and when they do not, motivation decreases (Wijsman et al., 2016). The fix for this part of the motivation factor would be to ensure that students feel connected to the curriculum and see that there is value in what they learn (Wijsman et al., 2016). Motivated students in middle school are most motivated by thinking that their teacher has a competent level of subject-area knowledge, and unmotivated students are most impacted by how they view their own knowledge and ability level (Farmer, 2018).

Instead of using worksheets, some schools are embracing other instructional strategies. A study was conducted that eliminated standardized testing and focused on students instead creating their own portfolio of work that would be graded; results showed that students were motivated and enthusiastic about their learning, and they preferred it because it was less stressful (Brown, 2019). Students who are given choices with instruction and encouraged to research things they are interested in learn more and remember what they learned better than with other traditional instructional methods (Alley, 2019). Choices result in a relatable curriculum that students can view as motivating and important.

Feedback

Student feedback is another possible way to increase student motivation. When students feel that the teacher cares enough to call them for individualized reflection, student motivation increases (Koenka & Anderman, 2019). Even feedback focused on what the student needs to change or improve can be beneficial if the teachers approach the interaction in the correct way using positive words and tone (Koenka & Anderman, 2019). When the student feels that someone is in his corner with him, he is motivated to perform better and to try harder at work (Koenka & Anderman, 2019). Yu et al. (2018) conducted a study of 109 seventh-grade boys from four different classes in one school; the control group was tasked with answering multiple-

choice questions online, and the experimental group answered the same questions online with one added part. The experimental group was also given student-made feedback for each of the questions (Yu et al., 2018). Results of the study showed that the students who made feedback for the online questions and were exposed to other students' feedback did better on work and were more motivated; the extra work of creating feedback did not affect motivation in a negative way, and students actually enjoyed this part of the assignment Yu et al. (2018).

Written feedback given to students is helpful because it can actually motivate them to address their strengths and weaknesses and to grow from progress (Selvaraj & Azman, 2020). Providing opportunities for students to see feedback and to go back and correct work based on written comments from teachers results in motivated students (Selvaraj & Azman, 2020). Good feedback should respond to the main needs of students, and it should be returned to students as soon as possible (Selvaraj & Azman, 2020). Feedback that is straightforward and easy to understand should be centered around what the students need to do in order to correct their work instead of focusing on the student (Selvaraj & Azman, 2020). Feedback that is positive is the key to improving the student's confidence, and when the feedback reveals the connection between student effort and what is needed for mastering a skill, intrinsic motivation is increased within the student (Kobus et al., 2007).

Self-Discipline

Self-motivation can be a future indicator of success for a student (Odanga, 2018). Students need self-discipline because everything they do in the classroom will be engaging or interesting for them; some strategies can help to increase motivation in the classroom (Odanga, 2018). Reinforcing students verbally, goal-setting, and using reflection to manage time can help

students to want to do better in class and increase motivation (Odanga, 2018). Instruction that encourages self-discipline can help students with motivation.

Overall, one can see that the classroom setting has changed since high-stakes testing has become the focus of the classroom in many school districts, and the motivation of students has decreased. Now, there is a need to pinpoint the main reason for a further decline in student motivation. More research should be done to determine if it is teaching to the test, the teacher's instructional strategies, the shift to teacher-led instruction, or the narrowing of curriculum, or something else that is the main culprit for the decrease.

Grit

Grit is defined as a standard that allows one to have a solid work ethic and a commitment to finishing a task (Bashant, 2014). Grit is a skill that can be taught, and this is important because students need to feel that mistakes are an acceptable part of school (Bashant, 2014; Tang et al., 2021; Usher et al., 2019). Students who possess the willingness to see a task to its end, demonstrate grit on a regular basis, and discipline themselves in school do better on standardized tests (Bashant, 2014). Many times in school, the goal of a student is a certain letter grade, and once that grade is achieved, students do not push themselves farther; other students who have grit do not see a letter grade as an endpoint and strive to gain as much knowledge as they can in school (Bashant, 2014). Tang et al. (2021) conducted a study that showed students with challenging academic goals and high grit had better grades and success in school, and grit had a strong correlation to most student's goals.

In middle school students, grit and self-discipline have no relation to cognitive activities, but they have a strong relation to grade point averages of middle schoolers (Usher et al., 2019). A higher drive to succeed in school outweighed what the students knew or could learn, and this

higher drive most often increases as students enter middle and high school (Usher et al., 2019). When students learn that failure and experiencing difficulty in school are a part of the learning process, they also learn to push through difficult assignments until they find success (Bashant, 2014). This process also sparks motivation in students because they have a desire to learn and discover solutions (Bashant, 2014).

Critical Thinking Activities

Critical thinking is applying existing knowledge to new encounters and difficulties in order to analyze, determine answers, and make evaluative assessments (Garcia et al., 1992). More research is now showing that there is a connection between critical thinking and student motivation; in order for students to be motivated cognitively, establishing goals can help students with critical thinking skills (Garcia et al., 1992). Critical thinking occurs most in the classroom when students are able to work collaboratively (Garcia et al., 1992). Garcia et al. (1992) conducted a study to determine the connection between motivation and critical thinking; the study showed that opportunities for critical thinking in instruction were connected to positive student motivation and thought processes (Garcia et al., 1992).

Critical thinking activities in classes hold the attention of students, motivate students, and use higher-order skill requirements (Smith & Szymanski, 2013). Because of the push for testing, most teachers use worksheets and focus on surface-level questions that do not involve critical thinking (Nur'azizah et al., 2021; Smith & Szymanski, 2013). However, critical thinking skills are what students need to be successful in life, and students can be taught how to think critically when teachers ask the right questions to facilitate student thinking in class (Smith & Szymanski, 2013). Motivation has a greater significance to achievement in school, and when this happens,

students will have a desire to think critically, solve difficult problems, and show analytic skills (Nur'azizah et al., 2021).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress reported in 2021 that critical thinking activities were not occurring on a regular basis in classes, and they were not being used in ways that had meaning for the students (Bouygues, 2022). Nationwide, 39 percent of eighth-grade educators reported using critical thinking instruction, and adding problem-solving strategies into instruction was reported as uneven and used periodically (Bouygues, 2022). The CCSS does have some critical thinking skills within the standards, but there is not a set way or shared process on how to teach critical thinking; this problem results in districts setting their own standards for instruction and obtaining instructional materials (Bouygues, 2022; Radulovic & Stancic, 2017). There are three main ways that critical thinking can be taught. Critical thinking can be taught through direct instruction, through being immersed within the curriculum, and as mixed instruction within certain subject areas (Radulovic & Stancic, 2017). The method that has shown the least positive results is when critical thinking skills are taught immersed within the curriculum; the mixed instruction programs showed the most positive results (Radulovic & Stancic, 2017).

Summary

Educational theorists like Dewey, the founder of progressivism, have many ideas on how education and teaching should look like in America. Dewey (1916) believed that students should be able to collaborate on real-world issues and complete their own research to find topics of interest in the classroom. Now, education has shifted, and many classrooms are faced with the need to revert back to a traditional classroom because of the push for teaching to the test (Polleck & Jeffery, 2017). Since the passage of Common Core State Standards, many schools in the

United States have increased testing, and there is now a problem with the high-stakes testing that schools face each year. Many students are facing a lack of motivation, and there are many speculations as to why this problem exists.

There are many factors impacting motivation such as student success in school, teacher support, and competence (Bureau et al., 2021). Motivation for good grades has decreased even in students who traditionally maintain good grades, and strong relationships, good feedback, reflection, and the feeling that students could believe in and trust instructors increase motivation in students (Chamberlin et al., 2018). Many schools have made it a requirement to focus on testing in the classroom, and this has impacted teachers and students both. Students are less motivated in the classroom for many possible reasons; a narrow curriculum and instructional strategies like teaching using only multiple choice and a shift from student-centered instruction back to teacher-centered instruction are possible causes of the lack of motivation. Many teachers now feel forced to find supplemental teaching materials that engage and interest students (Silver, 2022). When students think that teachers are bored, they can view school as meaningless; teachers who do not inspire and engage students can decrease student motivation (Budasi et al., 2020).

Instructional strategies have changed since Common Core State Standards were implemented; teachers now rely more on multiple-choice questions, and teacher-centered instruction is used more because of a need to focus on testing. Cooperative learning, positive reading strategies, and writing strategies in the English classroom are narrow and used on a less frequent basis because teachers are required to teach a more controlled curriculum.
Positive motivational strategies like a relatable curriculum, positive feedback, and increasing self-discipline have been seen as ways to increase student motivation. Middle school students

need to be taught grit, and they need to be challenged to think critically when faced with difficult situations.

Researchers have examined student motivation, but there is a gap in the literature for current information on issues with motivation that are tied to high-stakes testing in secondary grades. There is a need for more research on recent decreases in the motivation of middle school students since the establishment of Common Core State Standards and high-stakes testing. If districts can understand the lived experiences of teachers and students when it comes to decreased academic motivation in connection with high-stakes testing, they can work to correct the problem and motivate students in research-backed ways instead of just trying different options that might not work. There is a marked decline in student motivation when students enter secondary grades, and many schools do not meet the needs of students when they mature (Gnambs & Hanfstingl, 2016; Odanga, 2018; Yu et al., 2018). Researching what can meet the needs of these students in the classroom as a result of researching the lived experiences of teachers and students can help educators increase motivation in older students in schools that focus on high-stakes testing and Common Core State Standards.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to determine the lived experiences of English teachers and to discover how the implementation of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has influenced student motivation for middle school language arts students. The literature proposes that high-stakes testing and CCSS could affect the way that students learn in the classroom (Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Ritt, 2016). In an attempt to determine the factors affecting students, the researcher included ten teachers in grades six to eight at Smith Middle School for a total of ten participants for the study. The participants took part in observations, interviews, and focus groups. This chapter begins with the research design and questions, and then it moves into the setting and participants. Philosophical assumptions are then presented, and then the data collection and trustworthiness of the study are presented. Finally, the ethical considerations and a closing summary are detailed for the research. The results of this study should provide educators with the tools to increase motivation in the classroom, and results should provide future researchers with data to use and replicate for better trustworthiness. I hope to be able to determine reasons within academics that students are inspired to work hard and achieve their goals in the classroom.

Research Design

Creswell and Poth (2018) discuss that qualitative research is best for theories that are based on human nature and first-hand research established for interviews, observations, and descriptions. Qualitative research entails focusing on the world and attempting to make sense of things that people are exposed to on a daily basis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This type of research

is appropriate for my study because my research involves looking at one phenomenon that students in the classroom are exposed to and attempts to determine how it influences student motivation and instruction. There are several themes that were coded and explained, and this process is one that qualitative research embraces and uses to determine the essence of the lives of people (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Phenomenology is based on the idea of logic or sound reasoning, and this research design was identified by Edmund Husserl in the early 1900s; his works were not translated into English until the mid to late 1900s (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Husserl (1970) believed that phenomenology should explain the experiences of individuals, and thoughts should be analyzed and described by the researcher. Phenomenological analysis is the result of studying ideas that make sense and are understandable without deep research; they focus on descriptive meaning and experience.

Husserl (1983) discussed that phenomenology should focus on phenomena, and he developed transcendental phenomenology, which allowed for philosophical studies to be incorporated into phenomenology and for focusing on consciousness that was uninterrupted, unbiased, and allowed for true thought to emerge. Creswell and Poth (2018) describe that transcendental and hermeneutical are two different forms of phenomenology that emerged through the research of Husserl and another researcher. In transcendental phenomenology, the researcher is removed from the research, and in hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher's own thoughts and processes are important to help formulate what things mean (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Husserl (1970) proposed ideas on phenomenology that began in the first volume of his book *Logical Investigations*, but his ideas mostly emerged from volume two of the book. Martin

Heidegger, another researcher who contributed to hermeneutic phenomenology, agreed with Husserl's ideas to a degree, but he believed that research was more subjective than Husserl's (Heidegger, 2013). Heidegger believed that the researcher's thoughts and ideas were pertinent to the understanding of research, and he believed that all interpretations, even the ideas of a researcher, were necessary to fully understand the phenomena (Heidegger, 2013).

The hermeneutic cycle has emerged to understand Husserl's explanation of the reference to parts and whole in hermeneutic research. Husserl (1970) explained that there were separate parts to one separate whole in research. The hermeneutic cycle explains that in order to fully understand an entire text, one must also understand the individual pieces of the text, or research (Kafle, 2013). The whole cannot exist without the parts, and the parts have to make up the whole of something; hermeneutic research investigates the interworking relationship that exists and makes up the entire cycle (Husserl, 1970).

Hermeneutic phenomenology in modern times has been led by Max van Manen (2016). He discussed that research in phenomenology is explained by a position of wonder in which the researcher wonders about a phenomenon that has a connection to the world and carries out this wonder through research and asking questions. He outlined six steps for studying a phenomenon (Webb & Welsh, 2019). The six steps are: identifying a phenomenon, exploring a lived experience, finding themes, using prose to give a description of the phenomenon, remaining engaged in the phenomenon, and stabilizing research with a contemplation of the parts and the whole (Webb & Welsh, 2019). Phenomenology is a way of asking questions, and this is connected to writing and reporting on the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Hermeneutic phenomenology was appropriate for my design because the researcher is seeking to understand motivation in middle school students in English classes and how teacher

implementation of CCSS can affect student motivation. These students have all experienced the shared phenomena of high-stakes testing and CCSS. Since I am a teacher of middle school students, incorporating the interpretations and thoughts of the researcher is important. Combining the views of the participants and the view of the researcher will allow for a better understanding of the pinpointed reason that is causing decreased motivation for students in the classroom.

Since different things motivate different people, a math-based, quantitative approach to this study would not fit; the unique responses of the participants allow for deeper study of the topic; so, a research design of phenomenology is best. The goal of the study was to determine shared commonalities in participants and a connection to motivation. Conversations and critical thinking allowed for results that might not emerge in day-to-day thought. The reasons that one might be motivated or not motivated in the classroom might be beyond surface-level thinking. Therefore, guiding participants through three stages of response will result in more accurate data.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of teachers regarding decreased academic student motivation in connection with the implementation of the CCSS in English classrooms?

Sub-Question One

How do English teachers motivate students in the classroom while implementing the CCSS?

Sub-Question Two

How does incorporating test-preparation questions and other types of assessments influence student inclination to learn?

Sub-Question Three

Besides using worksheets, what other methods are beneficial to prepare students for testing?

Setting and Participants

The setting of this study was a public middle school with separate sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade English classes. Participants were selected using criterion sampling, and they were English teachers who teach English language arts within the school.

Site

The setting of the research was a small, rural town in east central Mississippi, and a local public middle school was the research location. The school has approximately 560 students in grades six, seven, and eight; the school is categorized as an "A" school for the state of Mississippi. Over 70% of their students are proficient in math, and over 50% of their students scored proficient in English (*Mississippi Succeeds, 2023)*. The school has inclusion and resource students, but the majority of students classified under special education are inclusion. There are 39 full-time teachers, and the student-to-teacher ratio is around fourteen to one. The school is ranked in the top 25 percent of all Mississippi Schools. Around 79% of the students in the school are white, 15% are African American, and 3% are Hispanic (*Explore,* 2022). The remaining percentage of students are a mix of two or more different races (*Explore,* 2022). Genders are almost 50% even, with 251 male and 248 female students (*Explore,* 2022).

In the school, there is one principal and one assistant principal who handle all discipline and school matters. There is a lead curriculum teacher, and she assists teachers with instructional materials. The sixth grade is located in one building on the campus, and the seventh and eighth-grade students are in another building on campus. This campus has been chosen for research

because it is the school where the researcher works and teaches daily. The middle school has also been chosen because the goal of the research is to focus on motivation in middle school students in English language arts classrooms. This school also uses CCSS, and high-stakes testing programs are used several times a year to measure student gains in instructional standards.

Participants

Participants for the study were identified using criterion sampling; this type of sampling was conducted because the teachers have all experienced the implementation of CCSS (Creswell & Poth, 2018). There will be ten total language arts teachers participating from grades six to eight. The total number of participants was ten and the teachers all teach regular education and inclusion students. Creswell and Poth (2018) state, "Thus, a heterogeneous group is identified that may vary in size from 3 to 4 individuals to 10 to 15" (p. 76). Too many participants can result in superficial contemplation and analysis (van Manen, 2016). Ten teachers allowed for saturation of data. The teachers were all language arts instructors, and they have taught for at least two years in the classroom.

Researcher Positionality

As a teacher in a middle school, I see students who struggle with motivation daily. I have been in education for 13 years and taught students before and after CCSS and high-stakes testing were implemented. Overall, I have been a witness to a decline in student motivation since schools made the shift to focus more on testing. As an educator who has a heart for my students, I have the desire to help them and to increase their motivation; determining the lived experiences of students and teachers can help account for the decrease and could help educators and administrators make a more positive change for students in the classroom. Social constructivism was the paradigm this study because it accepts that reality is formed between a researcher and the

participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through social constructivism, which focuses on a person better understanding the surroundings in which he works and lives in, my goal was to increase understanding of student thought and motivation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The reality of education is that rules and patterns of thought are developed by people in command who have never stepped foot inside a classroom to teach. Social constructivism, on the other hand, values the insight of a researcher and sees that reality should be influenced by people's unique experiences and thoughts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Interpretive Framework

Social constructivism was the interpretive framework this study because in hermeneutic phenomenology the researcher's thoughts and ideas are important and valued. Since I am a teacher, I also value my thoughts and ideas, which were likely unconsciously intertwined with the study. Since I am a teacher, I could also better understand the results and why the data showed certain indications. I have interacted with many other educators throughout my years of teaching, and those teachers have also influenced my patterns of thought. Interaction with others have been necessary to solidify my thoughts and change or influence my way of thinking about education.

Philosophical Assumptions

The philosophical assumptions that I have developed as a connection to this study are that high-stakes testing and CCSS have decreased student motivation in the academic area, and these assumptions have caused me to seek an understanding of the main reason for this issue. My research has been formed as a result of my assumptions, and it has led me to qualitative research because of my belief that interactions and data through other people can be more beneficial than

data based on numbers and statistics. The three philosophical assumptions that I used in my dissertation are ontological, epistemological, and axiological.

Ontological Assumption

My ontological assumption is that there is one Biblical worldview that is interpreted in many different ways. All teachers have individual opinions on what exactly might be the reason for a decline in student motivation. My goal was to report the different thoughts and positions that emerged through my study, and these differing points of view are what ultimately guided my research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I also informed my participants of my views so that they could better understand the reasons for my study.

Epistemological Assumption

The epistemological assumption focused on interaction with the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This assumption bases knowledge on individual experiences that take place where the teachers in the study work each day (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a teacher at the school, I interacted with fellow teachers and examined the subjective experiences of each participant as I conducted observations, interviews, and focus groups. The combined viewpoints of the participants and my personal experiences formed the epistemological assumption for the study.

Axiological Assumption

The axiological assumption takes into account my values, encounters, and beliefs that are introduced into the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a Christian, my belief in God guides my daily actions and thought processes. The Bible states, “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life” (English Standard Version, 2001, 1 John 5:20). I believe that God is truth and that all understanding comes through

the Bible, prayer, and through His power. My values ultimately shape who I am as a person and what I believe, and they will be present in my interpretation of the study. I presented all data in its true form as collected through data collection, but ultimately, I interpreted the findings of the research.

Researcher's Role

As the human instrument in the study, I developed the plan, conducted the research, and analyzed the data into themes that ultimately drove my conclusions about the study. I did not have a supervisory role over any participants. The teachers in the study were English teachers in my school. I was a complete participant in the data collection part of the study, which allowed me to better understand the final data. As a teacher at the school, the bias that I could possibly bring into the study would be my own experiences with student motivation that is tied to high-stakes testing.

Procedures

First, I contacted my superintendent directly for permission to conduct the study at Smith Middle School (Appendix A). Next, I obtained permission from the Institutional Review Board (Appendix B). Then, I sent out a letter from the IRB website that gave participants information about the study (Appendix C). All participants signed the Liberty University consent form. (Appendix D). Next, I scheduled dates and conducted observations in the classrooms of the ten participating teachers. Once that was completed, I interviewed the teachers on different scheduled dates that were convenient for them after school. Interviews were held in the conference room of the office area. Finally, I conducted three focus groups consisting of one per grade level for the teachers that were scheduled after school. Transcripts were made of the interviews and the focus groups, and this was used in data analysis. For interviews and focus

groups, the researcher interviewed and recorded all conversations for more accurate data collection. I used Apple Voice Memo as a backup for recording and Google Teams to record the in-person interviews and focus groups. Then, the recorded conversations were transcribed using Teams and coded by hand for theme analysis. All data was collected and coded; then, I searched for similar themes. For member checking, the researcher documented when participants looked over and signed off on the analysis of their individual data. The study achieved triangulation by using observations, interviews, and focus groups; the themes that emerged came from all three data sources; recorded themes helped to answer the research questions. Personal memoing also guaranteed that my ideas were kept separate from the thoughts of the participants.

Permissions

First, I contacted my superintendent directly for permission to conduct the study at Smith Middle School (Appendix A). Next, I obtained permission from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (Appendix B). Consent information was provided as an attachment to my recruitment email. Participants printed the consent form, physically signed it, and returned it to me as a scanned attachment via email.

Recruitment Plan

Criterion sampling is choosing participants that meet certain qualifications for this study. I purposefully chose English teachers in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades who teach students at various instructional levels (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The teachers all experienced the phenomena of high-stakes testing and using CCSS in daily instruction. The sample size for this study was ten teachers. Creswell and Poth (2018) point out that the sample size for qualitative studies should not be more than fifteen people. This sample was chosen because in order to determine possible reasons for a decline in motivation, twelve teachers were enough for data

saturation. Twelve participants would have been ideal, but I was only able to find ten willing participants. This also added to the validity of the study because the views and opinions of one teacher are not enough to make the evidence credible. Prior to obtaining consent, I sent out a letter from the IRB website that gave participants information about the study (Appendix C). Next, I sent the informed consent (Appendix D). Informed consent was received from each participant for criterion sampling so that there was no doubt that participants were informed of their rights and the benefits of participating in the study. Participants were given consent letters to read, sign, and return to me before the study began at the school (Appendix D). Teachers consented to participate in the interviews and focus groups. They also consented to be observed during instruction.

Data Collection Plan

The data collection approach for this plan involved the researcher using observations, interviews, and focus groups. Criterion sampling was used, and this sequence was carried out because the researcher used the observations to see what topics needed further investigation through a more detailed conversation in the interviews and focus groups. The data collection methods went from the least interactive to the most interactive with teachers. Since hermeneutic phenomenology cannot fully embrace bracketing as Husserl initially developed, the researcher incorporated personal experiences into the research through a personal journal (Laverty, 2003).

Observations Data Collection Approach

The observation protocol (Appendix E) included both description and reflection notes; the observer viewed all ten classrooms of the teachers participating in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Observations were the first data collection approach used in the research because initial observations allowed the researcher to draw on what was seen in the classroom for

interviews and focus groups that followed. Creswell and Poth (2018) discuss that observations are of utmost importance in qualitative research, and they allow for the use of the five senses. For the observations, the researcher was a complete participant where interaction with the participants was allowed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The observer viewed one class of each teacher from beginning to end, and the observations were recorded via Microsoft Teams for additional validity. Each observation was ninety minutes.

In each observation, the researcher looked for the use of test-preparation questions and other types of student assessment that might be used in that class period. I looked for the instructional methods of the teacher and if worksheets were used primarily for instruction. I looked for any visible student motivation or lack of student motivation that might be obvious. I summarized what was observed in the class and then filled out reflections on what was seen during the observation.

Observations Interview Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis plan for the observations involved an observation protocol. First, the researcher had an introductory sheet on the observation protocol that described the research to the participant; next, there were sections on descriptive, reflective, and observable evidence notes with a drawing of the classroom (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher used a checklist for observations that recorded data on what happened during the lesson. Before and during the observation, the researcher had informal conversations with the teacher about what students were doing and what the aim of the lesson was for that day. This was done using Microsoft Teams for video and audio. The notes and conversations were analyzed for categories and themes. All descriptive and reflective notes that the researcher recorded were analyzed using the detailed reading approach (van Manen, 2016). In this approach, the researcher analyzes each sentence to

look for thematic words, categories, or phrases that reveal data about the lived experience that is being investigated (van Manen, 2016).

Individual Interviews Data Collection Approach

Creswell and Poth (2018) discuss that interviews, or social conversations, should focus on questions that have open answers and guide the researcher toward answers to determine what happened, how something took place, and the result of the shared phenomena. Interviews were used to understand why student motivation was low and the reason for the decrease. Interviews were the best choice because they allowed similar themes to emerge through natural conversation and shared thoughts. The researcher was able to pinpoint specific reasons for the decreased motivation in middle school English classes. Would it possibly be increased testing, curriculum, instructional strategies, teaching to a test, or something else? The goal was to determine the lived experiences in English classrooms with motivation after the implementation of Common Core State Standards. Studies have been done to see what motivates students, but not many have been done to see why motivation has decreased since CCSS and the increased high-stakes testing that current students experience (Budasi et al., 2020; Bureau et al., 2021; Carrabba & Farmer, 2018; Dawadi, 2020; Olivier et al., 2020; Rahiem, 2021; Reeve et al., 2020). The only way that the educational system can improve is to see where there are problems, and if no one ever establishes the top reason that many students do not have any buy-in to learning and getting good grades, the problem will never improve.

Ten teachers in grades six, seven, and eight were interviewed. The interviews were held on the school campus in a location that was private and free from distraction, and the researcher interviewed and recorded all conversations for accurate data collection. I used Apple Voice Memo as a backup for recording and Google Teams to record the in-person interviews. Then, the

recorded conversations were transcribed using Google Teams and coded by hand for theme analysis. This allowed for data that could apply to multiple research questions since the questions were open-ended.

Individual Teacher Interview Questions

1. Please describe your educational background and career through your current position. CRQ
2. Describe your current challenges with motivating students in your English classes. SQ1
3. How do you use the curriculum to motivate students in the classroom? SQ3
4. Describe how you use state test-prep materials in your classroom. SQ2
5. How do you think using test preparation materials in daily class instruction negatively affects students? SQ2
6. What are the main factors that you see in the classroom that negatively affect student motivation? SQ1
7. Describe ways you have seen motivation work in your classroom, and explain what you used to motivate those students. SQ1
8. When have you ever felt that you had to narrow your curriculum because of the requirement to use state testing materials? SQ2
9. How do worksheets and a focus on multiple-choice motivate or not motivate students to learn and to try their best? SQ3
10. Do you think the students are more motivated through teacher-centered or student-centered instruction? Why? SQ3
11. How do you relate the curriculum to things that motivate and interest students? SQ1

12. Describe the positive and negative impact on the motivation of any test-prep programs that your students are required to complete regularly. SQ2
13. Describe how students learn about real-world issues and use creativity in your classroom. SQ3
14. What is the connection between motivation and being able to use creativity in class that impacts student motivation? SQ1
15. What is the main thing that you believe negatively impacts student motivation regarding the classroom in today's high-stakes testing environment? SQ2
16. Describe the effect of Common Core State Standards on pacing and instructional alignment. SQ2
17. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with motivating students that we have not discussed?

For the teacher questions, question one served to obtain information from the participants to have a baseline of their identity, and the question also allowed the participants to begin to feel comfortable with the interview. The central question that asks about teachers' lived experiences has a direct connection to question one since it is important to know background information on the participants and to restate the reason for conducting research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Questions two, six, seven, eleven, and fourteen covered sub-question one because they focused on student motivation and a connection with the curriculum. In recent years, student motivation has dropped, and looking at teacher experiences with student motivation and finding instructional materials that fit common core standards shed light on possible ways to improve student motivation (Mucherah & Yoder, 2008).

Questions four, five, eight, 12, 15, and 16 focused on sub-question two since they addressed testing, assessments, and how testing influences student learning. These questions are important because curriculum narrowing and instructional materials that mimic the state test materials are being used in classrooms instead of curriculum that forms a real connection with the real world (Merchant et al., 2020). Questions three, nine, 10, and 13 addressed sub-question three, which focused on instructional strategies and different methods of learning and instruction. The importance of these questions lies within instructional strategies and materials that motivate students to try their best. There is a connection between motivation and student-centered responsibility with learning in the classroom (Mameli et al., 2020). The aim of the sub-questions was to dig deeper into the central question by separating the main question into smaller sections that can be investigated to expose the essence of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

All interviews were recorded and then transcribed for theme analysis. The researcher manually coded the transcripts by reading the transcripts multiple times and then marking comments on them where themes for categories emerged; then, the researcher found comments and data that repeated in the writing (Manyam & Panjwani, 2019). The researcher engaged in first and second-cycle coding, which was achieved by going through the transcripts multiple times, obtaining first-level thoughts, and then digging deeper for additional categories that might be more specific (Manyam & Panjwani, 2019). Once the researcher found codes, they were organized into categories. Manyam and Panjwani (2019) state, “sometimes we code and categorize data by what participants talk about and also based on the memos that you create while reading through the transcript/dataset. You may group things together not just because they are alike but also because they might have something in common” (p. 2). The themes that

emerged from the coding were written down and then used again once all three data collection forms were completed.

Focus Groups Data Collection Approach

Focus groups were used in the study. Focus groups were a great choice for this research because they enabled the researcher to better understand the surveys and interviews that were first completed with the participants. Creswell and Poth (2018) discuss that focus groups might result in better data since the participants can interact and discuss thoughts together. Watching the participants interact brought on another level of understanding and clarified initial understanding of the information.

Focus groups allowed for triangulation of the research; this decreased the time needed for interviewing and created more robust data since there were three forms of data collection. The researcher facilitated the groups, and once the focus groups were finished, data was coded for themes and compiled.

Focus Group Questions

1. Why has student motivation decreased since the implementation of high-stakes testing and Common Core State Standards? CRQ
2. What is the main predictor for motivation and success in the classroom? SQ1
3. Discuss teaching to the test and how this issue has impacted your instruction. SQ2
4. How can teachers better connect instruction with real-world situations that have meaning for students? SQ3
5. How can teacher attitude positively and negatively affect student motivation? CRQ
6. Describe how alternative grading methods could improve motivation in classes. SQ3

7. How is testing material balanced with other instructional material in your classes? SQ2
8. How do students receive feedback in your classroom? SQ3
9. How have you been impacted by the narrowing of curriculum due to high-stakes testing? SQ2
10. What does instruction look like to you in the English classroom? SQ3
11. What have you experienced as far as a connection with a decrease in motivation and high-stakes testing in your classroom? CRQ

Questions one, five, and 11 of the teacher questions focused on the central research question because they were directly tied to teacher experiences. Question two focused on sub-question one since it centered around student motivation. There was a need to determine motivators for students from the teacher's point of view since common core has increased high-stakes testing because positivity and relatable school assignments are associated with higher motivation in students (Albrecht & Karabenick, 2018). Questions three, seven, and nine focused on sub-question two because they focused on tests and assessments. Teacher feedback in this area is crucial to improving student motivation since high-stakes tests have not improved student learning and have caused a decrease in motivation (Amrein & Berliner, 2003). Questions four, six, eight, and 10 focused on sub-question three because of the connection with instructional methods and feedback. These questions were more detailed because researching specific instructional strategies in combination with motivation research allows one to see what might work best for teachers and students.

Focus Groups Data Analysis Plan

The focus groups were recorded using Microsoft Teams, and they were fully transcribed using Microsoft Teams after the meetings. Data for the focus groups was transcribed and then analyzed by thematic coding in the same way as the interviews. The researcher recorded all conversations for accurate data collection. I used Apple Voice Memo as a backup for recording and Teams to record the in-person focus groups. Then, the recorded conversations were transcribed using Microsoft Teams and coded by hand for theme analysis. The point of the focus group was to gain information on the shared phenomena of decreased academic student motivation in connection with the implementation of the CCSS in English classrooms. In order to gain information on the root cause of a decline in motivation, questions for the focus groups were intentional in that they focused on motivation, assignments, grades, and relationships. Each focus group lasted an hour, and the end goal of the focus groups was to allow for in-depth conversation that connected with the observations and interviews that were first done in the study.

Data Synthesis

Data were synthesized into a coherent body of evidence that identified themes. Van Manen's approach to identifying themes was used (van Manen, 2016). First, significant statements were written from the data obtained from the observations, interviews, and focus groups (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Next, the statements were grouped into themes, and a textural description was written (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Then, a draft of what happened to the participants was written, and a structural description was written to describe how the experience happened (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, a composite description was written to include the essence of what happened to the participants with a description of the textural and structural

descriptions of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thematic analysis involved coding themes into categories by hand and then looking for emerging patterns (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is crucial to qualitative research, and researchers should use different ways to show trustworthiness based on what fits the research that is being conducted (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researchers need to show that people can trust their study, and they should show that they are telling the truth about the research that was conducted. Trustworthiness in this study was completed using member checking, triangulation, and peer debriefing. In hermeneutic phenomenology, this is especially important since, as the researcher, I chose to be a complete participant in data collection. Guba (1981) proposed a model for qualitative trustworthiness that studies should be credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable. This study had aspects of all of these characteristics and followed Guba's method for ensuring validation. I did this by triangulating my data and maintaining close contact with the participants during and after the study so that they could check for the validity of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used subjective evidence through observations, interviews, and focus groups that could be verified because of the evidence I collected.

Credibility

Credibility for this study was achieved by the researcher conducting member checks, triangulation, and peer debriefing. These three methods ensured that the data was valid and that it applied to more than just one isolated study. Ensuring that all of these were present enhanced trustworthiness of the study and provided tangible evidence that the investigation was valid and full of integrity.

Member checking is a form of validation where the researcher has the participants check the research for credibility. Guba (1981) states that these consist of "testing the overall report or case study with source groups before casting it into final form" (p.86). For this study, the participants were at my school daily, and they were able to look at the written analysis sections of each form of data collection for member checking. This process increased the reliability of the study because participants have the chance to check for the accuracy of reporting. For this study, the researcher documented when participants looked over and signed off on the analysis of their individual data. If the researcher interpreted something incorrectly, the participant had the opportunity to give written feedback that the researcher could add to the results. Also, after all data was analyzed for common themes, the participants had the opportunity to receive a copy of all data, transcriptions, and analyses to check for correct data.

This process consisted of using multiple methods for data collection, and it involves having the researcher search for similar themes in data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This was important because the observations, interviews, and focus groups added to the credibility and dependability of the study. Once all three methods of data collection were finished, the researcher looked for similar codes and themes that emerged in all three of the data sources. Guba (1981) states, "For example, no item of information ought to be accepted that cannot be verified from at least two sources" (p. 85).

Guba (1981) defines peer debriefing as giving one a chance to test thoughts and open up research questions. I discussed findings with other teachers, who are my colleagues with whom I interact daily. This gave me other perspectives and ideas for my research and allowed me to feel reassured that my research was heading in the right direction. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that the researcher should find someone who has also experienced the phenomena that is being

studied. In this case, it would be the implementation of CCSS, and all teachers at the school experienced this phenomenon. Participants asked difficult questions to ensure that the research was trustworthy; for this study, I had time to debrief peers and write down what happened in the meeting (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Transferability

Transferability is the idea that the data from the study also applies to other studies and can help researchers in the future for additional data on student motivation with regard to academics. Guba (1981) also discusses that transferability involves detailed descriptions and data that is below surface level; the data should be presented so that other people can easily understand and use the information in many different ways. This study was transferable because all students in public schools in the United States are now subjected to high-stakes testing, and a large majority of them follow the Common Core State Standards. Finding a way to improve student motivation with regard to academics is something that many educators could benefit from, and this study provides helpful information for the current decrease in motivation in students that teachers are seeing in classrooms.

Dependability

Dependability is focused on secure data that is consistent and verifiable (Guba, 1981). For this study, each step in the data collection and analysis process was detailed and could easily be replicated by another researcher. The questions that participants answered in the interviews and focus groups ensured that the data reflected reasons for lack of motivation in students. This data will be able to be replicated and verified in future research and study. Dependability occurred with an inquiry audit for this study.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the idea that the information from the study and research findings are from only the data and not from the researcher's ideas and final thoughts (Nowell et al., 2017). This can only occur when credibility, transferability, and dependability are in place; researchers should add justification for decisions that are made in the study (Nowell et al., 2017). For this study, the researcher included an audit trail that could assist with confirmability if needed; the audit trail consisted of all data and analysis that was conducted during the study. Nowell et al. (2017) state, "keeping records of the raw data, field notes, transcripts, and a reflexive journal can help researchers systemize, relate, and cross-reference data, as well as ease the reporting of the research process are all means of creating a clear audit trail" (as cited in Halpren, 1983, p. 3). I employed triangulation, allowing for information repetition and increased confirmability. Personal memoing was used since hermeneutic phenomenology does not use bracketing; this allowed for me to prove that my thoughts did not influence the final data of the study (Laverty, 2003).

I confirmed research through the observations, interviews, and focus groups that were either recorded or backed up with data resources. I recorded themes from the data that I collected, and a rational approach to thoughts and ideas was developed as a result of the research methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My knowledge bias developed from being in the observations, interviews, and focus groups because this was a hermeneutic phenomenological study where I immersed myself in the study and the data.

Ethical Considerations

Several ethical considerations would be considered germane to this study. Institutional review board approval was a necessary step before any research was conducted. First, I obtained

permission to conduct the study at the school where I am currently employed as a teacher. Next, I obtained consent from all participants by having them sign consent letters. The consent letters explained that the participants would be respected, taken care of, and treated fairly throughout the study because participation would be completely voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any time (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Pseudonyms for all participants, sites, and distinguishable names were applied since the community is small and the district is one of the top schools in the area. Since I am a teacher at the school, I made sure that all participants viewed the study as a method of improving the school.

Protection of the data was ensured by using confidentiality, backing up information, and securing files. All data that is electronic was password protected, and anything physical was secured in a locked filing cabinet; data will be destroyed after three years per the Institutional Review Board at Liberty University. There were no foreseen risks to teachers who participated other than giving up their afternoon to participate in interviews and a focus group. This study adds to the knowledge of motivation in our current society that focuses on Common Core State Standards.

Summary

Motivation is crucial to student success, and educators need assistance on how to increase student determination to learn and succeed. This study sought to determine teachers' lived experiences in English classrooms with motivation after implementing CCSS. Pinpointing reasons for the decline will help educators shift their classrooms and improve motivation. Keeping educational philosophy in mind and focusing on the responses of participants in the observations, interviews, and focus groups allowed me as a researcher to code and look for common themes in the data. I conducted data analysis for each data collection method and then

again as a whole once all three methods were completed. Overall, I looked for reasons why motivation might have dropped; this study was trustworthy because it incorporated Guba's (1981) model for trustworthiness to focus on credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable data. The study was ethical because it incorporated pseudonyms, and I made sure that the participants knew that I was a teacher at Smith Middle School. Data was locked and password-protected so that there were no risks of the information being seen by outsiders. This study helped close the current gap in the literature on this topic and will hopefully open educational leaders' eyes to show them that change is needed in education in many different areas.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to determine the lived experiences of English teachers and to determine how the implementation of Common Core State Standards has influenced student motivation for middle school language arts students at Smith Middle School. Using a hermeneutic phenomenological design permitted me to focus on one specific phenomenon and to see how CCSS have influenced student motivation. Since I am a teacher, this design method allowed me to engage with the participants and interpret the lived experiences that they detailed. This chapter includes participant descriptions, the data, in the form of narrative themes and sub-themes, outlier data, and research question responses before concluding with the chapter summary.

Participants

The ten teacher participants for this study were selected using criterion sampling and were English teachers who taught English language arts at Smith Middle School. All participants taught sixth-grade, seventh-grade, or eighth-grade English language arts and have taught for at least two years in the classroom. A recruitment email was sent to teachers, and written consent was obtained before data collection began in classrooms. Pseudonyms were used to protect both the participants and the school study site, Smith Middle School. Refer to Table 1 for participant descriptions in tabular form.

Table 1

Teacher Participants

Teacher Participants	Years Taught	Highest Degree Earned	Content Area	Grade Level
Amy	13	Bachelor's	English Language Arts	8th
Anne	20	Master's	English Language Arts	6th
Ashley	17	Specialist	Special Education - All Content Areas	7th
Ava	8	Bachelor's	Special Education - All Content Areas	6th
Brenda	17	Master's	Special Education - All Content Areas	8th
Carley	2	Bachelor's	English Language Arts	7th
Ella	11	Master's	Special Education - All Content Areas	7th
Emily	27	Bachelor's	English Language Arts	6th
Katie	9	Master's	English Language Arts	7th
Mary	3	Bachelor's	English Language Arts	8th

Amy

Amy is an eighth-grade English language arts teacher at Smith Middle School. She has taught ELA for 13 years and eighth grade for five years. Amy has a bachelor's degree in secondary English. When asked about her opinion of Common Core State Standards and the pacing guide for eighth grade ELA in her interview, Amy stated,

> I try to cover almost all standards all year because with one passage, you can cover every single standard. In one literature passage, you should be able to cover every single standard. With as long as I've been teaching, I feel like I know the standards by heart. They just come to mind. So, whenever I read something, I try to incorporate some kind of review of every single skill.

Amy teaches general education, and she also teaches inclusion classes.

Anne

Anne is a sixth-grade English language arts teacher at Smith Middle School. She has taught ELA for 20 years, and she has a master's degree in reading. In her interview, Anne discussed that she feels students just see her class as something that they have to pass, and they do not link English to anything that they will have to do later in life. Anne stated, "I feel as if students have become desensitized to the standards. Using standards-based test preparation materials in daily class instruction negatively affects students by diminishing the love of literature we are trying to foster." Anne teaches sixth-grade English language arts general education and inclusion classes.

Ashley

Ashley is a seventh-grade inclusion teacher for English language arts at Smith Middle School. She has taught ELA for 17 years, and she recently graduated with a specialist degree in

behavior. In her interview, Ashley pointed out that sometimes her students are genuinely surprised that they have shown growth or mastered a skill on a test. She discussed that the expectation should be that students would grow, but her students have made the same scores for so long that they are not motivated to show growth. Ashley stated,

> I think there's not a whole lot of guidance at all with Common Core State Standards. I think it's kind of a free-for-all because there's no stepping stones for what students learn in fifth grade, then sixth grade, then seventh grade, and then eighth grade. Like, the standards may be worded slightly different in a couple of little areas, but you're essentially supposed to teach the exact same skills for years and years. It just feels like teachers are smart enough to figure out what they want to teach, but there needs to be guidance so that you have those levels so that kids are actually growing.

Ashley teaches ELA classes for seventh-grade special education students and assists in inclusion classes for ELA.

Ava

Ava is a sixth-grade inclusion teacher for English language arts at Smith Middle School. She has taught ELA for eight years, and she has a bachelor's degree in special education. In discussing challenges with CCSS that she has encountered, Ava explained that her students are bored and just want to make it through the day because they are not interested in the curriculum. Ava stated, "The standards can be too rigorous for students, especially students that struggle with reading and comprehension." Ava teaches ELA classes for sixth-grade special education students and assists in inclusion classes for ELA.

Brenda

Brenda is an eighth-grade inclusion teacher for English language arts at Smith Middle School. She has taught ELA for 17 years, and she holds a master's degree in special education. According to Brenda, her students just guess on test preparation questions because they do not want to try to actually work through the questions. In her interview, Brenda stated,

> In ELA, the standards are basically the same every year since elementary, except they are supposed to be a little more complex than the year before because the reading levels are supposed to be higher. I feel the students are over discussing theme, author's point of view, etc. They understand the basics and do not feel the importance of discussing the deeper meaning of the skills.

Brenda teaches ELA classes for eighth-grade special education students and assists in inclusion classes for ELA.

Carley

Carley is a seventh-grade English language arts teacher at Smith Middle School. She has taught ELA for two years, and she has a bachelor's degree. In her interview, Carley discussed that time is an issue for her in the classroom because of the CCSS. She pointed out that there are many parts to just one standard sometimes, and she feels stressed with trying to cover all of the standards. Carley explained, "I don't really like the pacing of it because some standards fall through the cracks, and some of them are so similar. We don't have enough time to tell students how to differentiate between the two." Carley teaches seventh-grade general education classes.

Ella

Ella is a seventh-grade inclusion teacher for English language arts at Smith Middle School. She has taught ELA for 11 years, and she has a master's degree in special education.

When interviewed, Ella indicated that she was supportive of CCSS, but she felt that students were bored with the overuse of programs that were required for testing. Ella pointed out that students turn into a number with state testing, and they do not have an individual identity. Ella also stated, “I don't have a problem with Common Core. I think that the standards are rigorous. I think that they're good. I think that they give teachers a path for teaching.” Ella teaches ELA classes for seventh-grade special education students and assists in inclusion classes for ELA.

Emily

Emily is a sixth-grade English language arts teacher at Smith Middle School. She has taught ELA for 11 years, and she has a master’s degree in special education. Emily discussed how she thought the standards were too difficult for students. In her interview, Emily stated,

> I don't know if it's the standard. It's the way they word it, and it's also the way they word the questions on the test. It's the wording of everything. I almost feel like they're trying to trick the kids on the test because they make it so wordy and so hard to understand. I feel like that's what they do to us with the standards. I don't know. They're not hard to understand, but they're hard to come up with. It's hard to come up with material for it.

Emily teaches sixth-grade English language arts general education and inclusion classes.

Katie

Katie is a seventh-grade English language arts teacher at Smith Middle School. She has taught ELA for nine years, and she has a master’s degree. Katie pointed out that she does not dislike the CCSS, but she does think that certain parts of the standards are difficult. When asked about CCSS in her interview, Katie replied, “I'm going to be honest. I'm going to be the weird one. I like the Common Core. I do. It's very straightforward. This tells you what you're teaching,

and we don't really have a set curriculum.” Katie teaches seventh-grade English language arts general education and inclusion classes.

Mary

Mary is an eighth-grade English language arts teacher at Smith Middle School. She has taught eighth-grade ELA for three years and holds a bachelor’s degree in secondary English. Mary described spending too much time on some assignments, like writing, because she struggles with understanding the best strategy to use when teaching. In her interview, Mary added, “As a teacher, I always feel like I'm never where I need to be. I also feel like sometimes we have so many standards to cover. When do you have time in the timeframe that you're given to cover all of those standards?” Mary teaches both general education and inclusion classes.

Results

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of English teachers and to determine how implementing Common Core State Standards has led to decreased student motivation for middle school language arts students at Smith Middle School. This study focused on one central research question and three sub-questions. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and focus groups with the teacher participants. All teachers participated in all three data collection methods with member checking, and none withdrew from the study. Observation notes and conversations were analyzed for categories and themes. All descriptive and reflective notes that I recorded were analyzed using the detailed reading approach (van Manen, 2016). In this approach, I analyzed each sentence to look for thematic words, categories, or phrases that emerged from the data (van Manen, 2016). For the interviews and focus groups, data was obtained by Microsoft Teams transcription, and those transcriptions were then read and marked for beginning ideas. Then, I

formed initial codes with the data and wrote significant statements. The significant statement sections were formed into themes. Next, as Creswell and Poth (2018) explain, the statements were formed into units of meaning by developing textural, structural, and composite explanations. From this analysis, three main themes emerged, and six sub-themes were located. Table 2 outlines the themes, subthemes, and codes that emerged from the data.

Table 2

Themes, Subthemes, and Codes

Research Questions	Themes	Subthemes	Code Frequency
RQ1- What are the lived experiences of teachers regarding decreased academic student motivation in connection the implementation of the CCSS in English classrooms?	Boredom	Exhaustion	burned out (10), tired (9), sick of the same (8), dread (8), students put forth less effort (10)
		Use of Computer Programs	stories are not relevant (9), waste of time (10), overuse the programs (10), inaccurate data (10)
SQ1- How do English teachers motivate students in the classroom while implementing the CCSS?	Real-world Connections	Testing	no connection to real life (8), not relevant to problem-solving (10), trouble understanding test material (10), students are desensitized (8)
SQ2- How does incorporating test-prep questions and other types of assessments influence student motivation and inclination to learn?		Alternate Grading	projects motivate (10), can connect to society (10), encourages self-sufficiency (8), show more of what students know (10)

SQ3- Besides using worksheets, what other methods are beneficial to prepare students for testing?	Curriculum Narrowing	Creativity	shrink/take out valuable curriculum (10), surface-level instruction (8), delay fun/creative units to focus on testing (10), dependent on multiple choice (10).
		Teacher Versus Student-Centered Learning	teacher centered because of standards-based testing (7), student-centered increases motivation (10), student-centered fosters creativity (8)

Boredom

The first theme to develop from the data was boredom. All ten teacher participants saw student boredom in the classroom. In the observations, I also saw students who did not look motivated to learn. They made comments that what they were doing was boring, and they did not put forth effort to complete assignments with the desire to make good grades. In teacher interviews, teachers commented that curriculum based on test-taking skills was boring. In teacher focus groups, many comments were made that teachers were tired of the requirement of computer programs that were a waste of time and uninspiring. Teachers commented that they now see students settle for mediocrity instead of striving for greatness. During data collection, the sub-themes of exhaustion and computer programs emerged, forming the larger theme of student boredom. Overall, teachers asserted that students are tired of CCSS curriculum and computer programs that are boring and nonproductive.

Exhaustion

The first subtheme to emerge from the theme of student boredom was exhaustion. Teachers reported that students are burned out, tired, and sick of repetitive work. They also explained that students dread completing repetitive work based on CCSS and put forth less effort in their work because of this problem. In her interview, Emily discussed that her students did not have a desire to read. Emily stated, “They hate to read. They're burned out on it when they get here. So I think that's the main thing is getting them to like to read.” She discussed that students are forced to read certain books to complete a program in younger grades, and when they enter middle school, they no longer desire to read books. Carley also discussed a similar thought; she pointed out that the curriculum frustrates students because of repetitive work and does not motivate them at all. All participants agreed that students put forth less effort because they are tired and are not interested in the curriculum. Ella stated in her interview,

> They get burnout so bad they get sick. That's why I was thinking about the question you just asked. They get so burned out on the ELS test prep, or they see the same thing every day. We've found some alternative materials that we can use that don't necessarily look the same, but you get the same rigorous questions.

During classroom observations, six out of 10 teachers focused on test preparation material during class time. Student focus and motivation were very different when observing classroom to classroom, and the teachers’ teaching strategies employing repetitive material greatly impacted the observed levels of student boredom. For example, the observation protocol in Amy’s class showed that students were engaged and motivated some of the time. Amy used multiple-choice-formatted review questions on a central idea for the state test throughout the class period, and students read passages and answered the questions together in groups. Students seemed excited to work in groups but did not seem motivated by the actual work. They started

strong but would drift off task every few minutes during class. Amy walked around and redirected students. Several times, she asked, “Are you guys finished?” She also said, “Finish so we can go over this.” The groups that were finished with their questions were talking, and Amy walked around to help the remaining groups finish their work. Students seemed excited to work together but had no interest or connection with the questions they were supposed to answer. During this class, one group was confused about the passage because they could not understand the rigorous vocabulary in the text. Amy did help them by giving examples and defining the words. The students still seemed confused even after receiving help from the teacher.

Use of Computer Programs

Another subtheme for boredom was the use of educational computer programs. Most teachers used multiple computer programs for reading and standard-based testing. English teachers were required to use one reading program, Reading Plus. Reading Plus is based on common core reading standards that students must master each year. When asked about computer programs in her interview, Mary said,

> Other than the data, that's pretty much the only positive that I see in it because it's more of a dread to get them to do it. Sometimes, the dread for me to get them to do it outweighs the data. I would just sometimes rather not even do it and just get my data from somewhere else because they dread doing it so much. It's a challenge getting them to stay focused long enough to get the accurate data.

Katie responded with, “The articles are boring. They're not relevant usually to them. If they're not relevant, they're not going to make that connection.” All teachers also responded that there was overuse of the programs and data that was not fully useable since students were only

clicking answers much of the time when required to work in the programs. Ella described her experience with the program in her interview. She stated,

> I think that we overuse those programs. I think Reading Plus could have been a really good, is a good program, but I think that we have just overused it, and so they get nothing out of it. It is a waste of time, like, valuable time in the classroom. I just think we have to be careful with the programs we use and not use them every grade level, or every day or every subject. Something's got to give.

In the focus group with the sixth-grade teachers, participants discussed how requiring students to complete the same reading program in sixth, seventh, and eighth caused decreased motivation to the point that most students gave up trying by Christmas of each school year.

During the observation in Emily's room, at the end of class, students were supposed to be working on the computer program Reading Plus. Reading Plus focuses on CCSS reading standards; students receive passages to read, and they have multiple-choice questions to answer after they read the text. The observation protocol revealed that students were bored some of the time in class. During the Reading Plus time, I observed students pulling up different windows to play games in, students whispering to one another, students playing with and tossing water bottles, and students who appeared very bored with the task at hand. Some students were on task, but half of the class was distracted in some way and not motivated to complete their required minutes in the program.

Real-World Connections

The second major theme that emerged was real-world connections in the classroom. During observations, authentic learning was not seen in many classrooms because there was a focus on test preparation questions. Lessons like this focus on teaching scripted test-taking

strategies and ways to obtain correct points instead of encouraging students to research and learn material that they are interested in that relates to real life. In the teacher interviews, teachers reported that students regularly questioned what benefit their classes actually gave them. Teachers described that students failed to see a connection that what they did in the classroom was helping them for their future lives. In focus groups, teachers discussed that they felt pressured to make their tests similar to state testing formats because experts from the district told them that they should test this way. The sub-themes of testing and alternate grading emerged, forming the larger theme of student boredom. All in all, teachers declared that testing formats and a lack of the opportunity for alternate grading formats created a decreased connecton in the classroom for real world projects.

Testing

The first subtheme that emerged from the theme of real-world connections was testing. Most teachers pointed out in the focus groups that students did not see a connection between CCSS testing and the real world. Anne stated, “My students suffer from [a] lack of motivation because they see my class as simply a class. They fail to associate ELA skills with life skills.” Mary also discussed something similar in the focus group when she pointed out,

> I find that my students struggle more because, with a lot of the passages with state test prep, students cannot interpret a lot of the meaning. They can't comprehend what it's asking them. So, if they can't comprehend what that particular passage is asking them, it's hard to pull in something else because we really need to just kind of work through the passage at hand before we bring in text about the world. When I'm doing instructional time, I try to relate some of those difficult passages to the real world so students can see, oh, this is just what it's saying.

Teachers pointed out that they had to consciously connect the common core testing curriculum with the real world. In her interview, Ashley discussed that she uses videos with students to connect with real events around the world. She stated,

> We do watch a lot of videos in my classroom just because they're low-level readers. We'll watch videos, and then we'll write about those videos things that are happening now in the world. Recently, we watched some storm videos where people were standing in ditches, and it looked like things were flooding. We talked about why that was happening, and we tied in like author's purpose and things like that into videos.

Brenda also stated, “I try to find a way to connect the curriculum to the student’s life and future interests” in her interview. Teachers indicated that students who could connect what they were learning with real life were more motivated and interested in class.

During the teacher observations, two teachers maintained a real-world connection with the curriculum throughout the class periods, six teachers made a real-world connection during some of the class periods, and two teachers did not make a real-world connection at all in their classes. The two teachers who maintained real-world connections, Ashley and Ava, had engaged, motivated students during class. The six teachers who made real-world connections during some of the class period had students who were engaged for part of the lesson and off task or unmotivated for part of the lesson. Mary and Emily had classes where students were not engaged or motivated for the majority of the class because they did not make real-world connections. In those classes, students played, talked, and distracted others from learning. They did not seem concerned about learning, and they saw no purpose in attempting the CCSS-based work.

Alternate Grading

The subtheme of alternate grading emerged from the perceived benefit of alternate grading methods by classroom teachers. In focus groups, all teachers agreed that alternate grading methods where students are assigned projects and choice boards help to increase student motivation in class. In her interview, Amy discussed that she challenges her students to embrace projects each year. She stated,

> I try to give them opportunities to use the skills they're good at. Every nine weeks, I usually offer extra credit projects, and they have a variety of options that they can do. I have some kids who like to sculpt and make stuff out of nothing. Like, I've got kids who can take cardboard and aluminum foil and what you would think would be trash and make it into something cool. So, I usually try to offer some sort of little project every nine weeks to incorporate that.

All teachers described that they have to add project-based assignments into the curriculum that they have made using the CCSS as a guide. They do not have a set curriculum and must make their lessons and assignments.

Teachers also pointed out that students who were struggling with the material and had learning disabilities did better with project-based learning. In her focus group, Ava stated, “I do think it motivates them to do better. It for sure improved grades for my special education kids too. Some of them would be able to show more of what they learned through that project than just trying to answer questions on a task.” Ashley shared in her interview,

> Multiple choice for my students is very hard because they overthink all of the time. If you ask them a question, they're able to give you a response. However, if they're asked to pick the correct response, they second guess themselves, or they pick one that's close but not

the right answer. If they were just given the choice to freely respond, their answer would most likely be correct or pretty close to correct.

During my observation in Brenda's classroom, students played an interactive game with test preparation questions for the last half of the class. Instead of grading them on a pencil and paper lesson, Brenda graded students based on the points that they earned in each game. Students were engaged and motivated because the game was competitive. Evidence of cooperative learning was present because students wanted to win against their peers. There was a real-world connection to the game because students earned money, decided how to spend the money, and had to use critical thinking skills to finish in the top three places.

Curriculum Narrowing

The third theme that emerged was curriculum narrowing. The results suggest that CCSS have caused teachers to feel the need to remove important parts of the curriculum. Teachers in this study expressed the need for a curriculum that encourages creativity and student-led learning. Curriculum narrowing was a common theme in all teacher responses when discussing teaching time. Teachers felt that because of the need to cover all of the CCSS by the end of the third nine weeks, even though school lasts an entire extra nine weeks, they felt rushed and had to eliminate some of the project-based learning and student collaboration activities that they would have like to teach during the school year. Teachers are expected to have all standards taught by the middle of March so that they can focus on testing and review for the state test for several weeks. So, the theme of curriculum narrowing emerged from the sub-themes of creativity and teacher versus student-centered learning.

Creativity

All teacher participants agreed that there were times when they took out fun and creative units in order to focus on a curriculum that mimics the format of the state test. In her interview, Anne stated, “The more creativity students are allowed, the more motivated they will become.” All teachers reported that they felt the need to take out challenging, creative curricula at some point in the school year due to the pressures of adding testing material to student lessons. Kate pointed out in her interview, “When students just do multiple choice, the only problem is that it doesn't get that deeper thinking.” Ava stated, “When students are allowed to think outside the box, students are more engaged.”

Emily discussed that before CCSS, she felt more freedom to do fun activities with students that motivated them. In her interview, Emily stated,

> I remember my first year teaching *Where the Red Fern Grows*. We did an art project, and the kids loved it. I can't do art now, right? State testing and that focus has impacted student ability to be creative and to use other skills that a kid might have because it's all multiple choice.

Ella discussed in the focus group that when students do not feel that they have to “fit their ideas into a tiny little box that looks just like everyone else’s ideas,” they can be more creative and actually produce better work. All teachers reported that they try to incorporate student choice and creativity into lessons when they can, but this involves teachers being creative and thinking outside of the normal “box” since there is no set curriculum for teachers.

During the teacher observations, Katie focused on test preparation materials for reading literature standards, but the lesson was conducted in a creative way. The teacher put students into groups, and they all had different passages with questions assigned to them. Katie laminated the questions and gave the students dry-erase markers to choose their answers on the page. Students

were able to be creative with using different colors, and they came up with their own way of presenting their answers to the class. Students were engaged and motivated for most of the class. A few students did not seem to want to try, but Katie went over to those students and helped them.

Teacher Versus Student-Centered Learning

The second subtheme for curriculum narrowing is teacher versus student-centered learning in the classroom. Seven out of the ten teacher participants agreed that they felt a push to revert to teacher-centered learning because of the pressure from the administration to have high test scores. In all three focus groups, there was one teacher, Ella, who agreed that teacher-centered was best for students in order to learn the standards. However, the other nine teacher participants felt that student-centered was the best for student motivation. In her interview, Anne stated, "Student-centered instruction increases motivation since the students, through their exploration, are the keys to success." Ava discussed in the focus group,

> I think that it can be very tempting to go back to teacher-led because you feel like you have to throw them all of these materials for testing. This is the issue. I do feel like we have creativity if we are going to have students collaborate. However, there is a temptation to just use explicit instruction so that you can have better odds of getting the students where others tell you that they should be by the end of the year.

The consensus with teachers was that student-centered learning was better for the student, but teachers did feel tempted to focus more on teacher-centered learning at certain times in order to ensure students mastered standards.

In her interview, Brenda pointed out, “I feel like the students are motivated more through student-centered instruction because it can be tailored to be more relevant to them. At this level, teacher-centered is mostly “boring.” Katie added to that in her interview by stating,

> The classroom is very traditional. It's not set up in a way that's more modern. That's going to negatively affect the student. This is middle school. Students want to work, you know, at their own pace. They want to be part of a group.

All ten teacher participants agreed that student-centered instruction increases student motivation. Mary also discussed in her interview,

> I would definitely say student-centered is better. I totally believe that students learn better from each other. I have always believed in pairing children together and allowing them to learn from one another; for whatever reason, sometimes it just sounds better coming from another student. I have also found, even with the strategies that I give them, they take those strategies, and they kind of put their own twist to them. Students are able to teach each other by telling peers that they use my strategy and add a twist to it that also helps other students. I have always felt that students learn better from one another.

During the teacher observations, only two teachers taught lessons that were not 100% teacher-led. Carley’s classroom was teacher-led only for class instructions and bell work. The majority of the lesson was student-led. Carley told students to organize themselves into four groups of five students; students immediately did this with no arguing or complaining. I could tell that she had great classroom management. Students worked in groups on a murder mystery activity that focused on argument standards. Students had to make claims and back them up with evidence. Then, they had to agree on a murderer and defend their choice. During this lesson, students were motivated, excited to learn, and they tried very hard to complete their work. I saw

students smiling and having productive conversations within the groups. During Carley's lesson, students answered test preparation questions some of the period, but she also incorporated a variety of instructional methods, critical thinking, collaborative learning, and a relatable curriculum that engaged students.

Outlier Data and Findings

The codes and themes that developed throughout this study showed minimal outlier findings. The outlier findings mostly centered around the personal beliefs of the teacher participants. Teacher experiences were very similar with the exception of a few teacher responses on teacher-centered instruction and the common core standards.

Outlier Finding #1

Three teachers, one in each grade level, did not think that there was a push for more teacher-centered instruction since the implementation of CCSS. The other teachers in the group felt that they did feel pressure for teacher-centered teaching to ensure that all students knew the standards. In the sixth-grade focus group, Ava stated,

> I don't see any shift away from collaborative learning. Do you? Maybe I have a different perspective because my kids can't lead themselves well. So, in my mind, I'm thinking about them, and I mean it's definitely me beginning the lesson. However, I still use collaborative learning with my students all of the time.

In the seventh-grade focus group, Ella stated,

> For my room, I think that they are more motivated when it's teacher-centered instruction. With student-centered instruction, they tend to get off task. They play around. They're not really sure what the instructions are or what needs to happen next. When it is teacher-led

> instruction, they stay on task, and they move at the same pace. They move along with you, and they know that there's a start and a finish.

In the eighth-grade focus group, Brenda stated,

> With teacher-centered. I know that they are getting what they need done. With student-centered, you have to find the right pairing. I do not think that I feel pressured to move away from collaborative learning though. It has to be done in the right way to be successful.

Outlier Finding #2

Outlier two deals with the CCSS and its implementation. All teachers, with the exception of one, reported that they thought the CCSS were too rigorous at times for students and overwhelming for teachers since many of the standards have several different requirements for instruction within one standard. Anne did not think that the standards were too challenging. In her focus group, Anne stated, “I do not have a problem with common core. The standards are very rigorous. I think it's really beneficial because you know every kid is getting what they're supposed to in each grade. Does that make sense?” Overall, Anne supports the standards, but she believes that test preparation material has made students desensitized to the importance of English.

Research Question Responses

This hermeneutic phenomenological study consisted of one central research question and three sub-questions. The research questions aimed to describe the lived experiences of the teacher participants with CCSS and student motivation. The study focused on lived experiences that connected with CCSS, student motivation, test preparation materials, and alternative forms

of assessment. The three themes identified of boredom, real-world connections, and curriculum narrowing contributed to the teacher responses to the research questions.

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of teachers regarding decreased academic student motivation in connection with the implementation of the CCSS in English classrooms? Out of the 10 participants, only two teachers, Carley and Mary, had less than five years of experience in the classroom. Four teachers, Ella, Ashley, Amy, and Brenda, had over 10 years in the classroom, and two teachers, Emily and Anne, had over 20 years of experience in the classroom. The participants had many combined years of instruction and interaction with students, so, they could provide examples of many lived experiences with the CCSS and share how teaching the CCSS affects student motivation. Most teachers felt the same and reported similar experiences. In her interview, Ella stated,

> I think there's not a whole lot of guidance at all with Common Core State Standards. I think it's kind of a free-for-all because there's no stepping stones for you to learn this in fifth grade, then sixth grade, then seventh grade, then eighth grade. The standards may be worded slightly differently in a couple of little areas, but you're essentially supposed to teach the exact same skills for years and years. It just feels like teachers are smart enough to figure out what they want to teach, but there needs to be guidance so that you have those levels so that kids are actually growing.

Ella also pointed out that since teachers use different teaching styles, they also choose a curriculum that fits their instructional needs. She thought that the standards should be broken down more with specific skills because the standards can be confusing as they are currently written for teachers.

In her interview, Emily stated, “Preparing for the end of the year state test takes the joy out of teaching, and my lower students are hard to motivate because they are lost. The standards are too rigorous, and they decrease motivation in kids.” Carley also stated in her interview,

> There are so many standards, and you have to place more emphasis on some than on others. This allows for some important skills to fall through the cracks, and sometimes I feel like I am teaching the same things over and over. It ends up being a guessing game for testing, and beneficial student learning is not at the forefront of the classroom. This causes student motivation to decline.

Teachers expressed lived experiences of frustration with the setup and rigor of the standards, and they noticed that this impacted student motivation.

Sub-Question One

How do English teachers motivate students in the classroom while implementing the CCSS? All data collection methods were analyzed, and almost all teachers responded with experiences connected with hands-on activities, movement around the classroom, and real-world activities. The essence of the teacher experiences with student motivation was evident in their responses and through researcher observations in classrooms. In her interview, Mary stated,

> For me, it's important to do hands-on activities with CCSS. I love to incorporate hands-on activities into the curriculum. I also like to do interactive games. I find that if students are doing a lot of interactive games, it takes away from the fact that they're actually learning or instead of it being just like a lecture type and then you turn around and do the work.

Mary’s response was consistent with most teachers’ responses. Katie also described in her interview,

> Finding purpose in fiction is my struggle. Poetry, for example, can be difficult for students to understand. Giving reasons to motivate students for why we learn and study certain standards and making real-world connections to those specific pieces is a challenge.

However, Emily had a somewhat different response to this question. She stated in her interview,

> I don't really know. I've never really thought about how I motivate them. I do think it is important because you have to connect with students and build a relationship. They are just so burned out when they get to the middle school. The main thing for me is motivating them to read. Like, right now, we're trying to read *Where the Red Fern Grows*, and I would like to just assign them a chapter. However, I have so many low students that they can't do it by themselves. We're all listening to it on audio now, which I know is not the greatest thing in the world, but that's the way I manage.

Teachers had a desire to motivate students, but they expressed frustration with burnout, making connections with CCSS, and reading. This sub-question was answered by the themes of curriculum narrowing and boredom.

Sub-Question Two

How does incorporating test-prep questions and other types of assessments influence student motivation and inclination to learn? All teachers reported that students struggled to understand the CCSS curriculum and find meaning in passages and questions. This sub-question was answered by the theme of curriculum narrowing and real-world connections. When interviewed, Ashley stated the following:

> Test-prep questions cause students to be overwhelmed. The questions are very wordy. They're not very clear. There's no standardized way that the questions are asked or that responses are given. So, a lot of it is they know the material, and they know what's being asked, but they don't know how they're being asked to give the answers back. If they were asked [in] ways that were a little easier to understand or to even respond to, it would be better.

Brenda also added to this theme in her interview by stating, "While the state test prep materials require the students to think through the problem to formulate an answer, I feel like those are not the essential questions that are relevant to problem-solving in real life." Overall, teachers indicated that the CCSS did more to confuse students than to help them understand what they needed to learn because passages and questions were confusing and unpredictable.

Sub-Question Three

Besides using worksheets, what other methods are beneficial to prepare students for testing? All teachers reported that alternative grading and assessment methods benefitted students and better reflected student knowledge and learning of the CCSS. This sub-question was answered by the theme of boredom because students are exhausted and bored from repetitive CCSS-driven computer programs. In the sixth-grade focus group, Anne stated, "Students love doing projects, and if you give students a rubric, they are very self-sufficient on tasks. My students love choice boards, and I think that it motivates them to make better grades." In the eighth-grade focus group, Amy added,

> Students are more motivated by projects like book projects. Some students cannot write their thoughts on paper, but they can tell you orally everything that they learned. That is

good for students who learn in different ways, and many times, students can verbally explain a standard just as well as a kid who makes a 100 on a test in the classroom.

Summary

This chapter clarified the data for this hermeneutic phenomenological study concerning the lived experiences of middle school English teachers and shows how implementing Common Core State Standards has influenced student motivation for middle school language arts students at Smith Middle School. A total of ten language arts teachers from grades six to eight participated. Teachers all instruct regular education and inclusion students. The lived experiences of the participants revealed three themes of boredom, real-world connection, and curriculum narrowing. There were two outliers. Ava, Ella, and Brenda did not think there was an increased push for teacher-centered instruction since CCSS, and Anne did not think that the CCSS were too rigorous. Teacher quotes were used to support the themes of boredom, real-world connections, and curriculum narrowing and the sub-themes of exhaustion, use of computer programs, testing, alternate grading, creativity, and teacher versus student-centered instruction. The lived experiences of the teacher participants indicate that repeated use of test preparation lessons in the classroom has resulted in students who are bored and not motivated because of the constant repetition of lessons. Computer programs are overused, and this causes student boredom and a failure to recognize any real benefits to completing assignments. The CCSS test preparation material lacks real-world connections for students, and incorporating more assignments and lessons with alternate grading methods like group work and choice boards does increase student motivation and participation. Curriculum narrowing as a result of the push to focus on more CCSS-based testing material has decreased student creativity and increased teacher-centered learning in classrooms. Collaborative group activities increase student

motivation, but many teachers feel pressure to lead the entire class and push CCSS questions. The benefits of this study are clear, and they show a need for reform in the CCSS, the availability of a good curriculum, and change in instructional strategies that teachers use in the classroom.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to determine the lived experiences of English teachers and to discover how the implementation of Common Core State Standards has influenced student motivation for middle school language arts students. This chapter clearly and concisely describes my interpretations and findings of the study. Implications for policy and practice by stakeholders in education are included, and theoretical and methodological implications are discussed. Study limitations and delimitations are considered, and the chapter concludes with recommendations for future research and a chapter summary**.**

Discussion

A review of the literature revealed the need for current information on issues with student motivation that are tied to CCSS and high-stakes testing in secondary grades. More research was needed on current educational decreases in the motivation of middle school students in English classes to fill this gap in the literature. This study described the lived experiences of middle school English teachers' knowledge and insight into the CCSS and their influence on student motivation. Ten English teachers described their experiences through triangulated observations, interviews, and focus groups. Data manifested into three themes revolving around student motivation and CCSS. The findings are supported by empirical and theoretical sources, along with solid evidence from the study. This discussion section has five major subsections, including interpretation of findings, implications for policy or practice, theoretical and empirical implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The findings from the study corroborate the idea that teacher experiences with student motivation have changed since the implementation of CCSS. All teacher participants experienced frustration in some way with the standards. They reported that the only curriculum that Smith Middle School provided was over ten years old. While this curriculum was released with CCSS material, it is very outdated and does not match current testing blueprints. Teachers used several computer programs, but only one was a weekly requirement by the school district. Most of the teacher participants used two programs, Reading Plus and IXL, every week. Because of a lack of an up-to-date district-provided curriculum, most teachers found instructional materials on sites like Teachers Pay Teachers and by searching the internet for lessons that matched up to the standards. Participants wanted to meet the needs of the students in their classes, and they were working tirelessly to create engaging lessons that fostered student motivation. Teachers had a desire to motivate students through lessons that were not boring. They also wanted to employ real-world connections through creativity and project-based learning that did not narrow the curriculum for sixth-grade, seventh-grade, and eighth-grade English classes.

Interpretation of Findings

This section begins with a brief summary of the thematic findings presented in Chapter Four. Next, my significant interpretations along with empirical or theoretical research to support my findings, will be depicted. The findings of this research are based on participant data from the observations, interviews, and focus groups that were conducted.

Students are Bored and Tired of Repetitive Computer Programs

The essence of the findings for the first theme of boredom is that repetitive use of CCSS test preparation material and computer programs is decreasing student motivation. Students now are bored in the classroom, and they dread school because they know that classwork will be mindless repetition. All teachers agreed that students are burned out, and almost all of the teachers reported that students struggle to find purpose for their work. The teacher participants reflected that students put forth less effort in class because they do not attach meaning to what they are learning. Classes that are not exciting can lead to declining grades in middle school students, and students who are bored need engaging and worthwhile lessons (Furlong et al., 2021). The teachers described experiences that showed CCSS activities that were provided through computer programs and testing material were boring to students. Therefore, students need a stimulating curriculum that is not merely repetitious questions that they complete in class each day. Computer programs should not be overused, and more moderation is necessary so students do not see learning as worthless. Teaching to the test ignores more comprehensive educational material incorporating problem-solving skills (Zakharov & Carnoy, 2021). If educators want productive students, they should not teach to the test, and they should not follow the adage that the more exposure students have to the types of questions on tests, the better they will perform.

Bekker et al. (2023) describe academic boredom as a quiet but very intricate part of student achievement that has a negative connection with positive learning environments in school. Boredom can lead to low engagement and poor grades in the classroom (Bekker et al., 2023). John Dewey discussed the importance of preparing students for the future and making learning relevant to the student (Ledertoug & Paarup, 2021). Ninety-five percent of students

report enjoying school in the early years, but that drops to 37% in the beginning years of high school (Ledertoug & Paarup, 2021).

Students are not Motivated by CCSS Material

All participants in the study reported that students had difficulty understanding testing material for CCSS because there was a missing component to the texts. That missing component is real-world connections. Teachers also reported that CCSS material was not relevant to problem-solving skills, and students were desensitized to the value of learning. Teachers experienced unmotivated students because of the requirement of semester tests that were formulated from a testing program that the district required. Students were subjected to the tests year after year, and teachers used testing material in their classrooms on a regular basis. This caused curriculum narrowing because teachers felt that they had to cut out fun projects and other novels that they otherwise would have taught. Teachers experienced motivated students when lessons connected to real-world events and skills. Teachers reported that students wanted to learn about the world and not just isolated, made-up stories and texts. Lessons with real-world connections make students feel like they belong, and they also have a connection with positive student motivation and creativity (Weng et al., 2022). Teachers in the study expressed a desire for the test preparation materials to connect more with students, and teachers also expressed a desire for the curriculum to seem less like a test and more collaborative and creative.

Alternative Grading Methods Motivate Students

Teachers experienced pressure to make all assessments mimic the common formative assessments students take throughout the year at Smith Middle School. However, all teacher participants agreed that project-based learning motivates students and connects with real-world learning. Teachers agreed that collaboration and learning through projects allow all students to

show what they know better than taking tests. Cooperative learning enhances student motivation, encourages critical thinking, and promotes peer support (Sugano & Mamolo, 2021; Tran, 2019). Teachers who focused more on test preparation lessons focused on standards-based questions had students who were uninterested in learning. Huang and Jiang (2021) point out that schools must expose students to authentic learning that connects to critical thinking. Real-life experience better prepares students for the future, and tests that challenge students to dwell on reality instead of made-up situations motivate students to self-reflect and grow as individuals (Huang & Jiang, 2021). Authentic assessment combined with alternative learning strategies can motivate students to perform better in class and to enjoy learning (McPherson, 2021). These teachers had fewer real-world connections, and John Dewey's theory of experience would explain that the students did not experience motivation with the lesson (Dewey, 1916). Overall, this interpretation shows that students actually crave connectivity with the curriculum and the world.

Classrooms Should be Student-Centered

Student-centered instruction was an experience that all teachers believed increased student motivation, yet seven out of the ten participants reported that they felt pressure to revert to teacher-centered instruction to ensure standards mastery. The study showed that even if teachers allowed students to work collaboratively in groups, giving them test preparation materials caused mixed motivation in class. Some students focused and enjoyed the activity, while others were bored and distracted by the CCSS testing materials. Teachers reported that students need collaborative learning that is student-centered in combination with a curriculum that is creative and connected to the real world. Isolated texts and questions did not motivate students in class. Most teachers explained that the CCSS curriculum was surface-level and did not allow students to be creative or to think critically. Bloom and VanSlyke-Briggs (2019)

discuss that CCSS material is scripted and forces teachers to focus on a testing timeline rather than allowing for genuine learning moments in the classroom. Brown (2014) describe that students need the skills of critical thinking, imagination, working with others, analysis, adaptability, ambition, conversation, and writing in order to function in modern society. Padgett (2022) describes that CCSS has a narrowed curriculum, and students do not have those skills when they graduate high school. Teaching to the test has eliminated valuable curriculum elements previously included in lessons (Padgett, 2022). Teachers in this study did feel led to adopt more of a teacher-led instructional style that stifled student creativity because of the CCSS.

Implications for Policy or Practice

The findings of this study have implications for policy and practice related to teacher experiences with student motivation and the CCSS. First, this section will discuss implications for policymakers, laws, states, and school districts. Second, the section will examine implications for Smith Middle School. There are some recommendations that policymakers and teachers can make to improve student motivation now. Others need the immediate attention of curriculum writers, school districts, and lawmakers in order for change to be enacted for future generations.

Implications for Policy

The results of the study show that policies and laws surrounding the use of CCSS should be more explicit, and there should be policies that require school districts to have access to a usable curriculum with real-world connections and creative lessons that will motivate and inspire student learning. Curriculum writers should be made aware that there is a need for a curriculum that teaches the standards in a way that is interesting to students to avoid student burnout and frustration (Grecu, 2023). Negative outcomes for students have resulted from difficulty aligning standards to curriculum, and research has shown that CCSS poses no real benefits to students

aside from the state standards that most school districts were using before the adaptation of CCSS (Bleiberg, 2021).

Lawmakers should frequently require revision of adopted standards for states based on emerging research. If states choose to continue to follow the CCSS, mandates should be issued for a reexamination of standard alignment, and policymakers should ensure that states and school districts have effective, clear plans for implementing the standards. States should also examine the need for excessive testing, and policies should be put into place that take pressure off of school districts to have such high scores. Pressure to perform comes from the top down, and the current standards for scores are excessive and unclear (Brown, 2021). States change score requirements yearly, and schools never know exactly what they need to be proficient. This uncertainty causes unneeded stress, and it spills onto all stakeholders.

Laws should also be put into place that state school districts should be required to provide teachers with adequate curriculum, and policymakers should ensure that there is an updated, effective curriculum available for school districts. School districts should monitor the computer programs that students are exposed to at school, and ensure that students are not subjected to pointless repetition that decreases student motivation. Schools should ensure that what students are doing in the classroom connects to society and current practices.

Implications for Practice

The primary implications for practice focus on improving student motivation in the classroom. The goal would be for policies to change so that schools and teachers can feel less pressure to teach to a test and for a written curriculum that has real-world connections. Students can be creative, have exposure to real-world curriculum, and be prepared for standard-based tests all at the same time (Rivera, 2021). However, until there is a change in policies, schools and

teachers must focus on what they can do now with the current application of CCSS in the classroom. The current push for more high-stakes testing that matches yearly state tests can be counteracted by teachers consciously adding in more activities and lessons that are project-based, collaborative learning experiences that motivate and connect to the real world.

There are several solutions to current problems that teachers at Smith Middle School can implement to increase student motivation and engagement. First, teachers who do not have an updated curriculum to use should make sure that they are very intentional about adding a real-world component to the lessons that are taught. Teachers should make sure that they are not burning out students' desire to learn by requiring the utilization of computer programs that create an imbalance with direct instruction (Karlsson, 2022; Teachers and K-12 Education, 2023). Next, teachers should vary instructional strategies and use student-centered instruction that embraces alternative grading components that support project-based learning, choice boards, and creative learning. Finally, teachers should ensure they do not narrow the curriculum and only focus on surface-level instruction (Rivera, 2021). The results of this study show that these strategies can improve student learning and motivation in class if teachers are purposeful in planning and differentiating for students. While it is clear that these solutions can help Smith Middle School, they may also be effective for all school settings and students.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

The theoretical frameworks for this study were John Dewey's (1916) ideas of progressivism and his theory of experience, which focused on student interaction with the real world. The findings from this study have theoretical and empirical implications that are connected with the literature. Empirical implications were based on teacher experiences.

Theoretical implications were connected to Dewey's thoughts on student experiences and motivation.

Empirical Implications

The direct experiences of the teacher participants guided the empirical implications of this study. One interesting point in this study that emerged was that many schools are moving away from offering curriculum to teachers, and there is a push for teachers to create their own lessons; good teachers always tweak the curriculum to fit the needs of their individual students, but having a good baseline for instruction would benefit teachers and students. The teacher participants in this study agreed that having an updated curriculum would be helpful and create more time for them to add real-world components to lessons. This refutes current literature that calls for a need for real-world curriculum and creativity in the classroom (Grecu, 2023; Huang & Jiang, 2021; McPherson, 2021; Weng et al., 2022). Another interesting point from this study is that challenging students is essential, but the method by which the students are challenged is key. While the CCSS are rigorous and demand students to read complicated passages, they do not motivate students to work out difficult problems like real-world applications to problems that can interest and positively challenge students in classrooms. Students seemed bored and frustrated by the test preparation and multiple choice questions they had to answer in classrooms. This study adds to the field of education because it indicates a need for change in how school districts require teachers to implement test material and how all grades in education scaffold and pace alignment. This refutes current ideas that a need for student-centered learning will require standards alignment and updated pacing (Cohen-Vogel, 2021; McPherson, 2021). There is a need for more communication as students pass through grade levels to ensure that they are not completing repetitive work each year (Cohen-Vogel, 2021). Also, an updated, effective

curriculum should be written and available for teachers to use and edit to fit the needs of their unique classrooms.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical implications for this study corroborate strongly with what John Dewey believed would ultimately motivate and help students in the classroom. The lived experiences of the teacher participants in this study confirm Dewey's ideas that students learn best by interacting with the world around them and building on previous knowledge to make new connections with information (Dewey, 1916). Based on this study, Williams (2017) was correct when he discussed how the CCSS could overwhelm students and take away from student-centered learning. This study adds to Dewey's ideas by showing that not only do students need real learning experiences, but also that real learning experiences directly influence student motivation in the classroom in a positive way. This should form a plan for schools for future use because real-world experiences motivate students, promote student engagement, and create a positive spark for learning that many students in this study seemed to have lost due to CCSS instruction. Dewey's idea that students should not be held to a routine or forced activity contradicts what policymakers and school districts have implemented since the CCSS were adopted. This study shows that the push for testing, the impossible requirements of the rigor of test questions, and the narrowing of the curriculum are still occurring today in schools. Authentic learning in English classes has been replaced by reading passages that do not connect with students, decreasing student motivation.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations and delimitations in this study occurred because the site of study was the school where I teach and am employed. Limitations are possible areas of weakness in a study

that cannot be controlled, and delimitations are purposeful limitations that the researcher decided to impose on a study. The limitations in my study focus around demographics, and the delimitations are related to the type of study that I conducted. Hermeneutic phenomenological studies have limitations and delimitations because the researcher's ideas and thoughts naturally integrate with the study.

Limitations

There were a few limitations that emerged during this study. First, the teacher participants were limited to one subject area of English and three grade levels. More studies with other grade levels and subject areas would be beneficial to see if student motivation and the effects of the CCSS are similar across all grade levels and subjects. Second, participants teach at an "A" rated school in a small town. The demographics of this study could be a limitation, and further research in larger schools would be helpful. Examining other schools with different ratings would be important because all schools function differently depending on the stakeholders. Looking at the effects of different instructional strategies, computer programs, and schools' curricula would be interesting in future studies.

Delimitations

This was a hermeneutic study, and my educational experience would naturally become a part of my study. Since I teach middle school English, that is the area that I chose to focus on for my study. I wanted a beneficial study that could influence me and my school as a teacher. When one is in education for a while, the problems are more apparent, and I wanted to investigate ways that students could be more motivated and excited to learn. The CCSS have been around for a while, but the effects on teachers and students who have experienced them are just now beginning to surface. Political stakeholders, lawmakers, school districts, and teachers should

frequently examine these effects and make changes to implement CCSS, testing, and student curriculum.

Recommendations for Future Research

More qualitative studies that examine this study's findings would be supported because larger samples with multiple grade levels and subject areas could show a greater need than originally thought for schools to align better with all grade levels. Another idea for future research would be to examine the most beneficial CCSS computer programs that grow with students and do not have repetitive material. Instead of schools using multiple programs throughout the year, finding one program that is just as efficient for schools would decrease student burnout.

Another topic for study would be the availability of different curricula for schools that actually have real-world connections for students. Teachers need access to different instructional strategies and lessons that are creative and inspire students. There should be more studies on testing to see if repeated formative assessments are needed throughout the school year to prepare students for end-of-year testing and if an approach with more project-based learning would be just as beneficial to prepare students. Fewer assessments would allow teachers to focus less on test preparation questions throughout the school year, and they would have time to implement creative, real-world lessons that would motivate and engage the students. A case study that examines student perspectives on motivation and engagement with the CCSS would be beneficial since this study focused on teacher experiences.

Conclusion

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to determine the lived experiences of English teachers and how the implementation of Common Core State Standards

has influenced student motivation for middle school language arts students at Smith Middle School. The theoretical frameworks for this study are John Dewey's (1916) ideas of progressivism and his theory of experience, which focused on student interaction with the real world. This study focused on the lived experiences of middle school English teachers and the connection of CCSS with student motivation and achievement. Data collection was dependent on teacher observations, interviews, and focus groups. All data was coded, analyzed, and triangulated to reveal themes of boredom, real-world connections, and curriculum narrowing. Sub-themes were exhaustion, use of computer programs, testing, alternate grading, creativity, and teacher versus student-centered learning.

The findings of this study indicate that the CCSS have been implemented in schools in such a way that teachers feel the need to teach to the test and focus on testing material, students are burned out from the repetition of boring computer programs that are CCSS-based, and the focus on the CCSS from administrators and policymakers has caused a shift away from student-centered learning. Teachers feel pressure to revert to teacher-centered learning to ensure mastery of standards. The CCSS curriculum is not relatable to students, and there is no real-world component that is needed to motivate students in most of the CCSS curriculum. Teachers need an updated curriculum that engages and motivates students through real-world connections and creativity. Ultimately, students need to feel valued and important in the classroom, and studying material that is interesting and connects to the current and future reality of the student is needed in order to motivate students in the classroom.

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Appendix A

Site Permission Letter

[redacted]

[redacted]

November 15, 2022

Dear Ms. Susan Wright:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled, "A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study on the Common Core State Standards Implementation and Influence on Academic Motivation of Students in Middle School English Classes," we have decided to grant you permission to conduct your study within the [redacted] School District.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Appendix B

IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 13, 2023

Susan Wright

Sharon Farrell

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1124 A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study on the Common Core State Standards Implementation and Influence on Academic Motivation of Students in Middle School English Classes

Dear Susan Wright, Sharon Farrell,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your

research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [redacted]

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair **Research**
Ethics Office

Appendix C

Participant Information Letter

Dear Teachers:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction. The purpose of my research is to determine the lived experiences of teachers regarding decreased academic student motivation in connection with the Common Core State Standards. My research will focus on teacher motivation and instructional strategies used in the classroom while focusing on how Common Core has influenced student motivation for middle school language arts students. and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be language arts teachers in grades 6, 7, and 8. Participants, if willing, will be asked to

- be observed teaching for one 90 minute block
- participate in an interview that will last approximately one hour
- participate in a focus group that will last approximately ninety minutes
- participate in member checking where transcripts of the interview and focus group will be returned to you for a check of accuracy

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential. The focus group and interview will take place on campus after school on an agreed-upon date.

To participate, please contact me at [redacted] for more information.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me.

Sincerely,

Susan Wright
Doctoral Candidate at Liberty University's School of Education
[redacted]

Appendix D

Participant Consent Form

Consent

Title of the Project:
A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS IMPLEMENTATION AND INFLUENCE ON ACADEMIC MOTIVATION OF STUDENTS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASSES

Principal Investigator: Susan Wright, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a general education English teacher at Smith Middle School. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to determine the lived experiences of English teachers and to determine how the implementation of Common Core State Standards has influenced student motivation for middle school language arts students at Smith Middle School.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Observation (90 minutes)- I will observe each participant's classroom during one class period using an observation protocol/taking notes/questioning. The observations will be recorded using Microsoft Teams.
2. Individual Interview (60 minutes)- I will meet with each participant for an interview, and each interview will be audio and video recorded using Microsoft Teams. I will handwrite additional notes if they are needed. Each participant will look over and review the interview information for member checking to ensure accuracy of the transcriptions.
3. Focus Group (90 minutes)- There will be a focus group for 6th grade teachers, seventh grade teachers, and eighth grade teachers. The focus groups will be done using Microsoft Teams. Each participant will review the focus group for member checking to ensure accuracy of the transcription.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include adding to the research on how the implementation of Common Core State Standards has influenced student motivation for middle school language arts. There will also be an added benefit to all stakeholders in school districts which will include possible improvements to student motivation.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Electronic data will be stored on a password-locked computer, and hardcopy data will be stored in a locked file cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years after participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts. After three years, the data will be deleted and erased. Until then, the researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Smith Middle School. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number 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.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Susan Wright. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [redacted] or [redacted] You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Sharon Farrell, at [redacted].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

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 IRB. Our physical address is [redacted]

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

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

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix E

Interview Questions

Individual Teacher Interview Questions

1. Please describe your educational background and career through your current position. CRQ
2. Describe your current challenges with motivating students in your English classes. SQ1
3. How do you use the curriculum to motivate students in the classroom? SQ3
4. Describe how you use state test-prep materials in your classroom. SQ2
5. How do you think using test preparation materials in daily class instruction negatively affects students? SQ2
6. What are the main factors that you see in the classroom that negatively affect student motivation? SQ1
7. Describe ways you have seen motivation work in your classroom, and explain what you used to motivate those students. SQ1
8. When have you ever felt that you had to narrow your curriculum because of the requirement to use state testing materials? SQ2
9. How do worksheets and a focus on multiple-choice motivate or not motivate students to learn and to try their best? SQ3
10. Do you think the students are more motivated through teacher-centered or student-centered instruction? Why? SQ3
11. How do you relate the curriculum to things that motivate and interest students? SQ1
12. Describe the positive and negative impact on the motivation of any test-prep programs that your students are required to complete regularly. SQ2

13. Describe how students learn about real-world issues and use creativity in your classroom. SQ3
14. What is the connection between motivation and being able to use creativity in class that impacts student motivation? SQ1
15. What is the main thing that you believe negatively impacts student motivation regarding the classroom in today's high-stakes testing environment? SQ2
16. Describe the effect of Common Core State Standards on pacing and instructional alignment. SQ2
17. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with motivating students that we have not discussed?

Appendix F

Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Questions

1. Why has student motivation decreased since the implementation of high-stakes testing and Common Core State Standards? CRQ
2. What is the main predictor for motivation and success in the classroom? SQ1
3. Discuss teaching to the test and how this issue has impacted your instruction. SQ2
4. How can teachers better connect instruction with real-world situations that have meaning for students? SQ3
5. How can teacher attitude positively and negatively affect student motivation? CRQ
6. Describe how alternative grading methods could improve motivation in classes. SQ3
7. How is testing material balanced with other instructional material in your classes? SQ2
8. How do students receive feedback in your classroom? SQ3
9. How have you been impacted by the narrowing of curriculum due to high-stakes testing? SQ2
10. What does instruction look like to you in the English classroom? SQ3
11. What have you experienced as far as a connection with a decrease in motivation and high-stakes testing in your classroom? CRQ

Appendix G

Observation Protocol

Date:

Location:

Participant:

Time of observation:

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2"><u>Descriptive Notes</u></td><td><u>Reflective Notes</u></td></tr>
<tr><td><u>Sketch of Classroom</u></td></tr>
<tr><td><u>Instructional Strategies/Assessment</u>:</td><td><u>Evidence of Motivation/Lack of Motivation</u>:</td></tr>
<tr><td><u>Common Core Standards Addressed:</u></td><td><u>Is there a real-world connection?</u></td></tr>
</table>