

TENNESSEE EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS ON PASSING UNDESERVING STUDENTS

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Abstract

Learning is disguised in a variety of facets, but one of the best experience for learning is the wisdom gained from failure. The biggest lessons tend to be gained from the toughest of losses. Constantly, people are evaluated on how well they perform at their required duties. Compensation is gained founded on the achievements of employees, not on the mistakes or poor performance evaluations (Dillon, 2011). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how six secondary, Tennessee educators perceive the practice of passing undeserving students. The results led the researcher to a better understanding of the continuous practice that includes passing students who have not made passing grades. This study will provide a better understanding to the decision-making process which allows students to escape the failure status and instead continue to the next level. With the use of the interviews, the data analysis for this study allows for an opportunity to examine similarities and differences. The researcher will also use purposeful sampling, which is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015). These students can proceed to the next academic level, even though unsatisfactory grades exist. This investigation will be beneficial to the mindset of current and future administrators, educators, and policymakers. Based on the findings, state, and federal administrators should encourage mandates that highlight the potential and true cognitive level of students.

Keywords: failure to fail, motivational theories, educator's perceptions, pressures

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Psalms 32:8

Dedication

To the absolute best family ever: Chris, Cathy, Jennifer, and Patrick.

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To Mom, I miss you daily.

Hope is a hard habit to break.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Being successful requires an enormous amount of work. It takes commitment, dedication, and the willingness to improve one's self. But it also requires bouncing back from losses or mistakes. Although each person may lack qualities and abilities, the overcoming of one's flaws ultimately leads to the achievement of goals. In competition, an athlete is most likely to hear more about losing than about winning (Dorfman, 2003). There are more discussions from the negative with the message being not to lose. Those that spoke of losing used it a catastrophic consequence. But some of the most important lessons come from trial and error. As with most people, many do not pursue the trial because of the fear of making the error.

Failure to some is only a perception. It is a name given to performance that falls short of the goal. If educators or administrators, send messages indicating the shortcoming of students, then the perception of failure will occur. For example, an error on the baseball field can be perceived as failing, but also as making a good effort, or just being human. Likewise, the positive aspects of performance should be emphasized in academics. The learning still surfaces from the attempt of multiple tasks that have failed.

The need for approval and desire to meet the expectations of others is often linked to the way in which one is raised. This contributes to the sense of self-worth, which adds to the pressure to perform successfully. The fears of failure increases anxiety and results in social disapproval or rejection (McClelland, 1988). People feel pressure to meet the expectations of others, especially persons whose opinions are valued by that individual. Thus, they become cautious, avoiding risk, and they feel stressed, under pressure, and under great scrutiny to perform, but this ends up even more poorly (Smith, Bell, & Kilgo, 2005). The fear of failure destroys performance and effectiveness. If failure results, one must learn from it, forgive

themselves, and move on to the next task. The golfer at the first tee who is certain he is going to hit a horrible shot often does exactly that. This is especially true if there is a gallery that has gathered around the tee box! “The pressure is increased and the expectations rise. One must be confident, despite what has happened in the past” (Smith et al., 2005, p. 247). This is what makes the journey full of learning, it is continuous and it is useless to dwell on the past with a vision to motivate one forward.

The adage that success comes at a cost has begun to fade with the progression of our society. Many children were raised on the belief that hard work with added effort will bring success. This is not the sole reason for achievement. There are creative destructions that are lying in wait for the naïve to walk down this path. Society has made the euphoria of being successful a dimming light (Petroski, 2013). Though a focus on failure can lead to success, too great a reliance on successful precedents can also lead to failure (Petroski, 2013). In education, it is normal to reward students who merely show up for class. Much of this expectation comes from awarding with participatory rewards. Passing grades are given, rather than earned, so learning is lost in the process. A paradox of success, such as this routine, is propelling students into mediocrity.

Success is a lifelong endeavor. Not every problem in life can be solved and no one is perfect. One’s experiences, desires, and objectives form their own definition of success, and this may alter from one individual to another. Likewise, failure is just as personal. Following patterns of success and developing skills to avoid failure is a need to understand what has worked in the past and what has not worked and the reasons behind it (Weinzimmer & McConoughey, 2013). This journey allows the knowledge that being better comes from the wisdom that has accrued

from a set of successes and, more importantly, from valuable lessons learned from this type of letdown.

Many educators have concluded that failure is one of the most important lessons to learn (Edmondson, 2011). Action cannot take place without knowledge and though the experience itself may be painful, lessons such as humility and respect are principles with which derive from failing. Maturity evolves from admitting mistakes and facing failure (Berkun, 2011). Many academic institutions try to intervene and not allow students to feel the pain of failure. Instead, they pass students who deserve failure. This is a mistake to the individual student who is being deprived of failure. Teachers should remember the reason they got into the profession and recall the effort it took for their success. So, the most important lesson in all “mistake making” is to trust that while mistakes are inevitable, if you can learn from the current one, you will also be able to learn from future ones (Berkun, 2011).

Per Lafley (as cited in Dillon, 2011, n.p.), failure is more meaningful than success, “My experience is that we learn much more from failure than we do from success.” The biggest lessons come from the toughest of losses. In the academic field, progressive movement has been made away from students receiving failing grades. This tends to be for the benefit of the schools, rather than for the students. People are strengthened and only become better by overcoming adversity, but many students do not have to worry about resiliency or battling obstacles. Growth comes from experiencing setbacks and every person has experienced failure and, hopefully, learned from it.

Healthy risk consists of making mistakes. They provide and force people to see new perceptions and insights on how to improve or be innovative. These risks will sometimes end in defeat or failure. However, the most authentic failure tends to come from avoiding errors at all

possible costs. This consists from the fear of taking a risk to the inability to grow. Sometimes, individuals avoid taking risks to feel secure and not have to face failure. This includes educators as well as students. Excellence is valued in every level and in every way in present time (Edmondson, 2011). Teachers are telling students that, "Practice makes perfect." But their own practice is not always a successful one. The exercise of passing students who are not earning achieving marks is an unethical practice in education.

Failure provokes fear to the extent that its consequences are perceived as aversive. The likelihood of this behavior happening again in the future is reduced. To compete should be a challenge, not a threat. If one loses or fails, they should look forward to the next competition. This is ultimately what is lacking in today's classrooms. There is more of a tendency to hold a student's hand and not allow a student to fail, than there is to allow one to fail. Some students have not ever had to experience the feeling of failure due to a safety net that is always beneath them. However, the further they go in education, the more competitiveness the academics will become and the cost to endure a defeat is greater and more difficult to overcome. But if an educator does not allow failure in the classroom, then students will continue to expect grades to be given or retakes to be provided until a passing mark has been reached. The more a person climbs the ladder of success, the more the expectations rise, and the more the pressure increases. To truly experience success, one must experience failure to spearhead them to the top. It is a part of the human experience.

B. Bowden and S. Bowden (2001) felt that it is better to fail in a cause that will ultimately succeed, then to succeed in a cause that will ultimately fail. One's greatest challenge is adversity. It is the ultimate test of character, composure, and faith when it is for a cause. Proper steps should be taken before the storm of adversity ever comes. Adversity or failure should not cause

one to lose sight of their priorities. According to Vince Lombardi, “The Good Lord gave you a body that can stand most anything. It’s your mind you have to convince” (Randhawa, 2009, p. 110). Invaluable lessons can be learned from loss, defeat, and mistakes. Each can provide opportunities to learning and inevitably, lead to success. These types of lessons are not what people go in search of, rather it tends to seek everyone. No one is exempt from failure. However, by not knowing all the answers, this also develops a need to ask questions. There is nothing more wasteful than becoming highly efficient at doing the wrong thing (Weinzimmer & McConoughey, 2013). If one does not stop to ask what changes can be made, then they are likely to continue making the same mistakes.

Wolfe and Shepherd (2013) mention organizations ability to understand and make sense of failure is an important step in improving subsequent performance. However, Kohn (2014) explains that just because people have encountered setbacks, this does not mean that most people go on to become successful. There is a lack of study focused on failure in education, which provides a risky and controversial outlook on this issue. People tend to survive, to not lose, this prevents them from being aggressive and the willingness to take risks. Emerson once said, “Always do what you are afraid to do” (Porte, 1983, p. 379). This means that one should have a vision. If that vision is deterred, the willingness to pursue that vision, without quitting, is ultimately successful. As an American trait, the cheers for the underdog tend to be a lot louder than the cheers for the favored. So, when a risk is taken, the mere fact that one risks, enhances the chance of succeeding.

The commitment to the vision is so intense that mountains will be moved to reach it. One will do whatever it takes, even what has not been done before to reach the vision that has been set. That means even overcoming devastating losses or failure. But the risk is stimulating and it

keeps one renewed, provoking, and ahead of the pack. It ends up defining the individual as to their character and their ability to be resilient in the face of failure. Most people are under great pressure to perform well and to achieve success.

These are the types of lessons that students are missing in the present-day academic institutions of Tennessee. Not only do people overcome obstacles to become successful, but even after they have achieved a level of success, they continue to face additional obstacles. But if schools do not allow for failure, then these important lessons will only be experienced in the real world. This may be too late for some people to realize that they must continue to strive ahead and not to quit. Through much of history the idea of motivating people has focused on the external factors. Pink (2009) revealed that the threat of death helped drive people to pull large rocks around to build temples; while the sniff of large rewards encourages people do things they would otherwise find repulsive. These lessons need to be taught in the classrooms all over the country. The higher the level of success for any person, whether professionally or personally, the more complicated life tends to get. Greater demands and expectations are put on successful people, but if they have not experienced failure, then they may tumble quickly. As many successful people reflect upon the stepping stones to their achievements, Lafley (as cited in Dillon, 2011) refers to his failures as “gifts,” because they have given him growth opportunities. Failure is all about learning. It is about learning what you can do better. The ability to adapt to problems and face the difficulties is a part of the learning process, otherwise known as life. Everyone has problems. No matter how far they go or how successful they become, they will continue to face difficulties. There are other methods rather than grades or a winning percentage for judging success and failure. It is the fact that one should not worry about being better than somebody else, but to never cease trying to be the best as an individual. Wooden defined success

based on one's mindset, which is "a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming" (Wooden & Jamison, 2004, pp. 87-88). Society's claim is that all that matters is who finishes first. By this standard, most of society should be considered losers. However, all have the potential to be winners. But one may give up if their failure is experienced at a great cost without previous experience. The gap between success and failure is growing-this suggests that people prefer to learn from their flops rather than their achievements. Success is not something others can provide. It is instead, how one handles success and failure. It is imperative that both must be handled. Dewey (2015) believes that "Failure is instructive. The person who really thinks, learns quite as much from his failures as from his successes."

Statement of the Problem

Little research is available regarding the effects of moving students onward to the next level, despite their failing grades. However, there are studies that document the promotion of a student who does not deserve to be swept through the system. This investigation is concerned with the academic institutions lack of failing students. Many educators turn their heads to these students and continuously sweep them through with a passing grade that was not earned. The inquiry is to find the reasons why teachers' pass students undeservedly.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the practice of educators passing students who did not earn a promotion. The purpose of qualitative research is to produce findings. The data collection process is not an end. The culminating activities of qualitative inquiry are analysis, interpretation, and presentation of findings. The human element of qualitative inquiry is both a strength and weakness - its strength is fully using human insight and experience, its weakness is

dependency on the researcher's skill, training, intellect, discipline, and creativity. Improvements to academic institutions must begin with self-reflection. If there is a weakness, then a focus needs to be concentrated in that area. This investigation will consist of interviews with secondary educators of Tennessee.

Martin Luther King proclaimed, that the function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. The objective of education is to prepare students for their future, whether it be another level of education or the work force. At times, this process should consist of experiencing defeat or failure. Just like one learning to walk had to undergo the frustration of falling. This study will provide a basis for understanding educators' decisions to allow the passing of failing students. The uniqueness of this study is that it seeks to evaluate the perception that educators have on failure and the practice of failing students. It will determine the perception of educators and recommend modifications to the current process to help improve the overall realm of education. This study will assist educators, law-makers, and guide administrators to reconsider mandates and best practice guidelines.

Research Question

This research will use qualitative methods to focus on the following question:

What is the perception of educators who are integrating the practice of passing undeserving students?

Rationale for the Study

This qualitative approach aims to determine the factors influencing the Motivational Theories and its effects on those involved within education. Special attention will be focused upon the educator's motivation, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, to pass students who have not obtained successful marks. The research is not focused on a single angle, rather it is

focused on the teacher's perception. Thus, the qualitative research is considered the best approach to use. Qualitative work tries to look at a wide-range of unified processes or causes (Becker, Geer, Hughes, & Strauss, 1961) and it tends to engage in more conflict process between the questions asked and data observed. Furthermore, in place of reproducible results, qualitative researchers generally aim at accuracy, getting at the everyday realities of some social occurrence, and studying important questions as they are practiced (Al Jasmi, 2012). Where interviews allow collecting data in a relatively short period, it is the most appropriate for this research study.

This research method provides insight to the practice of passing students who did not earn passing grades. This tactic will allow the researcher to gain insight into the educator's reasoning. As well, this project relied upon the willingness of individuals to participate. Furthermore, there was an intentional comparison of different secondary level public school educators in Rutherford County, Tennessee.

The researcher is the instrument of qualitative inquiry, so the quality of the research depends heavily on the qualities of that human being (Patton, 1988). Educators should set a high standard and not be afraid to tell students that they have not met it. But they should be able to give detailed suggestions on what students can do to improve. And, most importantly, allow students the time, space, and support to make the revision. Failure should be defined as feedback; revise, and try again.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided to ensure uniformity and understanding of these terms for this study. The researcher developed all definitions not accompanied by a citation.

Constant comparative method-Combines newly collected data with previous data that was collected for comparative means

Exploratory framework – Conducted for a problem that has not been clearly defined (Bruggen, 2001).

Failure – The omission of expected or required action proven unsuccessful

Hermeneutics – “One needs to comprehend the mind-set of a person and language which mediates one’s experiences of the world, in order to translate his or her message (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

Inductive coding -The act of organizing so new theory may emerging from the data

Intrinsic motivation - Something done due to the enjoyment or interest

Phenomenography approach - The purpose of this approach is aimed at studying the variation of ways people experience, conceptualize, perceive, and understand (Bowden, 2000). Marton and Booth describe phenomenography as a study that “explores the variation in how different people conceive of learning experiences” (p. 2).

Purposive sampling - Is a non-probability sampling method and it occurs when the participants are chosen by the judgment of the researcher (Purposive sampling, 2012).

Organization of Document

The inquiry will consist of five chapters. Each chapter will contain a thorough explanation of its contents. The introduction to the study and the overview of the stated problem are included in the first chapter. The literature review, which highlights and focuses upon investigations of the stated problem, is included in chapter two. The methodology and the protocol which was used to inquire and collect data are provided in chapter three. Within chapter

four, an overview of the data will be provided. Lastly, chapter five will summarize the investigation and recommend any external changes that derived from the inquiry.

CHAPTER 2: Review of Literature

Although success and failure have separate outcomes, they are inextricably linked. In education, a focus on failure can lead to success; meanwhile, too great a reliance on successful precedents can lead to failure (Nodelman, 2007). Failure is a perception, much like success, a label of what society has given to performance outcomes. Pink (2009) believes that young people will recognize that setbacks are inevitable on the road to mastery and that they could even be guideposts for the journey. “You never stop making mistakes. If you stop making mistakes, you stop being human” (Barreto, 2007, p. 71).

The outcome may be interpreted as failure; however, the conclusion can also be perceived because of some undesirable personal quality, such as poor effort or lack of knowledge. Thus, what is success for one person (e.g., getting a 75 avg. on an exam) may be failure for another person, especially if so-called “performance failure” occurred in situations that altered the outcome. Effort and performing one’s best are associated with task mastery goal orientation, whereas winning is linked to ego or goal orientation (Wormeli, 2006). This belief is that classrooms across the country claim to be about standards and what the students have learned, but educators tend to compare students to one another when it comes to grading. This could be considered a win if a student receives a passing grade when they justifiably have earned a failing one. This may or may not depend on whether the student achieved a high mark. Ultimately, a student may have been given the grade, due to the educator’s choice.

A study on learning from success and failure was led by Madsen and Desai (2010) from Brigham Young University, with a hypothesis that prior organizational experience with major failure reduces the likelihood of future organizational failure more than does prior organizational

experience with minor failure. The hypothesis was tested with data accumulated from 1957 to 2004. The independent variable measured success with the number of prior successful launches made. The independent variable measuring failure was a count of the number of an organization's prior failed launches. Madsen's proven data "yielded strong evidence that organizations learn by observing their own and others' failures. They did not determine from the study that evidence of organizations cannot learn from success to improve performance" (Madsen & Desai, 2010, pg. 470). Thus, chronic perceptions of failure will diminish interest, generate anxiety, and lower feelings of self-worth (Anshel, 2016). This is particularly true as children move closer to adolescence. However, perceptions of failure occur when messages are sent indicating a failed result. For example, a loss can be interpreted as failing, making a good attempt, improving, or just being human.

Failure as a Lesson

Despite the negative connotations, failure should be foreseen as a good experience to teach a lesson. The positive aspects of performance should be emphasized. The researchers wanted to prove the ideal of learning from failure as real and as reality. This study viewed failure not as a negative, but rather as inevitable.

Success is based on an individual's perception that optimal effort will lead to achieving a desirable outcome and meet the person's goals. Individuals with a high need to achieve "tend to maintain a fervent and optimistic belief that success is possible" (Duda & Hall, 2001). Wormeli (2009) claims that in many schools, students consider academic struggle and undeveloped skills as weaknesses. Instead, it should demonstrate that failing and persisting, while learning, is a sign of strength. According to the research, some of a student's most valuable lessons can come from

failure. This study explains that failure can teach in ways that consistent success cannot. This proves that there may be a failure phobia in education.

General theory of motivation

Motivation may rely upon a growth mindset when the goal is to achieve learning. But Kohn, (as cited in Wormeli, 2006), feels that receiving an A grade works only on as an extrinsic motivator, meaning it does not help to achieve success later. Keller (2007) examines the challenge of how to stimulate students' motivation to learn and make it more predictable and manageable. These theories are based upon a general theory of motivation in relation to learning. This study concluded that motivational interventions can be focused within a general category, but they are not always limited in this way. Admittedly, while test scores, standards, and school report cards threaten to preoccupy and overwhelm, educators cannot afford to discount the importance of supporting students' motivation to learn, to achieve, and to become the best they can be (Harde, 2012).

Motivational theories

One motivational factor behind successful students is that they are scared to fail. In Syed's (2015) study, failure forces people to make improvements. He explains that there is a denouncing attitude towards error, which may diffuse everyday life. Success brings its own rewards, but the world comes down hard on those who are deemed failures. The desire to avoid such criticism prompts people to cover up mistakes. Barreca (2011) pinpoints the greatest potential loss is from being afraid of imperfection, and this stems from the fear of taking risks. For example, Syed (2015) uses several analogies to develop this point. Doctors telling patients of complications; police fail to drop cases against people wrongly accused of committing a crime; politicians plough on with policies which do not work. These are psychological strategies to

avoid admitting fault. But the resilient ability to recover, once knocked down, is the uncanny lesson that only failure can teach.

A study in 2004, noted that most organizations are not well-prepared to learn from small failures (Cannon & Edmondson, 2004). Few organizations make effective use of failures for learning, due to barriers, such as time or money. However, Madsen and Desai's (2010) study reviewed examples from a variety of organizations and industries where failures were used to improve. Although early warning signs are there, these are often ignored. This study reviewed examples from a variety of organizations and industries where failures were used to improve. The researchers wanted to prove the ideal of learning from failure is real. In conclusion, this study viewed failure not as a negative, but as an inevitable. "Failure should be associated with risk, uncertainty, and improvement" (Cannon & Edmondson, 2004, p. 301). This is a crucial step in the learning process to learn from our failures.

Churchill said, "Success is stumbling from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm" (Mishra, Parra, & Abeel, 2014, p. 1). Politicians, professional sports players, airlines, and even NASA can relate to the education found within unsuccessful attempts. An organizations' ability, or the aptitude of an individual, to understand and make sense of failure and effectively communicate that understanding, is an important step in improving subsequent performance (Wolfe & Shepherd, 2013).

Achievement Motivation

Ultimately, Cannon and Edmondson's (2004) study reveals that failure should be associated with risk, uncertainty, and improvement. Some students prefer challenging assignments rather than simple ones. Dweck (cited in Barshay, 2015) noticed that high-achieving students were more likely to tackle these harder problems after an intervention, compared to

similar kids in a control group. Immense satisfaction may be experienced when trying hard to overcome difficult challenges which result in success (Anshel, 2016). If the performance outcome is viewed because of the person's effort and skill, then the outcome is interpreted as successful. One characteristic of successful students is their great need to achieve. This need is commonly referred to as achievement motivation. The central focus of this theory is that some individuals derive tremendous satisfaction from success in achievement of activities or tasks. Everyone is responsible for determining his or her own achievement behavior and definition of success. Typically, high-need achieving people are usually fully conscious of the fact that they alone are responsible for how well they perform. They know immediately (through their own perceptions) whether they have failed or succeeded in their endeavor, and an element of risk is always present.

Cannon and Edmondson (2004) also stated that many people are not well prepared to learn from small failures. This research revealed that active learning is only common after failure. Students fueled by failure will go on to learn what is necessary to gain from their experience. Data proves that the best environment for learning is one that forces students to work through a succession of wrong answers and predispositions until they get to real learning (Miller, 2013). Education researcher Newkirk (2012) explores the pleasures of such difficulty, "Error marks the place where education begins" (p. 118). In conclusion, the research data yielded strong evidence, that organizations learn by observing his or her own and others' failures, but also failed to uncover evidence of significant learning from observation of his or her own or others' successes. Experiences create qualities, such as competence, foresight, and flexibility, and are only attainable through the journey, which is not always a prosperous endeavor (Mishra et al., 2014).

Avoidance Motive

One's actions that prevent something unpleasant from happening is called an avoidance motive. The importance and the anticipation of success make the approach motive more common with successful students than with their less skilled colleagues (McClelland, 1988). Anshel (2016) found clear differences between high and low need achievers. A person can have a high need to achieve but, due to a history of failure, have a low motive to risk a letdown. They suggest that children with a history of failure should not be expected to possess a high motive for achievement. Wormeli (2006) believes that low grades may push students farther away and will not motivate many students. In fact, expectancy for success would probably be quite low. However, this does not mean that their need to achieve is also low. Unless high need achievers with a low approach motive find an area which they are successful, the person will tend to stop participating altogether (Anshel, 2016). This is the heart of the fear-of-failure (avoidance motive) phenomenon so common in younger children or less successful students. No doubt, an unbroken string of successes in school does not adequately prepare students for the pitfalls that are part of life (Hoerr, 2005).

Intrinsic versus Extrinsic Motivation

An argument regarding external motivators was combated in an inquiry by Zuckerman (2013). In this research, the external can overcome the internal to learn. Based upon this study's results, everyone should be prepared to navigate failure, and many of those most in need of that preparation are students, who have avoided the experience at all costs. Zuckerman's theory is that grades function like training wheels and that they overt demonstrations of performance evaluation that are gradually taken away as people learn to balance on their own. This was based upon the "median grade at Harvard College is an A-, and the most frequently awarded mark is an

A” (2013, p. 1). This set off a debate that all the Harvard students are above average. The debate was based upon whether Harvard was failing to prepare its students. By helping its high-achieving student’s transition past secondary-school model of quantitative evaluation and “external motivators,” the grade inflation practiced by these professors began a backdoor shift that spread through other colleges and universities. This caused other post-secondary institutions to prepare graduates to survive and push beyond grades, but preparation for life.

A more recent field study in 2012, concluded that the effects of the rewards depend highly upon the context in which it is received. Only if it is accompanied with clear communication will the incentive effectively become a powerful motivational tool. There are disagreements in studies whether performance rewards, or incentives have consistent negative effects. If the reward is appropriately implemented, it should enhance, rather than undermine, intrinsic motivation - making the incentive effect that much more powerful than if it relies on extrinsic motivation alone (Ledford, Gerhart, & Fang, 2013).

The effects of extrinsic rewards and how they may affect intrinsic motivation has been a frequent study of psychologists. For years, the data was collected from students who received a participatory reward and this token had accompanied students to boost their morale. An article published in *WorldatWork* Journal (Ledford et al., 2013) reports on the effects of providing extrinsic rewards and how that may affect intrinsic motivation. For years, a participatory reward has accompanied students to boost their morale and encourage them to continue to strive for success. Deci’s theory is that intrinsic motivation has its own reward: “These are experiences that need yield nothing more to be fully justified. And one might go as far as to argue that a life devoid of such experiences is hardly a life at all” (1995, p. 46).

Self-determination theory

Ryan and Deci's (1985) self-determination theory (SDT) was associated with the symbolic value of receiving rewards. However, when students perceive that the primary focus of learning is to obtain external rewards, such as a grade on an exam, they often perform more poorly. Whitehead (2003) relates society as using motivational techniques to inspire, rather than to justify failure. Collins (2012) agrees that the perception may be one-sided, but only under certain conditions. His belief is that the teaching method involves discovery and productive failure is more effective than direct instruction. Ryan and Deci (2000) recognized intrinsic motivation as a stage that a person may move through. An argument regarding external motivators was combated in an inquiry by Zuckerman (2013). In this research, the external can overcome the internal order to learn. Based upon experience, students should be prepared to navigate failure, and many of those most in need of that preparation are students, who have avoided the experience at all costs. Dweck (as cited in Ross, 2015) has claimed that giving out participation trophies is tantamount to giving kids the wrong kind of praise. This movement holds that self-esteem is the key to happiness; anything that damages it in kids, such as proclaiming winners and losers in classrooms or on the playing fields, should be discouraged.

Failure to Fail

Failure is the ability to analyze what went wrong, examine one's responses, and brainstorm how to alter his or her reaction in the future. Bradley-Adams (2010) adds that every experience, whether failure or success, can be a learning experience. A study in the United Kingdom (UK) reported concerns about underperformance in medical students not being formally recorded (Cleland, Knight, Rees, Tracey, & Bond, 2008). It is expected that if these students are to continue down this route, they will become incompetent doctors or were likely to

fail. Embedded within this research was previous knowledge shared regarding North America. They indicated that clinical assessments do not always accurately reflect medical student performance. However, the important issue of ‘failure to fail’ has been under-researched. This research was conducted by a qualitative focus group study exploring the views of medical educators from two different UK schools. To make sense of a variety of factors impacting ‘failure to fail’ reasoning, the integrative model of behavioral prediction to underpin the data collection and analysis.

The research group consisted of ten focus groups that included 70 participants in each. The attention focused on the practice of educators failing to fail students who have not received a passing score (Duffy, 2003). The focus group discussions were recorded and the data were analyzed based upon what was said and how it was said. Participants ranged in age from 31 to 61 years old (Cleland et al., 2008). This study provided significant statements that contributed to the reasoning why many teachers do not fail their students. One statement was based upon whom the teacher liked or whom colleagues enjoyed having in class. This illustrates that the grade or work itself was only a by-product of the final grade. Additionally, mentors who failed students described the experience as ‘horrendous’ and ‘traumatic’ (Duffy, 2003).

By using both theory and data-driven framework analysis, six main themes surfaced. They included: teacher attitudes towards failing a student; normative beliefs and motivation to comply; efficacy beliefs; skills and knowledge, and environmental constraints (Cleland et al., 2008). This added value for a richer and more thorough study of ‘failure to fail’. Birckmayer and Weiss (2000) define it as an approach to evaluation that requires surfacing the assumptions on which the program is based in considerable detail. Knowing that the long-term effect of passing

these medical students will inevitably lead to malpractice and death of patients, what is the effect of the practice of ‘failure to fail’?

Excuses from teachers were from how they felt toward a student to not wanting to converse regarding underperformance with the student. It also reflected the lack of confidence in the teacher regarding their own beliefs in teaching style, knowledge of protocol to fail someone, and the lack of skills in giving negative messages effectively. A strong role definition, making teachers responsible for student learning, may help teachers withstand the conflicting pressures that lead to a sense of helplessness (Ashton, 1984). Rapp and Passano (2000) agree that teachers are more inclined to transfer their own loss of power to the children.

In a 2014 study, conducted by the *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, identified several reasons for the reluctance to fail students whose performance is unsatisfactory. Within this study, 2000 nurse mentors were surveyed, 37 percent reported that they had passed students despite concerns about their performance and attitude (Luhunga, Larocque, MacEwan, Gwekwerere, & Danyluk, 2014).

Faculty members stated that failing a student is a difficult process and there is a need for emotional and academic support for students, as well as educators. One educator wrote, “I think on a personal level, you feel like you have failed as an educator in your job” (Luhunga et al., 2014, p. 9). Caneva (2013) believes that keeping expectations high will help students in school, as well as their future careers. In most cases, educators have no written guidelines or policies to follow when they identify incompetent students. Another related concern to not fail a student is due to the program receiving negative consequences; “at times, personal, professional and structural reasons exist for failing to fail a student,” (Luhunga et al., 2014, p. 5) and the reputation of the profession itself could, seemingly, be diminished if there is an abundance of

failures. Findings suggest the importance of students' preparation and readiness for their final placement into the real world. In conclusion, the article reports that students are being passed even when performance is substandard. But if a student will learn from failing, then this should be the process to take (Luhunga et. al, 2014).

Edmondson (2011) agrees that those who recognize the inevitability of failure, in today's complex organizations: catch, correct, and learn from failure before others, will have a better chance to succeed. Learning from failure is a process which is expected, consequently, for not achieving success. In this study, researchers lay out criteria for success. Much of it consists of comparing missions and purposes, teaching and learning structures, and defining the meaning of success. Similarly, a faculty member is judged by their peers and evaluated on their performance; students go through their own type of scrutiny. Barr and Tagg's (1995) study, explains the shift in the learning paradigm and how the faculty and institution take on a view that human beings are born geniuses and designed for success. Accordingly, if students' fail to succeed, it is because their design function is being disenchanting. In this inquiry, learning environments and activities are learner-centered and learner-controlled. Muhammad (2011) believes that student confrontation is a product of their experiences and that teachers should provide them with new and productive experiences to replace the damaging ones. Einstein wrote, "The significant problems we face cannot be solved on the same level of thinking we were at when we created them" (Barr & Tagg, 1995, p.13).

Conclusion

Success should come at a price. There should be a vision or goal, a discipline to attain and work for, and the achievement should be the ultimate prize. To pass or fail a student may be one of the most crucial components for a teacher to decide. To be an effective teacher, the goal is

to teach, despite the outcome of the lesson. The failing of a student is part of a professional decision. Educators must create a climate that students believe they can make errors without feeling intimidated. Learning requires these errors to take place (Hattie, 2012).

Fried (as noted by Gustafson-Wolter, 2004) states that adults can make children learn well, in the absence or defiance of the child's inner sense of confident engagement with the power of discovery and of mastery. Then, you are placing that child at a great risk of failure as a learner. Another aspect of this article is that a student fails to make good choices, they are purposefully held responsible for their actions, as in the larger society (Gustafson-Wolter, 2004). The researcher believes that students are repeatedly denied the opportunity to learn from their mistakes. If the student did not do an adequate job and cannot pass the exit exams, then the school should not provide that student with the necessary grade or diploma. "Mistakes are almost good because you learn things, and without that knowledge you cannot really be successful," (Barreto, 2007, p. 71).

This literature review covers several theories of how failing can be the most satisfying lesson from which to learn. The researcher has reviewed the problem of the extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, failing to fail mentality, and studies that are presented throughout the examination. Although researchers differ on whether this reform should exist for the making of successful schools or for the betterment of the student, most agreed that learning from failure is one of the best ways to learn. Overemphasizing success may backfire on many students who have not had the experience of failure (Sasley, 2010). These noted studies combined both sides of the argument of failing as a method to teach. However, research has emphasized the importance of teaching failure, even if utilized as a minimal lesson.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

The determination of this study is to discover the learning benefit from failure and the paradoxes in these findings. The inquiry examined six, secondary-level teachers in Rutherford County, located in the middle Tennessee area. This research will strive to uncover the reasoning behind the practice of giving students unearned grades that passes them on to the next course, only to face the same dilemma. However, one of the best routes to take to success is to experience failure. But within Tennessee's academic institutions, the practice of passing students, despite underperforming grades, is common. The review of literature has influenced the belief that the best of lessons comes from resiliency in the face of failure. Students can learn more from failure, but are not given the opportunity. The significance of this study for the profession of education is to pursue the foundation of reasoning behind failing a student.

Research Question

The qualitative method allows for broader, flexible, and more contextual inquiries. The following research question has guided this study: What is the perspective of educators who are integrating the practice of passing undeserving students?

Research Strategy

A research strategy is a plan of action that gives direction to the efforts, enabling the investigator to conduct the examination systematically rather than randomly (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2003). For this study, interviews were chosen for measurement, as interviews are the most widely used method and strategy in qualitative research. This increases the credibility and validity of the results.

The usage of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is to investigate, how individuals make sense of their experiences and their interpretation of the focused event with the

people involved. Because the primary source of data is the individual being studied, in-depth interviews are the most common means of data collection. Furthermore, emerging themes are frequently validated with participants because their meanings of that lived experience are essential to the study.

In Creswell's *Research Design* (2009), the natural setting of qualitative research tends to collect data in the field where the issue or problem exists. This up-close information gathered was collected by talking directly to the educators. Multiple sources of data were gathered by using interviews, observations, and documents, rather than the reliance on a single data source. The researcher reviewed all data, organized it into categories, or tiers, that cut across all the data sources. This research followed an inductive design, meaning to build from the ground up, rather than a handed down theory. This inquiry was for exploratory purposes.

Setting and Participants

The research setting was in the middle Tennessee area. The geographical locations were in Rutherford County, where the participants currently teach. Each participant was a secondary-level educator employed by a secondary, public high school within the state of Tennessee. Before sending the survey, the researcher sent an initial email to Rutherford County Central Office seeking permission to orchestrate a research investigation with educators. Upon receiving permission, an email request was sent to principals (Appendix A) informing them that their school had been selected and that permission was needed to interview one of their teachers. Principals were informed that permission had been requested from central office and would be sent to them, upon request (Appendix A). Once permission was granted, the inquiry proceeded.

Convenience samples are defined as "choosing a sample based on availability,

time, location, or ease of access” (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Walker, 2013, p. 674). There are advantages and disadvantages to convenience sampling (Convenience sampling, 2012). The advantages of convenience sampling are: the sampling is easy to carry out, the cost is inexpensive, and the researcher can gather useful data. This sample choice provided a more in-depth look at how this ongoing practice is perceived from different educators. The classroom teachers are all presently teaching at the high school level in middle Tennessee with varying degrees and years of experience.

Purposive sampling was also conducted using a multi-level analysis (Snijders & Bosker, 2012), which is a suitable approach to consider the social contexts, as well as the individual respondents or subjects. The main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on characteristics of a population that are of interest, which will best enable the researcher to gain answers to the research question (Purposive sampling, 2012). These participants were selected to investigate the opinions of Tennessee high school educators.

A smaller number of participants enabled the researcher to see if any trends emerge. As well, due to the time limitations, an increased amount would involve more data to transcribe. A total sample size for this qualitative study is based upon one that answers the research question as new themes surface (Marshall, 1996). “IPA studies are conducted on small sample sizes,” (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 55). The total number of participants anticipated for this inquiry were, and remained, at six. Upon receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) the participants were notified and interview times were set up.

Research Design

Qualitative research methods were instigated for this inquiry. This technique took into consideration typical and logical perspectives and it called for data collection from interviews.

The clear connection of the study was behind the participants' reasoning. This study incorporated the interpretative method by applying interviews to get a subjective account of experiences. The rationale behind the qualitative research was to look in-depth at non-numerical data.

The IPA method draws upon the principles of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography to understand the essence of the problem. The phenomenology is concerned with attending to the way things appear to the individual within the experience; hermeneutics means to interpret or make clear, as the researcher is attempting to understand the participant's experience through their eyes, and the idiography is an in-depth analysis of each individual (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The IPA allowed for a first-person account of experiences under investigation. For educators, this "experience" may be considered extreme in their professional tenure as an educator. As it plays upon academic ethics and morals of individual educators. The researcher was thorough in the interview process and analysis of each person's account.

Analysis involved identification of core and major themes in the data, and validation of the findings with selected participants. By interviewing educators, the researcher received the exact reasoning about the process and their feedback toward inquiry. The structure of the data collected was based on the interview questions (Appendix B) which allowed for more conversation. For further analysis, the researcher developed a conceptual classification system to collect data. The researcher developed interview questions based on the data collected from the literature. Using interviews to collect data allows the researcher to gain insights from the perspective of the participants (McCammon, n.d.). The structured interviews led to a more relaxed discussion of this controversial topic.

The interview began with structured questions such as the following: "What is your role as it relates to student learning and assessment?" (Appendix B). With only an occasional

question from the researcher for clarification, the participants talked about a wide variety of topics throughout their extended interviews. The six interviews were conducted during a one-month period in March of 2017. All interviews were in person. This format allowed the participant to be more thorough with their conversation and engage in dialogue with the researcher. Prescott states (as cited in Cohen & Manion, 2000) that it depends largely on the kind of interview being used. The face-to-face interviews are easier and limits the distractions. The interviews were informal and open-ended, and carried out in a conversational style, with the researcher as the instrument for data collection, with the use of a recording device.

The scope of this research is to understand the educators' perspectives and how it relates to the experience that each participant has endured. The semi-structured interviews spearheaded the inquiry; with the researchers own transcription of responses. Additionally, the participants were from public academic institutions. This type of examination, analyzed, and interpreted observations for discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships. Participants were free from any control and data was collected in a natural environment.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

This methodology involved gathering data from direct interviews, which were gathered from six secondary educators in Tennessee. The participants were chosen due to their experience and willingness to share their thoughts and feelings about this topic and personal perception.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

The researcher used the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, which seeks to understand the participant's point of view and overall perception, along with making sense of their experiences. This allows the researcher the opportunity to stand in the participant's

shoes or understand what the experience was like. The data was collected by the researcher's personal interviews with participants in a one-on-one environment.

Although the researcher used a structured list of questions, this led to more unstructured questions, based upon the willingness of the participant. The researcher will use an open-ended approach to gather more detailed information. The secondary educators were from two different school locations. They were diverse in teaching experience and current teaching positions. The reason for the interview process is to gather a first-hand account of the educator's perception of passing students who did not deserve to be. The documentations will allow for an audit trail, which will demonstrate confirmability. This will allow other researchers to come to the same conclusions, using the same data.

Coding

A software program, Atlas.ti, is designed to assist the large quantity of data used in this investigation to help in the organization, labeling, coding, and to highlight the surfacing of reoccurring themes or patterns. The researcher used this inductive coding data to merge the information into categories. These groupings were determined based upon the themes that reoccurred. This was based on the actual words of each participant's interviews. Explicitly, the constant comparative method was utilized, "which combines inductive category coding with simultaneous comparison of all units" (Ary et al., 2014, p. 489). This specific technology was used to make comparisons and how it relates to multiple codes, while looking for interrelationships.

At this first level of coding, known as open coding or initial coding, the researcher looked for reoccurring concepts and categories in the data, which formed the basic units of the analysis

(Research Rundown). From the literature, the researcher formulated priori categories. The data was then placed into concepts.

Ary et al. (2013) suggests outlining the ideas that best fit and interpret the data and use these as analytic categories. Similar words or phrases were grouped together and given the same conceptual label. The purpose is to develop core concepts, categories, and properties.

Axial coding is designed to put data back together that were broken apart in the open coding. The researcher developed connections between a category and its subcategories (not between separate categories). The main purpose is to develop main categories and subcategories. In axial coding, the researcher used the concepts and categories while re-reading the text and interpret and explore how the concepts and categories relate. This allowed for the researcher to create a new category. Axial coding is a more direct approach at looking at the data and helped to identify all aspects of the collected data. For example, each time an interviewee mentions “entitlement”, when spoken, would be highlighted or coded, allowing for a concept to form.

Finally, the selective coding shows the connections between the discrete categories. The purpose is to bring the categories together into an overall theory. Other items related to this phrase (beliefs, etc.) became categories – all coded the same. The use of different codes distinguished each concept and category. This provided aid to the researcher in interpreting the meaning of the data or to reach an overall conclusion.

Journaling

The analysis involved numerous close readings of the transcript along with the notations provided by the researcher. The researcher paid close attention to the emotional responses or distinctive phrases from each participant. Notations within the interviews included the researcher’s observations and reflections, which was completed in a Daily Interpretive Analysis

(DIA). Like field notes, this was used to assemble and interpret the information collected quickly and it is essential to do this so as not to lose information obtained in the interview process. This is considered a reflective journal method used so the researcher can reflect on the abundance of information collected, whether verbal or non-verbal. Ary et al. (2013) suggests setting aside time each day to write and review and to expand the detail and to review the journal regularly to help the researcher see themes or patterns. With the use of the DIA and the Atlas.ti program, the researcher sought connections and emerging themes, grouping them together according to similarities. Then a grouping of the most prominent themes and less prominent. The researcher will produce short descriptions for each theme and use passages in the transcript for support and evidence.

Data Comparison

Trends that develop from the interviews were compared to the Tennessee state report card, which publishes district statistics. This concentration was focused on Rutherford County's graduation rates and overall average of ACT College Readiness marks from the academic data.

Role of Researcher

The researcher's role in the discussion process is to simplify and guide, rather than dictate exactly what will happen (Ary et al., 2013). The interviewer concentrated on what the respondent was saying, and how it was being stated. The respondent could determine how the interview process developed. The interview did not follow the sequence on the schedule, nor was every question asked, or asked in the same way, of each respondent. As the process progressed, the researcher attempted to resist from interaction that persuaded or altered views of the participant. The overall interview process took a total of two weeks.

Trustworthiness

The response bias, or cognitive bias, were most prevalent in this study because it involved self-reporting. The interview process created a more effective and thorough response opportunity. The emphasis of the partially-structured interview was based on experiences, opinion, feelings, and input. These results gave meaning and substantial ideas as to why the educators practice the method of passing undeserving students.

The educator will follow up with all participants at the close of the study.

Limitations and Delimitations

Although validity and creditability were taken, it might be troublesome for many educators to admit to falsifying records and allowing students to be passed undeservingly. The focus for this study was on the six educators of Tennessee. This may have limited the honesty and transparency of the participant's responses. The researcher asked the educators to present their answers in an honest manner assuring their anonymity. This may have allowed for more sincerity when responding to the interviews. The participants varied in experience, job titles and a variance with the years of teaching. Due to time restrictions, the researcher was unable to interview or survey a more abundant number of educators. This is another limitation within this study. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher did not link respondents' identifiers to their responses when using data. Common identifiers, which included names, addresses, and phone numbers were not requested from the educators as it was not a necessity to run the data software. Furthermore, there was a limitation of the researcher in this qualitative study, when he or she "is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis" (Merriam, 1998, p. 42).

The delimiters of this study came from accurately pinpointing what may lead to the practice of educators' failure to fail students who deserve to be failed.

Ethical Issues

Participants of this study were given informed consent forms (Appendix C) before participating in the interview. For respondents to give informed consent, the researcher informed the respondents of the study's purpose, content, duration, potential risks, and benefits. The respondents were informed that they did not have to answer all the interview questions. The researcher informed the respondents that this is optional and that they could stop participating in the study at any point.

CHAPTER 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to determine the reasoning behind educators passing undeserving students. This qualitative inquiry sought out six educators from Rutherford County in middle Tennessee. To collect and synthesize these perceptions, reoccurring themes emerged from the interviews of current secondary level educators. These participants had a unique and authoritative perspective than the general population, as their insights are valuable to the understanding of this practice. "The researcher enters the world of the people he or she plans to study, and systematically keeps a detailed written record of what is heard and observed. This material is supplemented (triangulated) by other data such as [artifacts], observations, journals, and newspaper articles," (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Qualitative provides a more in-depth and richer description to allow the reader to determine if the situation applies and inductively analyzes data and develops theories. Due to the detailed oriented results, data saturation occurs. This is when the researcher is no longer hearing or seeing new information and the similarities begin to overlap. This chapter will present the findings that emerged from the data collected and analyzed using the conceptual framework that was constructed for this study.

The objective of the analysis is to determine the educator's responses to the research question, on which this project is focused:

What is the perception of educators who are integrating the practice of passing undeserving students?

Responses were analyzed from the interviews, which were conversational discussions, initiated from a list of structured questions (Appendix B). The educators revealed their own personal insight and their motives behind their actions regarding this exercise. Additionally, the researcher has included the overall graduation average of Rutherford County, along with the overall ACT

College Readiness averages in Rutherford County. The comparison of this data with the interviews was discussed.

A Daily Interpretative Analysis (DIA) was compiled after each interview. This was used to describe the mood, emotions, and the hesitations of each participant. The DIA reflects the location of the interviews and the time of day. The quotes distributed throughout this chapter are considered “raw data” that the researcher interpreted to be rich and informative. Other data is published as discussion and explanatory inserts. Upon completion of the interviews, the audio was downloaded onto a qualitative coding software. The audio was then transcribed into text by the researcher. The data was then organized around the unit of analysis that constituted patterns and themes. Parts of the interviews were broken down into components by categorizing, or coding, and then synthesizing the relative portions and interpreting the results.

Coding was created using a frequent usage report for repeated words or phrases from all the interviews. Initially, the researcher created priori codes based upon the literature reviewed, but other emergent codes developed from the results of the interviews and once the transcripts were completed. The emergent codes were created based on a frequent word report used in the interviews that was generated from the data software. This process was used to distinguish a clear view of the data without any bias from the researcher. Three priori codes were created: entitlement, opportunities, reluctance. These were expected to be common throughout the inquiry. However, the emergent codes were revealed: politics, pressure, testing, and student work. A full compilation of all codes was created, along with phrases that were associated with that code (Table 1).

Table 1. Major Codes of the Situation.

<i>Major Categories</i>	<i>Associated concepts</i>
Entitlement – p	Expectations, receive, gifts
Opportunities – p	Tutoring, grade and semester recovery, graduation coach
Reluctance-p	Avoidance, embarrassment, detrimental
Politics – e	State, mandates, law, politicians
Pressure – e	Parents, administration, principals,
Testing - e	ACT, EOC, TN Ready
Work – e	Student work, work ethic, work hard
<i>Note: p=priori, e=emergent</i>	

There were also several tactics for sorting these six individuals: one group for females and the other males; one for beginning teachers in year two through ten, while the other more experienced group was in year eleven through twenty. All participants were on the secondary level and two of them were also serving as head coaches.

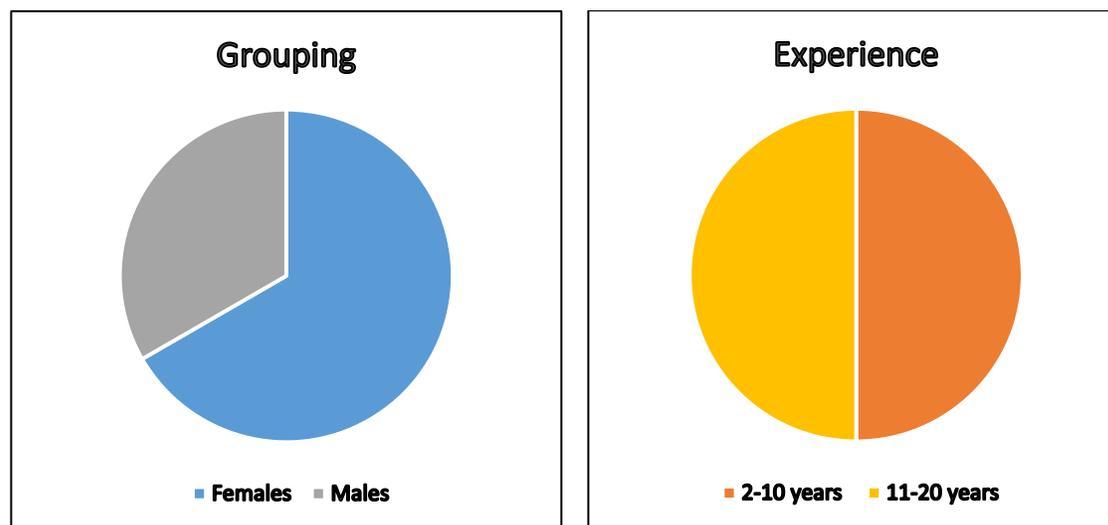


Figure 4.1. Purposive Sampling.

Selection of Participants

There were two districts contacted via email for permission to perform research within their territory. Of the two districts asked, one refused to allow participation to ensue. The only one approving of the research allowed the study to progress. After permission was granted, the researcher had to request approval from school-level principals. Of the three approached, two granted consent and one denied the interview process. Each of the six participants were contacted by email or text. All of them were accommodating and willing to help in the inquiry. They were provided consent forms and were assured anonymity and confidentiality as a guarantee. Each of these interviews were conducted in face to face environment and all lasted about 60 minutes.

Participant Demographics

The study participants were all secondary-level educators of Rutherford County. The teaching experience ranged from two and one-half years to 20 years. The subject area taught also varied from Digital Art and Design, World History, English I, English II, English III, and Biology. Each participant had graduated with a Bachelor's degree, two had Master's degrees. Of the six: four were female and two were male.

Most interviews took place within the participant's classroom to assure comfortability and convenience. The lone exception was an interview that took place on the back porch of an interviewee's home.

These specific educators were chosen for several reasons. First and foremost, the approval from their administrators had been granted. Secondly, they were willing to provide time either after school or on a weekend. For the purpose of reporting the results, all educators will be referred to by a four-digit number to preserve their anonymity.

Interviews

Entitlement

This theme encapsulates each of the participants' struggle to deal with the exasperation they have experienced as teachers in the classroom. There seems to be a constant battle with the obstacle of student's feeling as though they deserve something for just showing up students or teachers. There are a combination of feelings encompassing disappointment, helplessness, and irritation resulting in this frustration. A definition of entitlement offered by Harvey and Martinko (2009), indicates that "psychological entitlement refers to the phenomenon in which individuals consistently believe that they deserve preferential rewards and treatment, often with little consideration of actual qualities or performance levels" (p. 459).

According to participant #1928, there was a time when this feeling of being privileged was initiated, "*The thing that ruined this was when everything was to feel good and everyone gets a trophy.*"

The least years as an educator, #0625 shared a story that transpired in her class earlier during the day. She was providing small prizes from a treasure box for those students who had raised their grades by two points. One of her students said it was not fair and that it made her feel bad. This student went on to tell the teacher that they should not be doing it. So, the teacher took it to the class as a vote. The responses from most of her students was that they deserved it, if they had raised their grades.

In the beginning of one interview, it was not easy for participant #1712 to answer questions without his nerves sounding through. Although apprehensive, he explicitly expressed his feelings on this expectation. Also, as a coach, he frequently used athletics to describe some of the challenges he faces.

“Entitlement is the worst thing about this generation. Parents think that because their child is a senior, they should be starters on the team while another kid is hitting balls out. They say, ‘but their student has paid their player fees and they just don’t get it.’”

The interview of #1122 was an older female, who had entered the teaching field later in life. The researcher visited this participant at her residence on a weekend morning. The participant was extremely relaxed and, admittedly, tired, and frustrated. She was welcoming and transparent with her responses. According to her, in six to seven years, entitlement will be worse.

“Even the parents feel entitled, they want something for nothing. There is no hard work going on...I just wish that we would go back to hard work being expected and not rewarding those that do not do work...it is wrong.”

Entitlement was a topic that the researcher thought would inundate this study. Although it was stated, only four of the six participants discussed this topic. This was a priori code and turned out to be a theme that many related the lack of failing students toward.

Another question poised to educators was would students, who have been passed undeservingly, avoid challenging situations later in life? Half of the participants said that they did not think it would cause students to avoid a challenging situation. In fact, two of the respondents answered by using the entitlement excuse. Participant #0625 did not think that it would cause students to sidestep these trials, but instead make them feel authorized.

“It may bring more confrontation in their lives because they are told ‘No’. When push comes to shove and they have to meet a deadline, they will not have that drive to push through or work. There are situations when you cannot talk your way out of things.”

In agreement, #1928 claimed that she does not see the kids getting the message that hard work and staying the course will ultimately lead to success:

“Parents are working their ass off by working two jobs and you can’t get a hold of them. They can’t come in; their child is bouncing off the walls and they have no rules because no one is watching them. The whole message of hard work is not trickling through, nor the message of appreciation. It is just entitlement and it abounds and worsens every year.”

Opportunities

The educators each shared their frustrations with the educational system. Testing is approaching and the stress-level for some of these educators is increasing. Students are still choosing not to do the necessary work to achieve in the classroom. According to the interview results, this falls under the multitude of safety nets for them to not fail.

Many schools have created grade recovery programs, normally through an abbreviated online version of the class. There are also semester recovery programs; Response To Intervention (RTI) classes for those that are falling behind and need more one-on-one interaction; Intensive Care Unit (ICU) programs that are exclusive teacher – student interventions; Graduation Coaches, Academic Intervention (AI) curricula that includes the involvement of lunch detention, lifeguards, or Educational Assistants (EA) pulling students from their regular classrooms to make up work; tutoring before and after school, but rarely is there time for enrichment.



Figure 4.2. Opportunities that allow students to succeed.

Participant #5151, who is ending her 16th year in education, explained that her school now has a grading policy that students are not allowed to have more than three zeroes. If the student earns more than three zeroes, then the teacher must contact parents and have parent-teacher conferences every Wednesday throughout the rest of the school year. Also, according to grading policy, a student cannot have a grade lower than a 50 average. It is expected that if the grade is below 50, the student will not see a way out and therefore, will give up. She explains one method she uses in her classroom:

“I make it uncomfortable for them, but they know I am here early and I stay late. They must be here an hour early. They are allowed to retake tests, I had three show up and they were willing to come in and their grade improved. There are so many programs set in motion that stops them from failing, but they are fighting you, and running for the door.”

Despite the multitude of opportunities, the students are continuing to struggle. After 20 years of teaching, #1217 has a different perspective.

“The primary cause is the lack of consequences. I can count on one hand the amount of students that failed my class in my first ten years. That’s because it put graduation in jeopardy. There are no consequences at home either. There are not real world expectations or consequences for these kids.”

It is evident that schools are making the best of a poor situation. But according to #0625, *“We have crippled our teachers and are giving the power to the students.”* Many of the students are taking it for granted that they really do not have to do the classwork, because they have so many options to choose from to pass. One form, created for the grade or semester recovery programs, does not require the students to have a certain grade or a have a teacher’s permission (Appendix D). Contributor #0625 added, *“Children aren’t given the option to fail and I don’t mean that harshly, but we make it easy for students to pass.”* One teacher remarked how she would love to do a packet of work that is a condensed version of the classwork instead of teaching all day. The choice is ultimately going to the student and the student knows that there is no reason to sit all day and do the assigned work in each class.

This opportunity theme captured the participants’ strong feelings of discontentedness about the reluctance or the inability to fail students. However, participants believed that they should provide students with multiple chances. #1712 stated, *“My job is to give that kid ample opportunity.”* Interviewee #1928 likened it to the real world, where there are several opportunities to right a wrong.

“As they get older we are to teach them responsibility. They get to retake the driver’s license test. If they don’t pass the test at work, they don’t get a promotion. At our high school, they get as many attempts at a test as they like. They redo it for a better grade.”

Many high schools in Rutherford County have built a remediation period into their daily school schedule for students to retake exams, do homework, or make up missing assignments. This remediation period will allow the student to bring grades up, and, in the researcher’s opinion, eliminate failure.

Most of the participants were willing to give students multiple chances. Participant #1122 reflected on her experiences.

“I take each case into consideration. If they are trying, then there is a chance I will pass them. If they are not trying, they are not turning in their work, then I will fail them. However, for SpEd [Special Education] students, I don’t hold them to the same standard.”

Participant #1928 mentioned a similar situation:

“A 68 average will normally get you over the hump, if they just make an effort.”

Politics

The blame game is scattered throughout the academic arena. Educator #1217 points to *“Politicians who haven’t seen a classroom since they were in school, but the federal mandates are part of the pressure. If we don’t meet a certain graduation rate, then the state can come in and take over your school”*. He explains, that the pressure to graduate students’ starts at the federal level, passes to the state, then to the school board and principals. #1122 agrees that a good portion of the reasoning to pass undeserving students is politically-driven.

“We [teachers] are to meet a certain level of scores, especially if you want to keep your job and the administration wants to keep their job. I respect them for that.”

The federal government is constantly at work revising the nation's educational law. State governments debate the newest policies on testing, standards, and curriculum. Districts must enact rules in response to the policies, as well as address local concerns (Brenneman, 2015). Ultimately, teachers are charged with the execution of these new policies, often refusing to become a part of the political scene. Some members of the profession despise the state-standardized tests, teacher-evaluations, or any new proposals that arise. #1217 agreed a large portion of politics has altered education. He grimaces as he responds:

“It is a constantly evolving profession, as long as politicians determine what we do it won't change. We can still impact kids, and politicians can't take that away.”

Politics play a huge role in education, as well as in grades. #1928 pointed out that the state allows educators to pass SpEd students who have failed.

“If a student scores low enough that it brings them down to fail for the year, a teacher can overwrite it by filling out the Alternative Performance-Based Assessment (APBA) form.

If the student has an IEP [Individualized Education Plan], all you do is show acceptable proof that the student completed any of these in class: a test, an assignment, had an oral or writing response, had use of technology, or ‘other’”.

She laughs after providing this information, pointing at the word “other”.

“If skimming by with a 70...on the test they made a 50, you can give them a 70, if you prove they did their work.”

The changing of the score will only help the student, but not the overall evaluation of the teacher. A percentage of teacher evaluations is tied to the overall scores of students. So, the revisions are not a part of the teacher's scores. However, based on the Tennessee Department of Education website, “...it will count toward graduation rate” (TDOE, 2017).

Pressure

Teaching is a profession that has pressures targeting it from several angles. One angle is from the top-down, such as administration or district. The trickling down effect increases the pressure that is initiated at a higher level. The lower tiers (educators) receive what has been dealt at the higher levels from the pressure they felt from their supervisors. Different schools have different policies so there are variances in the way grades are obtained. Some policies are developed at the school level, while others may be created at the district level. Grading practices and pressure from administration was particularly common throughout the participants' responses. The pressure is to make sure that every chance has been given for the student to succeed. These are often requests made from the supervisory levels to help a student progress to the next level. These pressures are both intrinsic and extrinsic (Figure 4.3). These factors play a huge impact upon the grades delivered by educators.

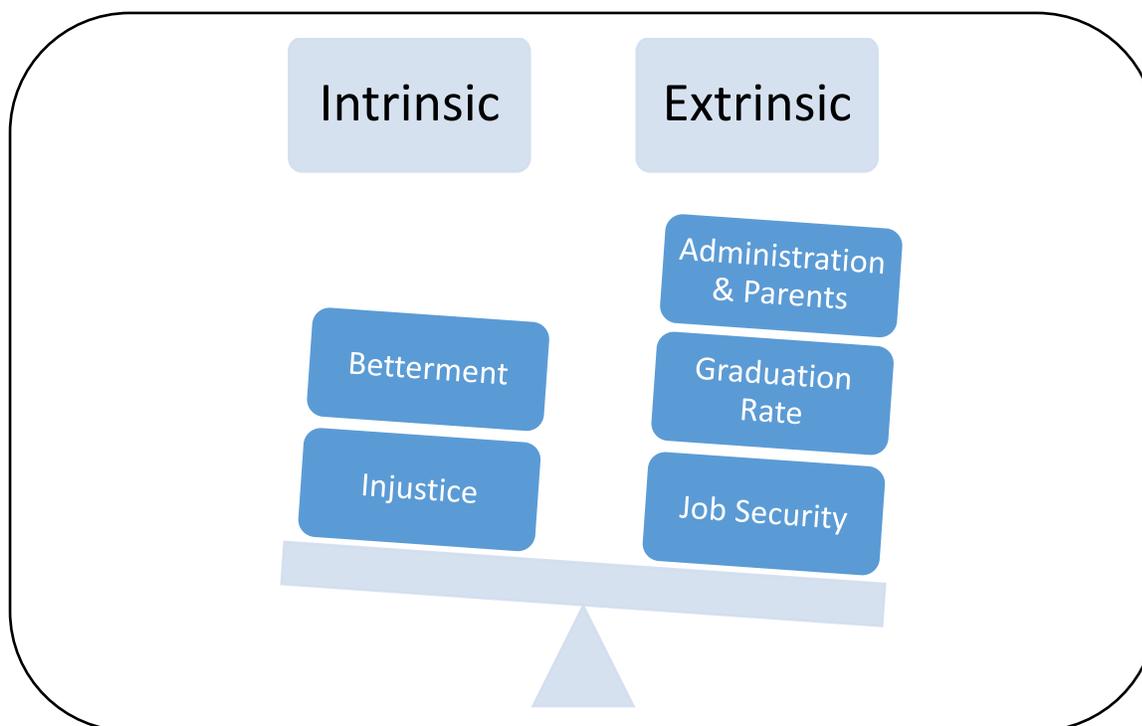


Figure 4.3. Pressures involved.

Participant #1928 explains the rule at her institution:

“If honors [student] fails, according to school policy, they can retake a test as many times as they like. Sadly, all students can redo if they get a C or lower on any assignment or test. They can redo for a better grade.”

Participant #1712 seemed to be even more willing to exceed the requirements of the school policy than was necessary.

“If I have a kid that needs to turn in assignments from the first grading period, then I will take it and give full credit. It is just hard to fail my class. I give them every chance. If I gave an assignment on day one and one that last day, I will still come to you and I will still accept it, especially it causes them to fail.”

#1122 stated that she is encouraged from administration, to find a way to get them passed. Even if that means changing a retake assignment so it is asking the same information, but in a different format.

“If the first test was written, then I’ve been told to ask them orally. They can turn in a novel book and receive five points on their test for their donation. If it was a multiple choice, then switch the retake to a short answer or a true/false.”

Additionally, pressure from the parents was mentioned by #0625, who has the least years of teaching experience. Parental conflict is always a factor for a newer educator. Especially one that is not yet a parent and so to see the issue from the parental angle cannot be fully understood. #0625 explains:

“I don’t want to deal with parents...but their dream was for their child to be valedictorian. The student just did not understand and the parents would come in and speak for them. So, now I have to figure out who that child is or whose parents are members of the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), or whose parents will create a ruckus. Rather than go through all of that, I just give them what they want.”

Another type of pressure is one that none of the interviews revealed, but is embedded in their responses. It is the internal factor that each of them want to do a good job as teachers and be good role models for their students. #5151, with 16 years of experience, shares her feelings as she shakes her head.

“It is frustrating, students just don’t see the value in education. No one makes them see why it is so important. As an educator, you have to care and do things that others don’t agree with and jump through hoops, but it is the most rewarding job ever.”

Testing

Another reason for the increasing pressure coordinates with the annual assessments. It is also part of the politics which derives from testing companies that rake in millions each year for creating and scoring standardized assessments (Frontline). There are several types of assessments that are used from the End of Class (EOC), to the TN Ready, but the most applied test tends to be the American College Testing (ACT). This is an assessment mostly taken by high school juniors and seniors nationwide. The ACT College Readiness scores represent the level of achievement required for students to have a 50% chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75% chance of obtaining a C or higher in corresponding credit-bearing first-year college courses (ACT). Based on approximately 214 institutions and more than an estimated 230,000 students from across the United States, these Benchmarks are median course placement values for these institutions and as such represent a typical set of expectations (Table 2). The assessment signifies how many of the graduating seniors are truly prepared for entry into a collegiate-level class. The scores have not been flattering for Rutherford County. There have been more implementations put into place to remedy the low scores. However, this is a yearly assessment that district administrators cannot gauge if their modifications are working until the results from this test are published.

These scores are gauges to the student's preparation and ability to perform in a post-secondary, academic institution. Testing was one of the emergent themes that was frequently mentioned within the interviews. Only one of the six participants did not mention it and he does not teach a tested subject. After testing, Rutherford County uses the State Report Card each year as a tool to identify strengths and areas that need to be improved.

“We are teaching to the test,” adamantly explained #0625. “We stress that ACT21 and we are pushing that [grade of 21 overall], but we are only teaching test skills and what to look at. But these are not skills to be successful.”

An added push has been made throughout the academic year for the students to earn a composite score of 21 on the ACT. If a student earns this number, then the student can qualify for college and state scholarship money. The more students from a high school or district that earns, or exceeds, this composite score, the more this achievement reflects positively upon the system. There are additional classes, remediation, and pressure for the teachers to nudge the students to use this number as the target.

Table 2. ACT College Readiness Benchmarks

<i>College Course Subject</i>	<i>Test Area</i>	<i>ACT Explore</i>	<i>ACT Plan®</i>	<i>Act Benchmark</i>
English Composition	English	14	15	18
College Algebra	Mathematics	18	19	22
Social Sciences	Reading	17	18	22
Biology	Science	19	20	23

Note. Adapted from <https://www.tn.gov/education/topic/report-card>.

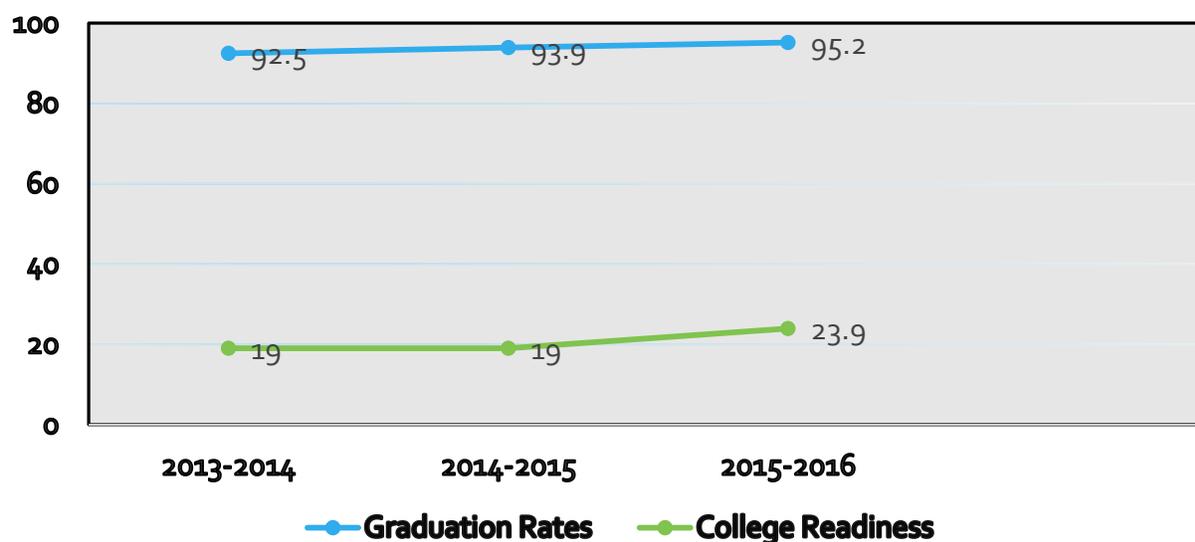
So why stress the test? This test also reflects how well the teacher is doing by preparing his or her students for the next level. Plus, this is a portion of the published report that the State of Tennessee compiles to highlight which schools are strong and those that are weak, which may need the state to intervene.

#1928 became extremely defensive when asked if she taught to the test:

“Absolutely, I teach to the test. I never thought it was wrong for the curriculum to be dictated by the test. Everything that I test them on, they will never use again in their lives. I teach

the most useless information to them they will never use. It is useless unless they are majoring in Biology. I tell them. I don't blow smoke up their tails."

Table 3. ACT Average Results 2013-2016.



Note. The county's average score places Rutherford County students near the 50th percentile of students who took the test in the United States in 2015-2016. Adapted from <https://www.tn.gov/education/topic/report-card>.

#1217 agrees that there is a lot that needs to happen for improvement to be made in the classroom.

"I am not preparing them for college. Our failing rates proves that we are not preparing them, we are just preparing them for the ACT. It is how to take the test and its tricks. It is not what they know, it is how well they take the test. But out of school, it is what you know."

Work

One of the most prominent emergent themes from the interviews was the frequency of the word "work". This word was used 82 times during the inquiries and is an overwhelming element

that is considered for the failing or passing of students. #0625 admitted that she is willing to fail students that do not do their work.

“If you are not willing to put in the work, then you should not be rewarded. But sometimes I will grade effort rather than ability. I am lucky to be able to do that and if you are working hard, then you deserve a passing grade. If you are at least trying, then it shows that you have work effort.”

This is the distinctive response throughout all participants. Whether it be the extrinsic factors or the unwillingness to add more work to the load that is already heavy, the teachers all agreed that they would take late work. #1122 mentioned, *“We are failing students just to look good.”*

Comparatively, one of those components which is published annually on the state’s report card is the graduation rate. A tool used to illustrate how many in the district made it through the process, achieving all required credits, and fulfilling all prerequisites for a graduate. However, these figures also calculate summer graduates (Figure 4.4).

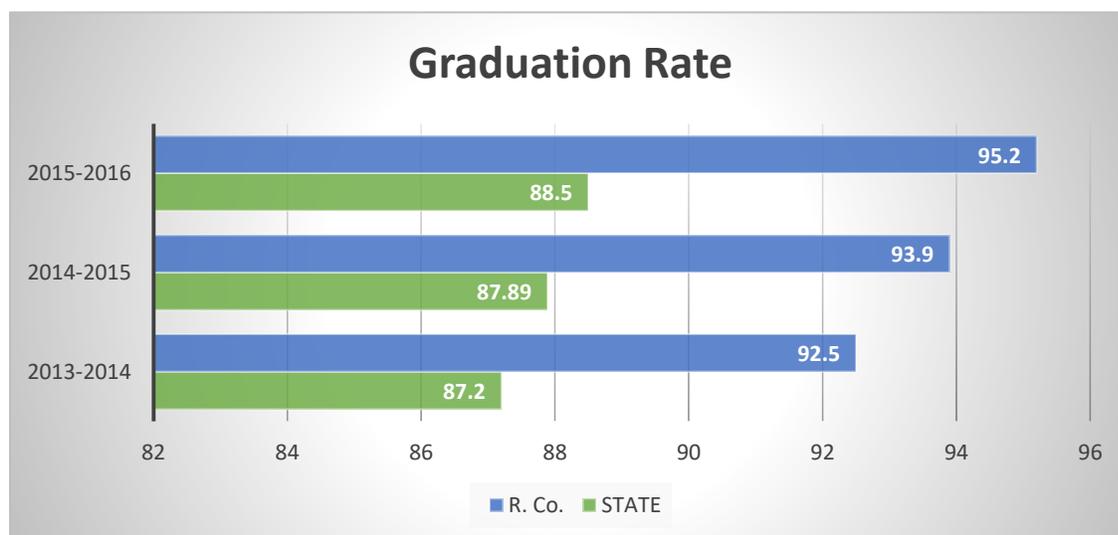


Figure 4.4. Tennessee vs. Rutherford County Graduation Rate Results for Three Years.

Oftentimes, those students in failing predicaments are strongly advised to take night school, adult school, or transfer to another institution for the benefit of the school's overall final graduation numbers.

Emotions escalated as the interviews progressed onto the subject of deciding to pass or fail students. #1712 seemed to be reconsidering his philosophy, as he hesitated before responding.

"It comes down in my class as to how hard are you trying or working. If you are genuinely trying than I can work with you, but if you are not trying it angers me that you get to pass."

This constant practice of refusing to allow a student to fail is detrimental to the academic institution. #0625 pointed out the exasperation she sees with her own students.

"I see a bigger decline in the aspirations of those students who want to excel and not just be mediocre. I think it comes down to our scores and if we have passing seniors for the graduation rate. But then they get ready to get into the world and they are not prepared to be held to a higher standard than in high school."

#1122 spoke with anger as she gave her explanation:

"We are not failing students just so people can look good. We are rated due to the state and the rates aren't real. It is a farce."

This statement reflects true once comparing the data. The scores are improving on the ACT, as well, the graduation rate is improving each year. But the amount of kids that are truly college ready is resoundingly low. This published discrepancy in results represents the data. #1217 also pointed out the other side of the data.

“Our particular procedures, even though not realistic, is about as fair in the current environment as it can be. There is more pressure on the teacher to pass them than on the student, but we are doing the job we are being told to do. Are we doing our job as educators? Absolutely not. If their grade determines they’ve failed, then I will consider if they put forth the effort.”

#1712 summed up the mentality of passing of undeserving students the best when he stated:

“Sooner or later, they will have to figure out that failure does lead to success. I just saw something the other day as a quote that ‘you are either winning or you are learning.’ That is what it is, there is no such thing as losing in the world.”

Summary

In Chapter Four, the results of the study were presented as the interviews provided information that facilitated the researcher’s understanding of educators’ perception of passing undeserving students. Included are excerpts of the interviews, observations, and data from published reports. The researcher attempted to remain neutral and observe all behavior without drawing conclusions during the collection phase. This allowed the development of the participant’s remarks to be honest and transparent. The seemingly mutual pattern of responses to certain questions could be attributed to Rutherford County as the employer. As an example, all participants are accepting late work despite the County policy that late work will be accepted up to five days following a student’s absence.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Introduction

Adversity is a common experience which people of renowned fame have undergone. Overcoming adversity or failure may prepare students for the greatest pathways of their lives. This type of challenge presents opportunities to learn and to mature. The overriding purpose of this inquiry was to investigate the perception of Tennessee educators that are integrating the practice of passing undeserving students. To accomplish that study, it became necessary to reach out to six secondary-level teachers of Rutherford County. Determining what factors play a role in the decision-making process connected with the motivational theories, played a high degree of importance during the literature review conducted for this dissertation. Related to that effort, it became necessary and important to develop an understanding of this experience through the contributors' views. This allows for first-person accounts of these practices under investigation. This study focused the difficult decision of educators failing a student for the hope of seeing eventual success or a positive reflection upon the student. Failure tends to bring a more powerful lesson to the student, but due to external factors, such as social promotion, and the Tennessee Report Card, failure of students is less likely to occur.

Summary

The instrument used for this qualitative study involved six interviews with secondary-level teachers in Rutherford County, Tennessee. These educators were asked structured-interview questions, leading to a more conversational discussion of passing students who did not earn passing grades. The basis for many of the questions were developed from the literature review in Chapter Two. Research has shown that there is a gap between graduation rates and the

ACT College-Readiness average. Teachers are looking for opportunities to present to the student in order to pass. There are motivational theories that also play an important role in the choices of educators. What is the perception of educators who are integrating this practice? This question was explored by the researcher mainly through these interviews.

Findings

Before the actual interviews, the researcher did a thorough study on failing as a learning opportunity. As well, there was an inquiry into the overall objective of education, which is to prepare students for their future. Realistically, this means that this process should consist of experiencing defeat or failure. The inquiry led the researcher to find multiple options given to students to prohibit them from failing.

All of those interviewed were initially asked questions from the structured list (Appendix B), along with additional ones as the discussion progressed. They were asked to explain times when they allowed a student to be passed that had failing grades. They were asked to describe experiences when they felt reluctant to fail a student. And finally, they were each asked what determining factors exist that weigh whether they pass or fail a student. Through the use of these results, data were collected which addressed the research questions in the first chapter of this dissertation.

With the results compiled from the interviews and the collection of graduation rates, along with the college readiness average of Rutherford County, there is a significant difference in results (Table 3). A comparable relationship exists between the passing of students and the high graduation rate. Consequently, there is a negative relationship between the high rates of passing undeserving students, which reflects on the low college readiness average.

Through the literature review, Syed's (2015) motivational theories were revealed and connected to many of the participant's views. As the study progressed, one of the participants explained that she tried to fail a student and the administration was not supportive in her decision. She claimed that "*it just took the wind out of my sails.*" From then on, she did not want to have the hassle of dealing with parents and administration, so she chooses to pass the students that do not make passing grades. This is known as the avoidance motive (Anshel, 2016), although normally referring to the student. This means that one's actions prevent something disagreeable or hostile to take place. This educator hesitates before approaching the administration and feels that things are easier to just pass the student on.

The honors educator interviewed claimed that her students are "*connected to the number.*" This was a unique way of explaining the urgency behind some of these higher-achieving students to seek as close to perfection as they can. Comparatively, this was another motive known as the achievement theory (Cannon & Edmondson, 2004), found in the literature review.

As well, another educator could not make up her mind as to whether failure would be good for a student. Her hesitation was expected due to her responses of being the teacher that chases a student down to make up work, coming in early, and staying late to provide additional opportunities for her students.

While educator's beliefs may lean one way, their actions are certainly erratic depending on several admitted factors. These are external elements that were revealed within these interviews. Pressure from administration and graduation rates are commonalities found throughout the participant's responses. They also feel pressure from external factors from testing scores and evaluation scores. Sequentially, factors, such as hard work and effort, are major

components to the decision to pass a student. All participants feel that SpEd students should be given the benefit of the doubt and passed, due to the difference in cognitive learning levels. The effect of the respondents' tendency to reveal their private thoughts on this controversial topic gave the researcher a distinctive insight to possibly research in the future.

A comparison of the data presented in Table 3 with the 2015-2016 Rutherford County ACT data raises some questions. The drastic differences in results allows for scrutiny of the academic institutions of Rutherford County, Tennessee. There is a great deal of reliance on the ACT and teachers may just be teaching to the assessment, rather than preparing students for university level.

A fundamental question remains as all angles fall back to the grading concept. If all were consistent and followed all school regulations, there would not be the additional push to get all students in a situation to pass. Eliminated are the high expectations of educators who are not lowering the bar, but are being undercut by administrators who are allowing such dramatic opportunities to be given to undeserving students.

This research inquiry identified: a) that pressures for educators to pass students come from multiple facets, b) that teachers are doing the job they have been told to do, not the job they have been hired to do, c) that the comparison of graduation rates to college readiness averages, proves that students are undeservingly passed to the next level, d) too many opportunities are made for students to not fail, e) that positive lessons can originate from failure.

This information was generated in response to interviews.

The complexity of failure provides a variety of definitions by everyone involved. The very nature of this study creates controversy within schools. An academic institution does not want to showcase their failures, nor do they want their weaknesses exposed. Administrators are

determined to keep the graduation rate at the highest level, so that they can remain in close competition to the neighboring schools in the district and state.

Several problems arose during the data collection. Although, permission was granted from Rutherford County Schools, further approval was sought from principals at three different high schools. Only two of the three schools granted the researcher permission. As well, the researcher was drawn into general discussions with participants before and after the interviews that may have allowed for longer spans of time devoted to the visit than predicted.

Recommendations for Change

Based on this research, the following recommendations are offered for changes in the academic institutions of Tennessee.

- It is recommended that the policy makers on the state level, use this information as a basis to find a different measuring tool that can be applied to reflect transparent numbers for graduation rates and not inflated ones.

- Each Tennessee Academic Institution should have consistent mandates and expectations across the board when dealing with grades and the issuance of them. These should remain intact and all policies followed throughout the academic year.

- Evaluation of educators should not be based in any percentage to the rate of graduates from their schools. This is placing undue pressure onto the teachers rather than onto the students. Giving the nature of this controversial topic, administrators should consider allowing educators more of an option to fail students for the benefit of learning.

- Too many safety nets exist to provide students opportunities to pass, when they should fail. These creative detours are just more methods to skew the overall statistics on state or local

levels. Lawmakers should intervene to terminate these procedures and place the pressure upon the students to fulfill the obligations and expectations of the academic institutions.

Recommendations for Improving Study

The following commendations are offered as possible ways to improve this study.

- Online tools are reliable mediums to effectively use for interviews, rather than ones that have no parameters when it comes to time.

- Interviews with other educators outside of Rutherford County or outside of the state of Tennessee would provide more diverse responses.

- More interviews or case studies could take place from the state, district, administrative, and student level to gain more insight on the purpose, factors, and pressures involved in the practice of passing undeserving students.

- Case studies, along with surveys and observations, would create a mixed-methods approach revealing quantitative data that could use statistics to generalize findings.

- Due to time constraints, the interviews evolved over a month. A longitudinal study might lead to more insightful information, allowing for the collection of more data.

- Further study into other state report cards throughout the country would reflect differing views and add substance to this study.

- The researcher has long term plans to continue this study and broaden the parameters to include others involved for the benefit of education.

Concluding Statements

Educators believe in teaching, not always are the lessons from curriculum. Students learn the most of crucial life lessons while going through their high school years. Embedded into these years are critical instructions that many teachers feel are more important than the syllabus. However, pressures exist that because valuable lessons to fall to the wayside. Oftentimes, educators are caught between extrinsic and intrinsic pressures that exist to look over teaching life lessons. One of those elements is failure. It is not something that teachers look to do and most likely, is a last resort to give students.

The complexity of failure derives negative connotations and the idea of it remains as a task that a goal has not been met or completed successfully. There is a degree of pain that comes from the lack of success. However, there are learning curves that develop from failure. This complication creates a paradox of learning. Although there is failure, there is a lack of using this as a motivating device to learn. Ultimately, students are being passed along rather than learning there are consequences to their actions, or lack thereof. Inflated graduation rates are being created due to the Tennessee Report Card becoming a competitive playing field. This competition was created by comparing scores among districts, schools, and even between educators. In fact, there are so many opportunities for students to pass. Some schools have allotted time on Saturday's for students to make up work and do online or semester grade recovery. Ordinarily, school would not allow this opportunity throughout the year, but the graduation rate is so valuable to the evaluation scores of educators and the overall school's report card grade.

Although the navigation from overcoming such flaws may take some time, the journey is where the lessons are learned. These teachings are buried if the opportunity to fail continues to

be ignored. Failure is reality and to ignore this lesson is to forsake a real-world scenario. Thus, educators are not preparing students for what the world offers. Consequently, a rosy picture is being painted and a false sense of hope is being portrayed to today's students.

The education that can be gained from failure is undefined, undetermined, and neglected. It is a self-assessment to understand the reasons why one falters and the self-determination to adjust in order to succeed. There is more to be learned from failure than from passing. Education should allow this lesson to be taught, rather to consider academic institutions as flawless. The greatest of lessons comes from the pursuit to do things right and succeed.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Email Correspondence

Dear -

I am doing research for a class that will consist of interviewing a teacher. They just so happen to be employed at your school. Mr. Zago has approved of my research and so I am following the proper protocol, which is to gain your approval to interview.

I certainly appreciate your quick response. Thanks, in advance.

Michelle Burke

Appendix B: Structured Interview Questions

Faculty Interview Protocol

Institutions: _____

Interviewee (Title and Name): _____

Interviewer: _____

Other Topics Discussed: _____

Documents Obtained: _____

A. Interviewee Background

Briefly describe your role (office, committee, classroom, etc.) as it relates to student learning and assessment (if appropriate).

1. How long have you been in your present position?
2. How long at this institution?
3. What is your highest degree?
4. What is your field of study?
5. What are your overall thoughts on failure of students?
6. In your opinion, how can failing a student be beneficial?
7. As an educator, are you reluctant to fail students who have not received passing grades?
Explain.
8. During your tenure as an educator, explain the times that you made the decision to pass a student that was not making passing grades?

9. During your tenure as an educator, were you, or have you, asked someone to pass a student that did not make the grades? Explain.
10. Some children are raised on the belief that hard work and staying the course will ultimately lead to success. Do you agree or disagree?
11. Do you think that passing students who do not deserve to be will cause them to avoid challenging situations in life?
12. Thomas Edison was quoted as saying, "I have found 10,000 ways something won't work. I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is another step forward." This ability to understand and make sense of failure is an important step in improving future performance. Do you agree or disagree? Explain.
13. What factors determined whether you passed a student that did not deserve it?
14. Would there ever be a time where you would discourage failure?
15. What are factors that determine whether a student should be passed?

B. Post Interview Comments or Leads:

Appendix C: Consent Letter

CARSON NEWMAN UNIVERSITY

CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

Study Title: A Qualitative Study of Tennessee Educator's Perceptions of Passing Undeserving Students

Principal Investigator: Michelle Galloway Burke

Student Researcher:

IRB Study Number: pending approval

I am a student at Carson Newman University, in the School of Educational Leadership. I am planning to conduct a research study, which I invite you to take part in. This form has important information about the reason for doing this study, what we will ask you to do if you decide to be in this study, and the way we would like to use information about you if you choose to be in the study.

Why are you doing this study?

The purpose of this study is to explore the practice of educators passing students who did not earn a promotion. The purpose of qualitative research is to produce findings. Educators may have external pressures that are facilitating this process. Unfortunately, these are various perceptions that have been formulated by educators and this study will allocate many of these through this inquiry.

What will I do if I choose to be in this study?

You will be asked to

- Provide clear, concise answers to the interview questions, and be willing to partake in a conversation upon the topic.
- Respond to a request from the researcher to participate; Set a time and place; Follow a structured interview which may involve a semi-structured or conversational piece to acquire data.
- Participate in a follow up meeting with the researcher to assure credibility.

Study time: Study participation will take approximately 70 minutes on average.

Study location: All study procedures will take place at the discretion of each participant.

I would like to audio-record this interview to make sure that I remember accurately all the information you provide. I will keep these tapes secured and they will only be used by the researcher. The audio is required for participation in this research. Remarks may be used in presentations or articles resulting from this work. *A pseudonym will be used to protect identity, unless specifically requested that you be identified by your true name.*

What are the possible risks or discomforts?

Your participation in this study does not involve any physical or emotional risk to you beyond that of everyday life. As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality of the information we collect from you could be breached – we will take steps to minimize this risk, as discussed in more detail below in this form.

What are the possible benefits for me or others?

This study is designed to learn more about the decline of failing students. The study results may be used to help other educators in the future.

How will you protect the information you collect about me, and how will that information be shared?

Results of this study may be used in publications and presentations. Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used. To minimize the risks to confidentiality, the research will be stored in a secure server, use coding, and pseudonyms to keep confidentiality.

Financial Information

Participation in this study will involve no cost to the participant. The participant will not be paid for contributing to this study.

What are my rights as a research participant?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer. If at any time and for any reason, you would prefer not to participate in this study, please feel free not to. If at any time, you would like to stop participating, please tell me. We can take a break, stop, and continue at a later date, or stop altogether. You may withdraw from this study at any time, and you will not be penalized in any way for deciding to stop participation. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the researcher will ask you if the information already collected from you can be used.

Who can I contact if I have questions or concerns about this research study?

If you have questions, you are free to ask them now. If you have questions later, you may contact the researcher at mgburke@cn.edu or call 615/294-7860.

Consent

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form at my request.

Participant's Name (printed)

Participant's Signature

Date

Appendix D

Rutherford County Schools Recovery Program Referral Form 2016-17

Student name: _____ School: _____

Teacher or Counselor name: _____

Date: _____

Course 1: _____

Original Grade: _____

Course 2: _____

Original Grade: _____

Course 3: _____

Original Grade: _____

Course 4: _____

Original Grade: _____

Course 5: _____

Original Grade: _____

Type of recovery (circle one): _____
Grade (9 weeks)

Credit (semester or year)

Grading period (circle one):

Qtr. 1 Qtr. 2 Qtr3 Qtr. 4

1st semester 2nd semester Year

STUDENT AND PARENTS FILL IN THIS BOX.

I plan to participate in credit recovery. (circle) Yes No

Student signature: _____

My child has my permission to participate in credit recovery for the course(s) listed above- I understand that some colleges do not accept credit recovery courses for admission, and that NCAA does not accept credit recovery courses for athletes.

Yes No

Parent signature: _____ Phone # _____