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**TEACHER AUTONOMY: A MULTI-SITE
CASE STUDY**

by

Carrie Manning

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the degree
Doctor of Education: Educational Leadership

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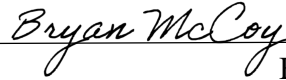
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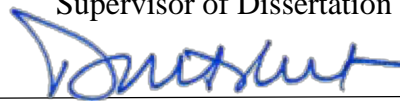
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine teacher autonomy and practices that school leaders implement to promote teacher autonomy at three schools in a small rural town in the southern United States. The study examined how school leaders influenced teacher autonomy in the classroom. This study incorporated an instrumental case study method and determined how teachers interpret, construct, and apply meaning to the autonomy they experience in the classroom and at the school. The researcher examined how school leaders interpret, construct, and apply meaning to their roles in enabling teacher autonomy. The study implemented the transformational leadership theory. Key findings suggest that teachers value decision-making about classroom management and curriculum choice and that it is directly linked to positive levels of autonomy for educators at all three sites. Teachers shared the understanding that autonomy is having the flexibility to teach. Most participants had a strong understanding of autonomy and openly and willingly expressed their opinions.

APPROVAL FOR SCHOLARLY DISSEMINATION

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Doubt sees the obstacles.
Faith sees the way.
Doubt sees the darkest night.
Faith sees the day.
Doubt dreads to take a step.
Faith soars on high.
Doubt questions ‘who believes’?
Faith answers ‘I’.

fawzia zie, 2009

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The level of autonomy an educator experiences impacts teacher motivation, burnout, empowerment, and stress levels. Ten percent of educators leave their careers every year because they are not satisfied with the profession (Espinoza et al., 2018). Educators resign their positions for various reasons, including the realities of teaching and the micromanagement of curriculum and instruction. Over 40 states have implemented strategies such as teacher preparation programs and retention programs to recruit teachers (Espinoza et al., 2018); however, some teachers still do not remain in the field because of the lack of autonomy they feel they have within the profession (Williams, 2022).

Educators want autonomy in managing their classrooms, assessing their students, controlling student behavior, overseeing the classroom environment, and deciding what professional development to attend (Bugra & Atay, 2020; Eren, 2020; Lin et al., 2018). Having the flexibility to practice the art and science of teaching affects the conception of both an educator's professional life and job satisfaction (Bugra & Atay, 2020; Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013; Shaw & Newton, 2014). Jiang et al. (2019) found that autonomous motivation affects classroom teachers' persistence, self-esteem, and well-being. Many secondary teachers are content area experts and desire the flexibility to teach

creatively without interference from other teachers or school leaders. Educators feel that autonomy is necessary to facilitate effective instruction and management of a classroom.

Background

School leaders across the nation can enhance or inhibit the execution of teacher autonomy within schools (Arifin et al., 2014; Cansoy, 2019; Gurley et al., 2016; Rigby, 2016). Warner-Griffin et al. (2018) studied, acknowledged, and reported that teachers who have control are more satisfied with their careers. Teachers want the autonomy to select what curricula and skills they teach, implement teaching strategies, assess their students, discipline their students, and determine how much homework they assign their students.

Prior studies examined teacher autonomy in educational settings; however, more literature is required to explore the autonomy levels of all teachers within a school system. This multi-case study examines levels of autonomy in one public school and two charter schools in the same district. The goal was to examine why some teachers have complete autonomy in the classroom, why some teachers have no autonomy in the classroom, and why some teachers experience a combination of different levels of autonomy. High school teachers were volunteered and selected by the researcher for the study.

Problem Statement

The problem under study is teacher autonomy and the ability to engage with the curricula the way educators want to make decisions that affect their classrooms and the schools. Teachers feel they lack the independence to teach how they deem appropriate,

while others think they do not have a say in what occurs in their educational setting outside of their classrooms (Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Lin et al., 2018; Oberfield, 2016). This study explores how both teachers and leaders interpret, construct, and apply meaning in each of their roles to enable autonomy.

Qualitative and quantitative studies indicate the importance of teachers and leaders sharing leadership opportunities whenever possible, especially with establishing curricula monitoring improvement, and growing leaders (Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Goddard et al., 2015). Educators want to teach creatively and effectively and influence students to be successful. They want shared leadership opportunities, primarily to assist with establishing curricula and monitoring the learning levels of their students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to examine teacher autonomy and the practices that educational leaders implement to promote teacher autonomy. The study provides a rich, thick description of how school leaders influence teacher autonomy in the classroom. Merriam (2009) maintains that qualitative researchers are interested in learning and understanding how people interpret, construct, and apply meaning to their experiences. This study incorporated a qualitative, instrumental case study method to determine how teachers interpret, construct, and apply meaning to the level of autonomy they experience in the classroom and at the school. Additionally, the researcher determined how school leaders interpret, construct, and apply meaning to their roles in enabling teacher autonomy. The current study explores how teachers perceive their levels of classroom autonomy, their leaders' influences on their autonomies, and how school leaders perceive their own influences of teacher autonomy in the classroom.

Research Questions

This current study sought to better understand the levels of teacher autonomy within three educational settings. Teacher and instructional leaders who participated in the study helped the researcher understand genuine personal and social situations in academic environments. The following research questions were developed from the literature and guided the study.

1. How do school leaders enable teacher autonomy in the classroom?
2. How do teachers perceive autonomy in the classroom?
3. How do teachers perceive the influence of school leadership on classroom autonomy?
4. How do school leaders perceive their influences on teacher autonomy in the classroom?
5. Why do some teachers have no autonomy, limited autonomy, or complete autonomy?

Definition of Key Concepts

Pedagogical Autonomy: The Great School Partnership defines pedagogy as the relationship between learning techniques and culture. Autonomy is the quality or state of self-governing. Educators want the freedom to supervise curriculum development and instruction and assess the student learning process (Brown-Ferrigno, 2016.)

Principal Leadership: Highly effective schools are more successful with strong and effective principal leadership (Gurley et al., 2016).

Teacher Autonomy: The Great School Partnership defines autonomy as the quality or state of being self-governing. The opportunity for teachers to use their discretion to choose what they do in their classroom (Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013).

Teacher Leadership: Teachers can extend their leadership both in and out of the classroom to influence others (students and staff) to improve learning and instruction (DuFour et al., 2008).

Limitations and Delimitations

The limitation is that there are confidentiality issues that may limit access to students and teachers within an educational setting. A methodological limitation is there could be no claims for correlation or causation. The external validity is limited, and readers of the study will only be able to make naturalistic generalizations about the context of the study. The delimitation is that the study included three sites within the same school district with three different sets of policies and mandates.

Summary

This qualitative instrumental case study examined teacher autonomy and the methods school leaders implemented to promote teacher autonomy in the classroom. The study determined why some teachers have complete autonomy in the classroom, why some have no autonomy, and why some experience a combination of different levels of autonomy in the classroom. The amount of autonomy in the classroom affects an educator's daily instructional and classroom management methods. The study examined why school leaders trust some teachers to operate their classrooms without interference,

and it also looks at why leaders micromanage some teachers. Additionally, the study addressed leadership traits in teachers and school leaders that promote teacher autonomy.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers throughout the country have varying degrees of autonomy to teach and lead in their classrooms (Boser & Hanna, 2014). Autonomy levels differ from state to state. Eighty percent of teachers reportedly have moderate or a great deal of control over what content they teach students, whereas only 42% of teachers reportedly have the same amount of autonomy. Federal and state government's involvement with policies and laws in the profession causes teachers to feel unproductive because teachers want opportunities to educate effectively. Officials should provide educators with more support, better salaries, and a positive work environment (Boser & Hanna, 2014).

Guba and Lincoln (1981) stress the significance of studying new behavior. They emphasized the implication of studying human behavior of people within their natural environments to understand human behavior and habits. Qualitative studies involving school leaders within the P-12 context demonstrate the importance of school leaders in prior research and reinforce school leadership's importance in enabling and encouraging teacher autonomy in the classroom (Anderson, 2021; Bandura, 2002; Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013). Teachers with autonomy and leadership support invest more in their programs and teaching abilities because they do not feel micromanaged or undervalued (Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Ford et al., 2019; Kasalak & Dagyar, 2020; Oberfield, 2016). Lack of autonomy in the classroom tends to cause teachers to resent

leadership, have a negative attitude, and feel disrespected in their profession (Angelle & Teague, 2014; Aoki & Kobayashi, 2009; Boser & Hanna, 2014).

Resources accessed for this study include the online databases JSTOR, EBSCO, ERIC, and ProQuest. The primary search terms used were teacher autonomy, leadership autonomy, self-efficacy, teacher morale, distributed leadership, and transformational leadership. The literature review focused on how school leadership enables teacher autonomy in classrooms and why some teachers have complete autonomy, some have limited autonomy, and some have no autonomy. The analysis of the overall body of research found three research topics or pathways contributing to understanding teacher autonomy in the educational environment. The research pathways are the significance of teacher autonomy, the importance of principal leadership, and the importance of teacher leadership.

Teacher autonomy is significant because autonomous teachers encourage their students' autonomous behaviors and promote a constructivist culture in the learning environment (Boser & Hanna, 2014; Eren, 2020; Oberfield, 2016; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Jiang et al. (2019) believe that autonomy is a psychological need that educators require to pursue their interests, curiosity, and goals freely without judgment from coworkers or supervisors. Autonomy levels of educators fluctuate at different schools and can even distribute differently within a single school. Some people assume that educators at public charter schools are more autonomous than public schools; however, charter schools that are not successful can lose their charters because they are more accountable than public schools. Although teachers state they have more autonomy at charter schools, they must ensure they are teaching the proper standards to ensure the success of student

achievement which protects the charter. (Oberfield, 2016; Rigby, 2016). Subsequently, charter school educators report higher levels of autonomy than public schools (Jiang et al., 2019; Oberfield, 2016; Rigby, 2016). Educator autonomy directly impacts teaching practices (Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013; Stein, 2020).

Principals play a crucial role in promoting teacher autonomy by empowering teachers to lead in ways that allow them to influence the classroom and organizational decisions and processes (Cansoy, 2019; Goddard et al., 2015; Gurley et al., 2016; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Sebastian et al., 2016; Shaw & Newton, 2014; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Influential leaders develop effective teacher leaders when delegating responsibilities and offering leadership opportunities. Highly effective educational settings are more successful with strong and effective principal leadership from leaders who promote an autonomous learning environment (Brown-Ferrigno, 2016; Gurley et al., 2016; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Jason, 2000). Effective principals lead teachers to become instructional leaders who actively engage with other teachers to supervise curriculum development, improve teaching practices, assess student learning, and implement school improvement initiatives (Brown-Ferrigno, 2016). Principals are instructional leaders, and each must lead in a manner that reflects the importance of maintaining an educational setting that promotes learning (Drago-Severson, 2012; Goddard et al., 2015; Gurley et al., 2016; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Sebastian et al., 2016). Principals influence teaching practices, and influential leaders promote an autonomous environment for teachers and students (Adarkwah & Zeyuan, 2020; Gurley et al., 2016; Rigby, 2016).

The teaching profession has evolved, and many educators have more responsibilities and influences outside their classrooms (Angelle & Teague, 2014; Bugra & Atay, 2020; Lin et al., 2018; Sebastian et al., 2016). In the past, administrators assigned teachers with formal titles such as department head or department chair. Today, positions now include titles such as curriculum coordinator or instructional coach (Lin et al., 2018; Prichard & Moore, 2016). Lin et al. (2018) believe schools are evolving settings where teachers engage with colleagues to resolve teaching issues with curriculum, assessments, and classroom management. School leaders still formally assign teacher leadership roles; however, leadership opportunities often occur naturally among colleagues. Lin et al. express the importance of offering professional development opportunities to mold teachers into leaders when participating in professional learning environments. Many educators who want autonomy have natural leadership abilities both inside the classroom and throughout an organization.

Teacher autonomy is a direct result of leadership practices displayed by principals and teachers. Teacher autonomy affects teacher motivation and job satisfaction. Educational settings that promote leadership opportunities and encourage autonomous instruction are more successful (Brown-Ferrigno, 2016; Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013; Sebastian et al., 2016; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Studies have examined levels of autonomy in a variety of educational settings and found there are few school systems in which all teachers have complete autonomy (Boser & Hanna, 2014; Brown-Ferrigno, 2016; Eren, 2020; Oberfield, 2016; Sebastian et al., 2016). Educators want autonomy to ensure job satisfaction, professional respect, and to manage all aspects of running the classroom. Autonomous educators wish to decide on

the pedagogy, assessment, and the discipline of students when necessary (Angelle & Teague, 2014; Boser & Hanna, 2014; Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013). Educators want job satisfaction, they want self-respect and respect for their field, they want to be a valued member of a collaborative community, and they want the autonomy to manage an effective classroom to encourage all students to be successful (Cansoy, 2019; Goddard et al., 2015; Lin et al., 2018; Stein, 2020; Warner-Griffin et al., 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Burns (1978) described transformational leadership theory as leading to motivate followers to achieve success and become leaders themselves. Transformational leaders influence those they teach in ways that empower them to take ownership of the goals and objectives of an organization (Arifin et al., 2014; Bass & Riggio, 2005; Burns, 1978; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Shaw & Newton, 2014). This form of leadership is applicable when implemented in educational environments because transformational leadership offers teachers leadership opportunities and provides them with support, mentoring, and coaching as well as encourages teachers to become leaders themselves and, in turn, begin to lead and mentor others (Arifin et al., 2014; Eyal & Roth, 2011; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Kasalak & Dagyar, 2020).

Hauserman and Stick (2013) determined one of the goals of transformational leadership is to motivate teachers to perform at higher levels both in the classroom and within the educational organization. Ideally, this encourages all educators within an educational setting to work together to lead initiatives on school improvement and motivates faculty members to provide the best mentoring and instruction for students. Eyal and Roth (2011) ascertained that school vision building greatly influences the

motivation of administration and teachers because it encourages teachers to achieve personal goals and creates a desire to see a change in the organization's future. The vision should reflect the needs and interests of both to improve and contribute to the school and the community (Arifin et al., 2014; Bass & Riggio, 2005; Eyal & Roth, 2011; Prichard & Moore, 2016). School leaders and teachers form partnerships in an educational setting that encourages positive action to support engagement that promotes creativity, innovation, and motivation throughout an organization (Arifin et al., 2014; Balyer, 2012; Bass & Riggio, 2005; Eyal & Roth, 2011; Hauserman & Stick, 2013).

Bass and Riggio (2005) define four components of transformational leadership theory: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Ethical school leaders create idealized influence when they demonstrate consistent leadership and maintain high standards of integrity when making decisions (Arifin et al., 2014; Bass & Riggio, 2005; Burns, 1978; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Prichard & Moore, 2016). Highly effective instructional leaders provide inspirational motivation by motivating and inspiring staff with meaning and challenge them to take the initiative to support the school's vision. Intellectual stimulation occurs when school leaders encourage faculty and staff to question procedures, to take risks, and to become competent problem solvers both inside and outside the classroom (Arifin et al., 2014; Bass & Riggio, 2005; Burns, 1978; Hauserman & Stick, 2013).

Transformational leaders utilize individualized consideration to get to know their staffs, to act as a coach or mentor, and to meet the individual needs of their teams (Arifin et al., 2014; Bass & Riggio, 2005; Burns, 1978; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Prichard & Moore, 2016). Leaders need to build individual relationships with teachers as this

profession is unique because of the varied credentials educators bring to an educational setting. Implementing all the components of transformational leadership allows a transformational principal to motivate staff to meet the vision of the school, model best practices, convey high expectations, and maintain an overall positive school climate with shared decision-making opportunities (Arifin et al., 2014; Bass & Riggio, 2005; Burns, 1978; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Shaw & Newton, 2014).

Arifin et al. (2014) concluded that transformational leadership is relevant to predicting work engagement and teacher intellectual stimulation. Teachers desire intellectual stimulation and want school leaders to entrust them with opportunities to increase their responsibilities within an organization (Arifin et al., 2014; Balyer, 2012; Bass & Riggio, 2005; Choochom, 2016; Eyal & Roth, 2011). Additionally, Arifin et al. maintain that other leadership styles such as transactional leadership do not effectively contribute to the positive effects of transformational leadership on teachers.

Hauserman and Stick (2013) demonstrated that highly effective schools are more successful under transformational leadership and that school leaders directly influence the positive or negative effects of teacher attitudes. They studied 10 teachers from 135 schools to assess the highly transformational behaviors that were indicative of demonstrating support to teachers. Their study determined that the five teachers who worked with highly transformational principals spoke highly of their principals in four areas associated with transformational leadership: idealized influence, individualized concern, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation. Transformational principals meet the needs of the students and staff, and they hold both students and staff accountable and encourage distributed leadership (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). The five

teachers who did not work for transformational principals reported low influence from their supervision and claimed they did not receive input regularly from leadership and that some staff members received different treatment from administration. Positive transformational leadership also affects teacher autonomy in education (Hauserman & Stick, 2013).

Teachers who are outspoken about professional freedom understand that both leadership roles and morals impact autonomy. Educators desire to achieve positive outlooks by achieving autonomy, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction, which are qualities of transformational leadership that motivate teachers to succeed in the classroom and within a school organization without succumbing to teacher burnout (Choochom, 2016; Eren, 2020; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Oberfield, 2016; Shaw & Newton, 2014).

The Significance of Teacher Autonomy

Autonomy has various definitions and meanings with multiple interpretations. Johnson (2020) used a three-phase model of moral development to rationalize that autonomy allows people to make their own choices without the influence of other people. Johnson does not believe personal autonomy rejects beliefs or morals of parents or society or how others expect people to act. Instead, it a self-awareness and methodical understanding of morality, is a respect for accountability, and a devotion to other individuals that leads us to freely choose what we see as necessary for improving the human condition (Johnson, 2020). Autonomy in the realm of education also has various interpretations.

Teacher autonomy varies within school systems, and some teachers have it, some teachers desire it, and some do not have any independence whatsoever (Hauserman &

Stick, 2013). Teacher autonomy directly impacts educators' views about job satisfaction, curriculum choice, instruction, assessment, and even classroom management and discipline (Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013; Kasalak & Dagyar, 2020).

Teacher autonomy affects job satisfaction, curriculum choices, classroom management, and the educational organization (Brown-Ferrigno, 2016; Ford et al., 2019; Sebastian et al., 2016). Eren (2020) determined teacher autonomy and learner autonomy connect since autonomous teachers provide constructivist environments for students to learn and grow. Autonomy strengthens the control and power within teachers' personal lives, in the classroom, and as members of the educational setting where employed (Eren, 2020). Eren examined the characteristics of an effective autonomous teacher and why teachers believe those characteristics are essential. The study determined that independent teachers are free to teach without pressure from other teachers or school leaders.

Educators strive for autonomy in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, student behavior, classroom environment, and professional development (Eren, 2020). Effective teachers require a degree of professional freedom from structural and internal constraints like other professionals such as lawyers and doctors. Teachers with this level of freedom enthusiastically pass it on and share it with colleagues and their students. Teacher Work Autonomy measured teachers' senses of independence and provided empirical evidence that validated the need for autonomy in the classroom, school environment, staff development, and curriculum development (Eren, 2020). Eren demonstrated that autonomous teachers are flexible, use technology in their classrooms, and do not strictly teach from a standardized curricula. Autonomous teachers are student-oriented, proactive,

and reflective, and they adjust the curriculum based on student needs and appreciate students' perspectives and ideas. Additionally, Eren ascertained that autonomous teachers are lifelong learners who continually improve their teaching and leading practices and reflect on their instructional strategies. They are open to shifting and studying methodology trends and implementing them creatively in the classroom.

Autonomous teachers are leaders in their own right. Their independent acts in the classroom utilize the components of the transformational leadership model: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Arifin et al., 2014; Bass & Riggio, 2005; Burns, 1978; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Prichard & Moore, 2016). Autonomous teachers display consistent leadership and model ethical behavior when instructing students. Autonomous teachers execute inspirational motivation by motivating, inspiring, and challenging students to take ownership of their learning and adapt their leadership abilities (Arifin et al., 2014; Burns, 1978; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Prichard & Moore, 2016). They provide intellectual stimulation by encouraging students to be problem solvers and challenge them to take risks in and out of the classroom. Finally, autonomous teachers utilize individualized consideration and get to know their students to meet the needs of all students (Bush & Glover, 2012; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Prichard & Moore, 2016).

Opportunities for teacher autonomy are not necessarily available to all teachers and may vary between school districts. Some people assume that educators in public charter schools appear to have more independence than educators in public school systems (Oberfield, 2016). Oberfield (2016) investigated the levels of autonomy teachers have in public charter schools and traditional public schools and concluded educators in

charter schools report greater autonomy than public school teachers; however, charter school educators do not feel “more or less accountable” than teachers in public schools. Some teachers who claim to have acceptable amounts of perceived autonomy do not necessarily believe their educational settings are managed competently.

Autonomy for educators is the professional independence teachers have in the classroom. Autonomy affects job satisfaction, curriculum development and implementation, classroom management, and educator influence in the whole educational environment (Burns, 1978; Eren, 2020; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Oberfield, 2016; Prichard & Moore, 2016). Autonomous teachers promote autonomous opportunities for students by teaching with constructivist learning methods. The curriculum is student-oriented, and the self-sufficient teacher adjusts the curriculum as needed to meet the needs of students (Eren, 2020; Oberfield, 2016; Prichard & Moore, 2016; Walker, 2020). Autonomy levels of educators vary from school to school, and principals’ and teachers’ leadership practices greatly influence the distribution of autonomy amongst educators (Eren, 2020; Prichard & Moore, 2016; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008).

The Significance of Principal Leadership

The position of principal within an educational organization is crucial to lead and manage a school effectively; some even claim the role of the principal is the most critical position in a school (Angelle & Teague, 2014; Brown-Ferrigno, 2016; Goddard et al., 2015; Gurley et al., 2016; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Sebastian et al., 2016). Best practices of highly effective principals in educational settings are associated with teacher self-efficacy and teacher autonomy (Brown-Ferrigno, 2016; Goddard et al., 2015; Gurley et al., 2016; Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Instructional leadership, collective efficacy,

instructional leadership behaviors, leadership teachers want, and collaborative school leadership contribute to effective educational settings (Brown-Ferrigno, 2016; Goddard et al., 2015; Gurley et al., 2016; Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Kasalak and Dagyar (2020) determined that job satisfaction connects to self-efficacy and that “self-efficacy has a significant and positive relationship with job satisfaction” (p. 27).

Goddard et al. (2015) posited that schools are most productive when principals collaborate and lead staff to develop collective expertise and share leadership opportunities to manage a school. Strong leadership motivates and encourages teachers to be more effective and become leaders themselves. A principal’s instructional leadership relies on collective efficacy beliefs through collaboration with teachers (Goddard et al., 2015).

Goddard et al. (2015) assert that schools where teachers report that principals monitor their instruction and provide instructional support are more likely to employ teachers who collaborate with other teachers to improve education. Principals who are strong instructional leaders encourage accountability in teachers. Because the teaching profession is unique due to the many opportunities to collaborate in various manners from professional development to team teaching to co-teaching, there are several opportunities for teachers to collaborate with other professionals (Goddard et al., 2015). The most common goal for teacher collaboration is to improve and enhance instructional methods. Influential instructional leaders ideally take the lead to encourage their educators to support and promote teachers’ collaborative work (Lin et al., 2018).

Principals’ instructional leadership strongly predicts the degree to which teachers collaborate to improve instruction. Teachers at schools with strong instructional leader

involvement reported that leaders produced high-quality collective work among teachers. Schools where teachers report weak administrator involvement have the least frequent formal collaboration with teachers and leadership (Goddard et al., 2015). Effective instructional leadership from principals is a positive predictor of collective efficacy beliefs of teachers who work collaboratively (Goddard et al., 2015).

Shaw and Newton (2014) asserted that the classroom teachers are valuable because of the influence they have on student welfare and achievement. Strong school leaders recognize the value of teachers by ensuring teacher satisfaction in order to retain teachers because of the many benefits of keeping teachers who show growth and become experienced teachers.

Servant leaders exhibit transformational leadership qualities as well as characteristics such as love, humility, altruism, and trust (Shaw & Newton, 2014). There is a strong correlation between teacher perceived servant leadership techniques from principals and job satisfaction and retention rates. Teachers are more likely to remain at a school with an instructional leader who leads as a servant leader.

Drago-Severson (2012) examined how principals shape growth enhancing climates that support learning while meeting the challenges of teaching. This research examined Catholic, independent, and public schools with varying levels of income.

Most of the principals in the study implemented the following learning-oriented leadership methods: attend to the context specific priorities to enhance school climate, cultivate shared values, and create a culture of collaboration (Drago-Severson, 2012). Public school principals utilized managerial leadership to address financial realities and provided the time and encouraged collaboration among teachers. Independent school

leaders have more flexibility related to the specific mission of the school to encourage collaboration among teachers. The Catholic school principals focused more on a visionary leadership that meets the needs of the vision of the Catholic doctrine (Drago-Severson, 20120).

Highly effective schools are more successful with solid and effective principal leadership (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Principals affect the attitude of educators positively or negatively. The role of the school principal is the most critical role within an educational organization (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Principals are responsible for the entire operation of a school. They must build a team of professionals who collaborate and work diligently to teach, encourage, and guide children to become productive citizens. Hauserman & Stick reported that ultimately, the principal is responsible for both instruction and student achievement.

Hauserman and Stick (2013) maintain that principals who incorporate transformational leadership successfully facilitate organizational learning. Teachers were generally happier in work environments where transformational principals led the way in creating a school vision and influencing the learning process within the organization. Hauserman and Stick maintained that schools with transformational leaders maintain a positive learning environment compared to schools not led by transformational leaders.

Jason (2000) examined how transformational leadership of a principal is conducive to develop effective multicultural education and found that learning communities are shaped through transformational leadership and multicultural learning communities. Principals who engage in transformational leadership promote a culture that is responsive to the multicultural needs of students and staff. Transformational

principals encourage change and promote growth for instructional leaders and teachers. Leadership programs for teachers that promotes decision making, problem solving, and collaboration on multicultural education benefit teachers and students.

Cansoy (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of 27 studies from multiple countries that focused on relationships between school principals' transformational and interactional leadership behaviors that affected teacher job satisfaction. Teachers throughout the world reported positive levels of job performance from principals with transformational leadership practices. Transformational school leadership is influential on variables such as the teachers' levels of commitment, performance in the classroom, and the achievement level of students is higher at schools led by transformational leaders. Cansoy determined that principals who value their teachers, show an interest in them, encourage them to participate in school-wide initiatives, and create a strong vision positively affect the job performance of teachers.

Brown-Ferrigno (2016) concluded that principals must lead teachers to become instructional leaders who actively engage with other teachers. Principals supervise curriculum development and instruction, assess the student learning process, and implement school improvement initiatives. Student learning centered around leadership relies on complex, organic relationships among all staff members within an educational setting (Brown-Ferrigno, 2016). The study determined that teachers and leaders make a difference by building relationships, breaking down barriers, and sharing resources. The researcher determined that transformative principals encourage transformative leadership from the teachers they mentor.

The role of principal within educational organizations is one of the most critical positions within an educational setting (Angelle & Teague, 2014; Brown-Ferrigno, 2016; Goddard et al., 2015; Gurley et al., 2016; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Sebastian et al., 2016). Highly effective principals who lead by incorporating transformational leadership practices promote high morale, self-efficacy, and encourage autonomous instruction from educators (Brown-Ferrigno, 2016; Goddard et al., 2015; Gurley et al., 2016; Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Instructional leadership, collective efficacy, instructional leadership behaviors, leadership teachers want, and collaborative school leadership contribute to a successful educational setting (Brown-Ferrigno, 2016; Goddard et al., 2015; Gurley et al., 2016; Hauserman & Stick, 2013).

The Significance of Teacher Leadership

Teacher roles have evolved throughout time, and teachers today desire to be effective in the classroom and to have input in the daily operation of a school outside the classroom (Angelle & Teague, 2014; Lin et al., 2018; Sebastian et al., 2016; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Teacher leadership opportunities have changed over time, and teachers now have more influence outside the realm of their classrooms than they had in the past (Sebastian et al., 2016). Sebastian et al. (2016) determined that principals influence teacher leadership when they delegate authority to teachers and enable them to influence key organizational decisions and policies. Teacher leaders emerge from a principal's active efforts to delegate responsibilities and empower teachers with leadership opportunities (Sebastian et al., 2016).

Distributed leadership is best utilized within a school setting when distributed amongst principals, teachers, and other personnel (Sebastian et al., 2016). Schools no

longer focus on only the principal as the leader due to having multiple leaders making a school's daily operations more complex. It is essential for school leaders to distribute leadership opportunities to teachers. Teacher leaders develop because of the purposeful actions of principals. Principals delegate responsibilities, and teachers and other personnel work together to improve school procedures and classroom instruction (Sebastian et al., 2016).

Angelle and Teague (2014) examined teacher perception of self-efficacy and found there is a strong relationship between collective efficacy and teacher leadership. The researchers utilized Bandura's social cognitive theory as a framework because the theory maintains that when a person believes he or she can complete a task, he or she also considers the results. Social cognitive theory indicates that teachers with high efficacy are persistent and set high standards for themselves and their students regardless of demographics.

Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) examined the relationships between principal-teacher interactions and teacher-teacher relationships to learn how those relationships impact the instructional practices in the classroom. Shared leadership and professional community are strengths that teachers value. When shared leadership and professional community are present, the teachers' trust in the principal is less important. When teachers share ideas and knowledge about practices with other teachers they rely less on interaction from the principal. Positive self-efficacy strongly affects instructional practices.

The roles of educators have changed over time (Lin et al., 2018). Previously, school leaders assigned teachers organizational titles such as department head or

department chair. More current positions include position titles such as curriculum coordinator, instructional coordinator, testing coordinators, and content area specialists (Lin et al., 2018). Many schools are evolving to an environment where teachers engage with their colleagues to settle classroom issues such as curriculum and teaching, assessments, and classroom management. Teacher leaders continue to teach students in the classroom, and they influence the improvement of instruction and learning in other classrooms (Lin et al., 2018).

Lin et al. (2018) ascertained that professional learning environments contribute to growing teacher leaders when schools establish procedures for teachers to collaborate and participate in professional learning environments. Within professional learning communities, teachers engage, lead, and learn from each other (Angelle & Teague, 2014; DuFour et al., 2008; Lin et al., 2018; Sebastian et al., 2016). School leaders influence the formation of teacher leadership opportunities by implementing school structures such as co-teaching and helping with scheduling. Leaders directly encourage teacher leadership by implementing consistent school policies to collaborate (Bush & Glover, 2012; Gurley et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2018; Sebastian et al., 2016). Aoki and Kobayashi (2009) ascertained that teachers' attitudes and commitments to the profession change throughout their careers. Teachers are influenced by the educational environment and affect social and educational practices. Teachers need the flexibility to insert their personalities, ideas, and creativity to instruct.

Transformational leaders create opportunities for their organizations to be successful, and they motivate and encourage staff to become leaders themselves (Burns, 1978). Educational settings provide a platform to transform educators into leaders who

collaborate and work together to meet the school's vision. The field of education has evolved, and, today, principals lead as instructional leaders who guide their teachers to be leaders who are collaborative, participate in professional learning communities, stay current with teaching methods, and remain on a quest to educate themselves constantly (DuFour et al., 2008; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Lin et al., 2018; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Educators who experience autonomy in their classrooms but do not have it outside their classrooms are conflicted when it comes to scheduling, planning activities, and the overall running of the school (Eren, 2020; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Lin et al., 2018; Oberfield, 2016). Autonomous teachers want opportunities to help with the overall planning and daily activities. Teachers want the same opportunities that they observe other teachers performing. Allowing one educator to have complete autonomy while another educator receives little autonomy hurts the overall environment. School leaders must ensure schools operate safely, smoothly, and successfully. They must determine which teachers to entrust with autonomy. School leaders who encourage teacher autonomy benefit from the reward of leading a motivated and resilient faculty (Bush & Glover, 2012). Leaders encourage teachers to be problem solvers, collaborate with their peers, and become lifelong learners to improve their profession (Adarkwah & Zeyuan, 2020; Goddard et al., 2015; Sebastian, et al., 2016).

Summary

Educators desire autonomy for a variety of reasons. Many want to ensure job satisfaction and professional respect, and they want to manage all aspects of running the classroom. Educators want autonomy to ensure job satisfaction, earn professional respect,

and manage all aspects of running the classroom. Autonomous educators wish to decide on the pedagogy and assessment and how to discipline students when necessary (Angelle & Teague, 2014; Boser & Hanna, 2014; Cansoy, 2019). Teacher autonomy is crucial for teachers to manage effective classroom that encourages student success.

The role of principal within educational organizations has a huge impact on teachers' sense of autonomy and self-efficacy (Angelle & Teague, 2014; Brown-Ferrigno, 2016; Goddard et al., 2015; Gurley et al., 2016; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Sebastian et al., 2016). Principals who lead by incorporating transformational leadership practices promote high morale, self-efficacy, and encourage autonomous instruction from educators (Brown-Ferrigno, 2016; Goddard et al., 2015; Gurley et al., 2016; Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Principals have various methods for leading an organization. Schools are unique in that educators and instructional leaders implement varying leadership methods to manage a school. There is no set of rules on how to manage teachers and students; however, effective principals actively provide teachers with opportunities to help lead the school (Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013; Gurley et al., 2016).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This instrumental qualitative case study examined teacher autonomy and educational leaders' practices to promote teacher autonomy in a multi-site case study. It describes how school leaders enable teacher autonomy at two charter schools and a public high school in the same school district in the southern United States. This study examined why some teachers have complete autonomy in the classroom, why some teachers have no autonomy, and why some teachers experience a combination of different levels of autonomy in the classroom. The level of autonomy in the classroom affects an educator's daily instructional and classroom management methods. In some cases, teacher autonomy expands outside the classroom, and teachers can also influence the school.

Chapter 3 describes the methods and designs implemented for this study. School leaders and classroom teachers participated in the study. Chapter 3 contains seven sections: methods, study design, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, validity and reliability, and researcher bias and assumptions.

Design of the Study

The purpose of this instrumental qualitative case study was to examine teacher autonomy and the practices that school leaders implement to promote teacher autonomy

at three public schools in the same district located in the southern United States. The study provides a detailed description of how school leaders influence teacher autonomy in the classroom. Merriam (2009) clarified that qualitative researchers are interested in learning and understanding how people interpret, construct, and apply meaning to their experiences. This study describes how teachers interpret, construct, and apply meaning to the autonomy they experience in the classroom and at the school. Additionally, this study examines how leaders interpret, construct, and apply meaning to their roles in enabling teacher autonomy throughout schools.

Case study research falls in the constructivist and pragmatic paradigm. Stake (1995) maintained that a case study may involve analyzing a single child, a class, a teacher, a program school, a district, etc. Typically, a researcher studies a case because the researcher is interested in something unique about the topic. In this case study, teachers and leaders demonstrated how school leaders promote teacher autonomy within each school in the same school district.

Case study research facilitates understanding a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit to the fullest extent possible by observing and analyzing the natural environment where a case occurs (Merriam, 2009). The outcome of the analysis helps determine future trends and may lead to solutions to problems in an environment. Merriam (2009) further elaborates that case studies may examine how historical organizations develop over time, the purpose of observational case studies, and the research of someone's life. The researcher gathers much of the data personally; however, research of a historical organization may be necessary to understand the case thoroughly. Researchers gather data through observation, interview, shadowing, examination, and

reflection. The outcomes of this case study provided valuable information to teachers and educators at the school who value teacher autonomy.

Multi-site case studies occur when a researcher studies more than one case at a time (Merriam, 2009). The researcher collects data from several sites, analyzes each site, and then cross analyzes amongst sites. This method is advantageous for understanding if leaders manage educational settings legitimately. For example, instead of studying one school to determine how leadership within a school setting enables teacher autonomy, it is more enlightening to research every high school within a city to analyze the topic. Merriam (2009) acknowledged that the results are much more “compelling” when a study contains more variation. This multisite case study includes multiple embedded cases.

Educators and school leaders who participated in this study understood real personal and social situations in an educational setting. The results clarify how teachers perceive classroom autonomy, how teachers perceive school leaders’ influences on autonomy, and how school leaders perceive their own influences on teacher autonomy in the classroom.

Learning about the perception of teacher autonomy was the overall intention of the study. Participants were encouraged to share their views on the subject by answering open-ended questions that allowed them to explain or clarify as much as they wanted.

Research Questions

1. How do school leaders enable teacher autonomy in the classroom?
2. How do teachers perceive autonomy in the classroom?
3. How

4. do teachers perceive the influence of school leadership on classroom autonomy?
5. How do school leaders perceive their influences on teacher autonomy in the classroom?
6. Why do some teachers have no autonomy, limited autonomy, or complete autonomy?

Setting

Educators and instructional leaders at two charter schools and a public secondary school in the same district in the southern United States participated in the study. The two charter schools are relatively “young” compared to the public school that has been in operation for decades. The three schools service almost the whole district, except for a small Christian school not included in the study. The schools’ student and faculty populations vary.

Charter School A serves 970 students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Of those students, 80% are Caucasian, 11% are Hispanic, 6% are African American, 1% are Native American, 1% are Asian, and 1% are two or more races. The school is divided into three sections: kindergarten through fourth grade, fifth through eighth grade, and ninth through 12th grade. The school is organized from the top down with an executive director, nine supervisors, teachers, paraprofessionals, and clerical staff. The supervisors all have decision-making authority, with the final authority resting with the executive director, who answers to a school board. The campus contains one large school that serves instruction for kindergarten through 12th grade. Educators and instructional leaders who teach or lead in grades 6 through 12 participated in the study.

Charter School B serves 426 students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Of those students, 91% are Caucasian 4% are Hispanic, 3% are two or more races, and 2% are Asian. The school is organized from the top down with an executive director, an assistant director, and one other supervisor. The supervisors have decision-making authority, with the final authority resting with the executive director, who answers to a school board. The campus contains a central building with portable buildings attached for instruction. Educators and instructional leaders who teach or lead in 6 through 12 participated in the study.

The Public High School C serves 843 students in sixth through 12th grade. Of those students, 55% are African American, 30% are Caucasian, 13% are Hispanic, and 2% are two or more races. The school is organized from the top down with a principal and three assistant principals. The supervisors have decision-making authority, with the final authority resting with the principal, who answers to the district superintendent. The researcher invited all educators and instructional leaders to participate in the study.

Four of the nine administrators at Charter School A participated in the study. The administrator in charge of finance did not get an invitation to participate in the study because she does not influence classroom teachers. Two of the 4 instructional leaders at Charter School B participated in the study. Two of the 4 instructional leaders at Charter School C participated in the study.

Purposeful sampling determined which instructional leaders continued to the interview phase of the study. Merriam (2009) stresses choosing the best participants for the selection criteria within qualitative research. Only teachers and instructional leaders who teach or lead 6 through 12 completed a Google Forms survey to determine the

interest and willingness of participants. The researcher assessed the instructional leader surveys and decided that four participants would continue to the interview portion of the study based on their views of teacher autonomy, education levels, certification areas, and years of experience.

The goal for Charter School A was for five to 10 teachers to participate in the survey portion of the study; however, a total of 17 teachers participated and eight were selected for the interviews. The male and female teachers invited to participate were Caucasian and African American. Twenty-nine percent of the teachers have master's degrees, and 12% have a master's degrees plus 30 graduate hours. Twenty-five percent of the instructional leaders have master's degrees, and 50% of them have master's degrees plus 30 graduate hours. Many teachers and instructional leaders have a Louisiana teaching certificate; however, there are exceptions. There are a couple participants who have a bachelor's and or master's degree who did not complete a formal teacher education program, so they do not have a state teaching certificate. The researcher selected eight teachers to continue to the interview section of the study. The teachers not chosen to continue did not have strong opinions about professional autonomy.

At Charter School B, teachers and instructional leaders who teach or lead in grades 6 through 12 completed a Google Forms survey to determine the interest and willingness of participants. The researcher assessed the teacher surveys and determined which participants participated in the interviews based on their views of teacher autonomy, education levels, certification areas, and years of experience.

The goal for Charter School B was for 5 teachers to participate in the study; however, seven teachers participated, and eight were selected for the interviews. The

male and female teachers invited to participate were Caucasian and African American. Every teacher has a bachelor's degree, some have master's degrees, and a few teachers have a master's degrees plus 30 graduate hours. Fifty-seven percent of the teachers have a master's degree, and 14% have a master's degrees plus 30 graduate hours. Sixty-seven percent of the instructional leaders have master's degrees, and 33% have a master's degrees plus 30 graduate hours. Many teachers and instructional leaders have a Louisiana teaching certificate; however, there is an exception. One of the teachers has a bachelor's degree; however, she did not complete a formal teacher education program, so she does not have a state teaching certificate. The researcher selected five teachers to continue with the study. Of those who participated in the survey, one opted out, and the other had less than 5 years of teaching experience.

At Public School C, teachers and instructional leaders who teach or lead 6 through 12 completed a Google Forms survey to determine the interest and willingness of participants. The researcher assessed the teacher surveys and determined which participants participated based on their views of teacher autonomy, education levels, certification areas, and years of experience.

The goal for Public School C was for 10 teachers to participate in the survey portion of the study; however, a total of 12 teachers participated, and six were selected for the interviews. The male and female teachers invited to participate were Caucasian and African American. Every teacher has a bachelor's degree, some have master's degrees, and a few teachers have a master's degrees plus 30 graduate hours. Twenty-five percent of the teachers have master's degrees, and 2% have a master's degrees plus 30 graduate hours. Fifty percent of the instructional leaders have master's degrees. Many

teachers and instructional leaders have a Louisiana teaching certificate; however, there is an exception. One of the teachers has a master's degree and but she is not certified to teach in the state. She is working on an alternate teacher education program. The researcher selected six teachers to continue to the interview portion of the study.

Procedures

After receiving approval from the Louisiana Tech Institutional Review Board (Appendix A), the executive director at each charter school, and the public school superintendent, the researcher contacted the schools to conduct the study. All teachers and instructional leaders who teach or lead 6 through 12 received an invitation via email to complete a survey on a Google Form. An email accompanied the Google Form that explained the researcher's intentions and precisely what the study involved and how much time participation would take. Surveys are a primary research tool to collect data and provide a wide variety of information about education in the United States. Muijs (2011) asserts data from surveys are more manageable to generalize findings, gather data at low costs, and it is an easy way to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Participants completed a consent form and a survey as well as a questionnaire. Some participated in an interview, Zoom session, or email chain with the researcher for follow up questions or clarification. The discussions clarified the responses on the questionnaire with pre-prepared questions that assessed the following areas of teacher autonomy: teacher morale, perceived leadership, leadership structure, decision-making autonomy, and self-efficacy. The researcher used pseudonyms in place of the participants' first and last names and school names.

Data Collection

Stake (1995) encourages the use of triangulation to “minimize perception” and help ensure the validity of the analysis. Triangulation, simply, is the use of several investigative methods to understand a phenomenon. Data collection for this project included surveys, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and observations. The focus groups were unnecessary due to the responses received during the interviews. The researcher coded and organized the data on a spreadsheet.

Surveys and Questionnaires

The survey questions on Google Forms was a quick method to gather important information from instructional leaders and teachers, such as demographics, education levels, experience, and brief thoughts about teacher autonomy. The survey questions collected information about potential participants and determine who participated in the study. The survey also assessed teachers’ perceptions regarding autonomy and the depth and breadth of teachers’ perceptions. The questions on the questionnaire for the interview are more detailed, and the researcher followed up with interviews in most cases. Most participants chose to interview electronically due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interviews

Participant interviews have the potential to provide valuable data within research. Merriam (2009) maintains that qualitative studies typically employ structured and non-structured interview techniques. Most of the structured questions, such as demographics, were confirmed from the participants’ completed surveys. The questionnaires that contained open-end questions were transcribed for analysis. The questions for the

teachers and administration were slightly different; however, they covered similar themes that assess teacher autonomy.

An alpha and beta test validated the interview questions, and the committee chair approved them. For the alpha and beta testing teachers and instructional leaders with varying levels of experience answered the questions with the researcher. Participants helped determine which questions were vague, confusing, or illogical. Following are the interview questions presented for teachers at Charter School A, Charter School B, and Public School C (See Appendix B).

Teacher Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.
2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?
3. Why is autonomy important to educators?
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?
7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?
10. How much autonomy do the teachers in this school have?

11. Do all teachers have the same level of professional autonomy?
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs in your current setting?
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision-makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?
15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.

The first two questions developed familiarity between the researcher and participant. The responses provided basic information about the participant and were verified with the survey information. Questions 3-6 are the actual research questions for the study that have been repeatedly analyzed. Many of the questions focus on teacher autonomy. Many educators care about their students and claim to love the school; however, it has been suggested that some teachers do not have autonomy in the classroom, which is what initiated the study. Walker (2020) reported that many teachers across the United States believe that teacher autonomy declined due to the No Child Left Behind era. They also concluded that the autonomy of a classroom teacher is so important that it determines the level of overall job satisfaction in the profession (Walker, 2020).

The self-efficacy question links to the social-cognitive theoretical framework of the study based on Bandura's social-cognitive theory, which is how teachers view their worth (Bandura, 2002). This interview topic contributed meaningful explanations about how teachers view their performance in the classroom. The questions for administration

are similar to the teachers; however, the following section demonstrates the differences in the questions.

The researcher validated the interview questions through alpha and beta testing, and the committee chair approved them. The researcher interviewed Charter School A, Charter School B, and Public School C instructional leaders (see Appendix C).

Instructional Leader Open-ended Interview Questions

1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.
2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?
3. Why is autonomy important to educators?
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?
7. How do leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?
10. How much autonomy do the teachers in this school have?
11. Do all teachers have the same level of professional autonomy; if not, why?
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs in your current setting?

13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision-makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?
15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.

Direct Observations

Due to complications from the COVID-19 pandemic, direct observations were not an option for Charter School B and Public School C. Zoom meetings and email exchanges clarified any follow-up questions or explanations regarding school procedures. Participants were gracious with their time and very accommodating when explaining how procedures work at each campus.

Data Analysis

Data from this study were derived from input from the initial survey, questionnaires, interviews, and follow up notes from when clarification was required. The information from participants was coded and categorized in a spreadsheet to determine similarities, differences, themes, and trends. Coding involved examining responses, words, and paragraphs and then looking for repetitive themes. The constant comparative method aided in analyzing the data (Merriam, 2009). Kolb (2012) described the constant comparative as a four-stage process to sort through data, analyze and code the information, and finally reinforce theory generalizations. The researcher created a spreadsheet with categories and themes that directly related to how teachers feel school leaders enable teacher autonomy. Additionally, the researcher examined the perceptions of teachers' and leaders' opinions about teacher autonomy. Most of the triangulation

occurred by comparing interview questions. Survey results were also compared along with verifying responses from follow-up interviews and emails.

Validity and Reliability

The data collected were meticulously documented and analyzed without bias. A qualitative researcher validated the work. The researcher understands the dynamics of the different levels of autonomy at the school. The researcher listened carefully and recorded facts without skewing the data with personal thoughts or opinions. Throughout the interview process, the researcher member checked the transcriptions by constantly to ensure accuracy and transferability to ensure a complete understanding from the participants; often, the member checking took place via emails. The researcher filed them with the interview questionnaires.

The original research questions explain how leadership enables teacher autonomy. Some of the questions could be tricky for the participants if they felt overly emotional about the subject. The researcher carefully articulated the participant's intent when analyzing the data. The results of the study are trustworthy and valid.

Research Positionality and Ethical Considerations

The primary assumption of this study for the researcher is that teachers are professionals with important responsibilities who work relentlessly in their chosen profession. They may resent participating in yet more work primarily with the stresses of COVID-19 that has interrupted the world. The researcher respected the time of the participants and was as non-intrusive as possible. There were concerns about the transparency of responses because of the evolving environment; however, it turned out

that out of all three schools, there was only one negative response that the researcher decided not to pursue or to include in the study. It appears that the volunteers who participated in the study have strong opinions about autonomy. The researcher avoided biases and assumptions if they were present.

The role of the researcher is that of a human instrument. Merriam (2009) theorized that the researcher must identify and explain biases, dispositions, and assumptions about the study. As a colleague, friend, and mentor to many staff members, it was essential to remain neutral about the data and interactions with the participants throughout the study. The researcher's opinion is that teachers must have complete autonomy to effectively instruct and manage their classroom environments daily; therefore, it is essential to remain neutral in dealing with the opinions of others who may not feel the same.

There are confidentiality issues that may limit access to students and teachers within an educational setting. A methodological limitation is there could be no claims for correlation or causation. The external validity is limited, and readers of the study will only be able to make naturalistic generalizations about the context of the study. The delimitation is that the study included three sites within the same school district with three different sets of policies and mandates.

Yin (2018) described the importance of being sensitive to data provided by participants. Research must be ethical. Many participants have intense, and one could even say, passionate feelings regarding teacher autonomy. The researcher acknowledges that many participants are emotionally involved in their positions as educators and

advocates for children. The focus of the study revolved around the promotion of teacher autonomy.

One of the biggest concerns of the researcher was to respect the time and space of all participants. Participation was at the complete discretion of each participant, and member checking and follow-ups were also at the discretion of each participant. Face-to-face meetings and interviews were as brief as possible.

Participants

Twelve instructional leaders from Charter School A, Charter School B, and Public School C volunteered to participate in the study. The researcher selected eight instructional leaders to partake in the study because of their survey responses, leadership experience, teaching experience, and in-depth knowledge of the subject of autonomy. The transcripts for the Instruction Leader Interviews are in Appendix D. The transcripts for the instructional teacher interviews are in Appendix D.

Thirty-six teachers from Charter School A, Charter School B, and Public-School C volunteered to participate in the study by completing the initial survey. The researcher selected 18 educators participate. Ten who were not selected stated on the survey they were not interested in being interviewed. The other 8 were not selected because they didn't seem to understand the concept of professional autonomy. After assessing the knowledge level of the survey responses about the participants familiarity with professional autonomy the researcher decided to include only 18 participants because of their teaching experience and their level of understanding of the topic autonomy completely. One of the teachers not selected was very angry and her responses were not consistent with the rest of the participants.

Following are descriptions of the participant's position, teaching credentials and a summary of each participant's opinion on the topic of autonomy. The descriptions are divided by the name of the school and instructional leaders and teachers. The transcripts of the teacher interviews are in Appendix E.

Charter School A Instructional Leaders

Michelle Stephens was promoted to the middle school supervisor 2 years ago, after teaching fourth grade at the school for 5 years. She has 11 years of teaching experience in the fourth and fifth grades. Stephens believes educators should have some freedom within the classroom and teaching methods. They should have some free will and that "we have to guide curriculum to ensure that it falls within all beliefs." For the middle school, she is responsible for making all curriculum decisions. She believes that school leaders promote teacher autonomy through guidance, professional development, continued education, and encouragement to become problem solvers.

Rachel Lyon has served as the high school supervisor for 8 years. She taught fourth grade for 1 year and taught family and consumer sciences to grades nine through 12 for 6 years. Her master's degree is in educational leadership. She is the supervisor of high school teachers and students. She does all the scheduling, dual enrollment collaboration, college and career counseling, and community involvement. Rachel is certified in 6-12 family and consumer sciences, 6-12 English, and K-12 leadership. Lyon believes in the importance of teachers having as much autonomy as possible. She believes autonomy is significant because when someone spends time earning a degree to do a job, he or she should be able to do the job without a forced script. It would be insulting for someone who does not know the students to push a script or curriculum.

Anne Thomas has served as the director of special education for 3 years. She taught kindergarten for 6 years and special education grades 9-12 for 2 years at the charter school. Anne's master's degree is in educational leadership, she also has a master's degree plus 30 graduate hours, and she is a certified educational diagnostician. Her certifications include educational leadership, teacher leader, mild-moderate special education, child search coordinator, and reading specialist. Anne believes autonomy is essential for experienced teachers and that inexperienced teachers require more direction. She thinks micromanaging teachers is rarely effective. If students are learning and the teaching standards are covered, she believes that teachers should have the authority to manage their classes as they see fit.

Tammy Martin has been the athletic director at the school for 4 years. She supervises the physical education teachers and all coaches at the school. Tammy is in her 21st year in education, and before taking the athletic director position, she taught chemistry, biology, physical science, physical education, and fifth grade science. She has a master's degree in education and is certified in physical education and K-8, all subjects. Tammy has coached girls' basketball throughout her career in high school and collegiately. As far as autonomy, Tammy believes that accountable teachers should arm themselves with tools and resources to be successful; however, there has to be a balance between the teacher and the administration.

Charter School A Teachers

John Bell switched to a career in education 10 years ago after working as a software engineer. He has been at this charter school for 3 years and has experience teaching in A-rated and D-rated public schools. He teaches Algebra 2 and Algebra 3 to

juniors and seniors and coaches football and powerlifting. He has a master's degree plus 30 graduate hours. He is certified to teach math, computer science, business, and physical education to grades 6-12 John believes that professional autonomy empowers teachers and demonstrates trust between administration and educators. He thinks he currently has the most autonomy he has ever had in any teaching position.

Mandy Carter has been teaching for 8 years, and she is in her sixth year at the charter school. Her bachelor's degree is in business education, and, before teaching, she did office work at a community college. Mandy is certified to teach business classes for grades 9-12. Mandy believes autonomy is the ability to have the professional freedom to research and select the material she teaches to convey information to her students. She believes if she is passionate about the content, it will transfer to the students.

Renee Collins has been teaching for 24 years. She taught in private, public, and charter schools. This year is her second year teaching at the charter school. This year she teaches Algebra 1 to freshmen, college algebra to juniors and seniors, and physics to juniors and seniors. She has a lifetime certificate in math 6-12, physical education, and health. Collins believes professional autonomy pertains to freedom and trust in the classroom and is very rewarding for veteran teachers. She highlighted that schools that allow professional autonomy to become sought out as a place where educators want to be.

Angie Gray is in her 24th year of teaching. She taught history for one year and has taught English I and English III for 8 years at the school. Her bachelor's degree is in education, and she is highly qualified and has a lifetime certification to teach all subjects in grades 1-8 and English in all grades K-12 grade. Angie believes educators need

professional autonomy to choose the content and material they teach in their subject areas. She also thinks that it is essential because it gives educators the ability to reach each child in their classrooms regardless of their ability levels.

Macy Taylor has taught for 15 years in public schools, and she has been at this charter school for 10 years. She primarily teaches math, and she has coached both cheerleading and softball in the past. This year she teaches geometry, math essentials, and dual enrollment trigonometry. Macy has a bachelor's degree in education, and she is certified to teach high school math in grades 6-12. She has an out-of-state certification. Macy acknowledges the realities of standardized testing and feels that it should be up to the teacher to teach students to succeed on the test. She believes that educators are efficient at following directions; however, they are not robots. She feels that educators spend countless hours "honing our craft" and thinks educators "know their students" better than school leadership or test writers.

Sarah Parks has taught for 20 years. She has been at this charter school for 10 years, and she taught for 10 years in private school settings. She teaches health, nutrition, and physical education to grades K-12. Her bachelor's degree is in education, and she is certified to teach health, and physical education. Coach Parks believes that an educator with professional autonomy has earned a degree in a specific area and should have the freedom to apply his or her education to educate young minds by using methods and materials deemed applicable to the group. Autonomous teachers can "read the room" and apply their experience and training to teach that particular group of students in the content area.

Janet Winn is in year 20 of teaching English language arts, and she is in her 10th year teaching at the charter school. Her bachelor's degree is in education, and she is certified to teach English language arts to grades K–8. Janet is passionate about her profession, and she believes professional autonomy gives educators the right to make grade-level appropriate decisions that enhance learning. These decisions should consider state guidelines, student background and needs, national standards, and curriculum availability. Autonomy is essential because educators are the ones who work and learn about the needs of their students.

Jacy Saint is in her 13th year of teaching junior high English language arts. She has a master's degree in intensive reading. She is certified to teach all subjects through middle school. Saint believes autonomy is important to educators because it allows teachers to take responsibility for their students. It enables them to know that they have the capability to do their job with fidelity.

Charter School B Instructional Leaders

Patrick Banes is in his second year as assistant principal at Charter School B. He has 27 years of experience as a math teacher and administrator. He has a master's degree in education, and he is lifetime certified to teach math in grades 6–12. He has a principal endorsement for grades K–12. Banes believes when he was a teacher, he and others who earned it could teach however they wanted to without interference from the administration. Today he thinks we live in the age of “robo-teachers” where teachers are given a curriculum and commanded to teach it with fidelity. Banes acknowledges that a teacher is supposed to be an expert in his or her field. Banes believes that today

regardless of expertise, education, or experiences, teachers are disparaged by the “powers that be” to teach like automatons. He stated, “The discredit to the profession is galling.”

Cassie Adams is in her seventh year as the assistant executive director and elementary principal at the charter school. She has a master’s degree plus 30 graduate hours, and Adams has taught every grade and every subject in grades K–8. She was a teacher for 20 years. Adams believes that professional autonomy gives educators the authority to make decisions regarding the curriculum they teach. It is essential because it allows educators to have some control in the decision-making. Autonomy empowers teachers because it empowers them.

Charter School B Teachers

Nathan York is in his sixth year at the charter school, and he has taught for a total of 11 years. He is the only high school science teacher who teaches whatever science content area is needed. He teaches Biology 1, physical science, chemistry, and anatomy and dual enrollment physiology this year. He has a master’s degree, and he completed an alternative education program. He is certified to teach biology and chemistry to grades 6–12. York discovered his love for teaching while tutoring students during his undergraduate science program.

York believes professional autonomy offers the ability to decide on his own or through collaboration with colleagues, the content to be learned and the skills to be mastered by students enrolled in a course. Similarly, educators decide what methods to implement to meet that goal. York believes autonomy is vital because people capable of making wise and effective decisions expect to be allowed to make wise and effective decisions. The less autonomy educators have, the more “brain drain” our profession will

have because many people will choose to work where their abilities are valued rather than prohibited.

Sheila Hardy is in her fifth year of teaching at the charter school. Although she is not certified to teach in this state, she has a master's degree in history. She teaches civics, United States history, world history, and world geography. Hardy believes professional autonomy means educators have control over their curricula and it is important because teachers should be the deciding voice within the classroom.

Vanessa Anson has taught English for 6 years at the charter school. She has a bachelor's degree in history and English, and she is certified to teach history and English in grades 6–12. She is working on her master's degree in English as well. Vanessa feels that professional autonomy allows teachers to determine what students need to learn. However, she feels forced to follow a curriculum with fidelity. She thinks that the lessons are boring and unengaging. Vanessa believes autonomy is significant because it is pointless to work in that position if a person cannot govern himself or herself in a professional setting. While she has strong feelings about autonomy, her school offers more than other schools.

Public School C Instructional Leader

Mike Snell has worked in education for 29 years. He has been an assistant principal at Public School C for 3 years. He has a master's degree plus 30 graduate hours. He is certified in the following: business education, biology and general sciences, principal, teacher leader, educational leader, and supervision of student teaching. Mike believes professional autonomy is significant because it gives educators buy-in and

ownership to what they teach. He believes that teachers should have the freedom to connect with the curriculum for student comprehension.

Chance Strong has worked in education for 10 years. He taught middle school and high school history. He has been an assistant principal for 7 years. He has a master's degree in educational leadership. Strong believes professional autonomy is important to teachers because educators believe that allowing as much autonomy as possible produces authentic instruction, producing buy-in and higher-order instruction.

Public School C Teachers

Justin Williams taught and coached for 3 years at Charter School A, and he has taught and coached at Public School C for 3 years. He teaches civics and biology to high school students. He has a master's degree in education, and he is certified to teach social sciences to grades 6–12. Williams believes professional autonomy offers the freedom to plan and organize lessons as educators deem necessary. He believes autonomy is important because educators are the ones who meet with students daily. Educators must adapt to different situations that are just as different as the students they teach.

Lisa Wilson has taught for 15 years for Public School C. She teaches English I, English II, and dual enrollment psychology. She is certified to teach English and social sciences in grades 6-12, and she has a master's degree in education. Lisa believes professional autonomy is an opportunity for educators to mold the curriculum to fit the needs of students. Autonomy is important to teachers because they witness students' immediate needs and need the freedom to adjust as needed.

Ken Albritton has taught at Public School C for 22 years. He is working on his doctorate in curriculum and instruction, and he teaches United States history and two dual

enrollment history classes to juniors and seniors. He is certified to teach social sciences in grades 6 -12. Albritton believes administrators must allow educators to decide how to teach state standards. He thinks professional autonomy is crucial for educators to retain the power to make critical decisions in their respective classrooms.

Chad Long taught for 7 years at Charter School A, and he has taught at Public School C for the past 3 years. He has a master's degree plus 30 graduate hours in education, and he is certified to teach physical education in grades K – 12 and biology in grades 6 – 12. Long believes professional autonomy is the teacher's right and ability to make the best instructional decisions based on the teacher's specific group of students. He feels autonomy is important to educators because all schools, classrooms, and individuals learn differently. Educators must accommodate these varying needs within the classroom to give the students the best possible education.

Amy Tanner has taught for 12 years. She spent 10 years at a private Christian school and 2 years at Public School C. Before teaching, she spent 25 years in the private sector in various management positions. Her master's degree is in business, and she is enrolled in an alternative education program to earn her certification. She teaches Algebra I, Algebra II, and geometry. Tanner believes that professional autonomy allows teachers to adjust the curriculum to accommodate differences in their students. It is essential because it provides teachers the flexibility to reach every student.

Andrea Denny has taught for 16 years, all at Public School C. She has a bachelor's degree in education. She is certified to teach all subjects in grades K–6 middle school social studies, and English and agriculture in grades 6–12. Denny is an experienced teacher who has taught multiple subjects, and she currently teaches middle

school American history. Denny defines professional autonomy as the ability for educators to make decisions in their classrooms on presenting the curricula to students. She believes that professional autonomy is important to educators because it offers the freedom in the classroom to present material most effectively to students.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Overview

The purpose of this instrumental qualitative case study was to examine teacher autonomy and the practices that school leaders implement to promote teacher autonomy at three public schools in the same district located in the southern United States. The study provides a rich, thick description of how school leaders influence teacher autonomy in the classroom. Chapter 4 focuses on the findings of the surveys, interviews, observations, and follow-up discussions that offered clarification.

It is not the purpose of this study to compare instructional leaders, teachers, or even schools amongst the three sites. The purpose is to explain the perceived levels of autonomy amongst educators and instructional leaders within the same school system.

Outcomes

There are many similarities and differences in teacher beliefs about autonomy within each school. The first phase of data analysis was to examine the similarities and differences to the autonomy questions presented on the survey. The survey questionnaire results are explained and divided by instructional leader and teacher.

Instructional Leader Survey Results

At Charter School A, 50% percent of the instructional leaders agree, and 50% somewhat agree that school leaders promote and encourage autonomy in the classroom. Leaders reported that 50% of the instructional leaders agree, and 50% somewhat agree that teachers have complete independence to plan and teach their content area curriculum.

At Charter School B, 100% percent of the instructional leaders agree that school leaders promote and encourage autonomy in the classroom. Leaders reported that 67% of the instructional leaders somewhat agree, and 33% somewhat agree that teachers have complete independence to plan and teach their content area curricula.

At Public School C, 50% percent of the instructional leaders agree, and 50% somewhat agree that school leaders promote and encourage autonomy in the classroom. Leaders reported that 50% of the instructional leaders somewhat agree, and 50% disagree that teachers have complete independence to plan and teach their content area curriculum.

Teacher Survey Results

At Charter School A, 65% percent of the teachers agree, and 35% somewhat agree that school leaders promote and encourage autonomy in the classroom. Teachers reported that 88% of the teachers agree, and 12% somewhat agree that teachers have complete independence to plan and teach their content area curricula.

At Charter School B, 71% percent of the teachers agree, 15% disagree, and 14% are not sure if school leaders promote and encourage autonomy in the classroom. Teachers reported that 57% of the teachers somewhat agree, 29% agree, and 14% disagree that teachers have complete independence to plan and teach their content area curricula.

At Public School C, 42% percent of the teachers somewhat agree, 25% agree, 17% somewhat disagree, 8% disagree, and 8% are not sure that school leaders promote autonomy. Teachers reported that 67% of the teachers agree, 25% somewhat agree, and 8% disagree that teachers have complete independence to plan and teach their content area curricula.

Qualitative Results

The data collected from the interviews, observations, and follow-ups when necessary were coded in a spreadsheet, and the constant comparative method was employed to analyze the data. Based on the responses from participants in all three schools, the following themes resulted from the interviews: Pedagogical Autonomy, Curriculum Autonomy, Decision Making Autonomy, and Morale.

Pedagogical Autonomy

Participants in all three schools said they have more autonomy than teachers in most schools. Participants in Charter School A reported complete autonomy to teach effectively. Charter School B participants recognize that they have limited flexibility regarding teaching because they must follow the mandated curricula with fidelity. Public School C participants had the most mixed feelings about autonomy levels on pedagogical autonomy. Some teachers feel they have autonomy, and some feel that their autonomy levels are limited. They also report that they have the autonomy to teach but not to choose a curriculum.

Vanessa Anson at Charter School B believes high school teachers are experts in their content areas, and they should be permitted to teach freely. She believes teachers have more autonomy than teachers at other schools. However, she does not feel that the

administration encourages flexible teaching. Nor does she think that leadership treats all teachers the same. She shared the following:

We believe that we are professionals and should be treated as such. As teachers, we often get treated as though we are children ourselves. Teachers who have been at the school longer are free to do what they want. If they are new to the school, they are watched with scrutiny.

At Charter School B, Nathan Young maintains autonomy levels vary based on whether a subject is connected to a standardized test. He also feels that it is not the administrator's fault that they cannot allow complete autonomous instruction for tested subjects. Young confirmed the following information about how autonomy differs from subject to subject based on the various classes that he teaches. He elaborated,

I have near-total autonomy in my classes where the state does not require a standardized test, and I have very little autonomy in my biology class. You can see this by looking at how many teachers are directed to teach scripted biology curriculum in our state. Supervisors are preoccupied with getting good test scores or ensuring teachers are using a curriculum labeled "tier 1" even if that curriculum is hot garbage.

The supervisors who participated in the study at Charter School B have different views about the levels of autonomy teachers should have regarding teaching flexibility. Cassie Adams chooses the curricula for the teachers, although she does consider their input. She also allows teachers the autonomy to reteach a skill when necessary. She elaborated on the following:

I allow very little autonomy over the curriculum but not on how the teachers teach the curriculum. Teachers can reteach or pull something extra to help with teaching. I hope we have trained them well enough to do that and still adhere to the standards. State standards and the curriculum we choose affects the level of teacher autonomy. State assessments and the timing of these assessments also affect autonomy.

Adam's colleague, Patrick Banes, believes that teachers are content area experts, and he feels that he promotes autonomy as much as possible. In addition to supervising the high school teachers, he also teaches a dual enrollment math class, so he still teaches and maintains a very hands-on approach and elaborated on the following:

I try to advocate for the teacher because I do not think that exists nearly enough in this profession. I try to make the classroom environment as conducive to teacher empowerment as I can, and I hope that it helps to drive them to encourage, involve, and inspire their students. In high school particularly, almost all of the teachers, bar two, are seasoned veterans and have a good deal of autonomy in the classroom regarding their subject matter.

Lisa Ward at Public School C concurred that it is acceptable to teach a mandated curriculum; however, the curriculum should allow the teacher's creativity and experience to adjust the curriculum when it is necessary. It is also an opportunity to adjust the curriculum to meet the needs of every student. She shared the following:

I do not have a problem with a school-selected curriculum that provides consistency across grades. It should still allow the teachers' creativity as the lesson is presented.

Ken Albritton at Public School C affirmed that each educator contributes to his or her own level of autonomy. Good educators know their content, how to teach it, and how to manage the classroom environment. Albritton maintained the following:

If teachers view themselves as effective, they will be confident to make critical decisions for their students and the school. Educators must retain the power to make essential decisions in their classrooms, and educator autonomy should depend on their classroom management and pedagogical skill.

Albritton's coworker, Lisa Ward, believes teachers should have almost complete autonomy to teach the mandated curriculum as creatively as possible. She thinks scripted lessons are boring and do not work for every student. She explained,

I see autonomy as my opportunity to take the curriculum and adjust and mold it to the needs of my students. Teachers are in the classroom daily, and we see the immediate needs of students; therefore, we need to have the freedom to adjust as needed.

The supervisors at Public School C believe the standards limit leadership from granting more autonomy to teachers. Instructional leader Mike Snell believes autonomy is earned "based on the experience" levels of the teachers; however, autonomy is limited by the curriculum. He shared,

State mandates and district requirements hinder autonomy at times because it drags the teacher away from their desired areas. I encourage and reinforce autonomous teaching when appropriate and the curriculum permits it.

Participants at Charter School A reported positive levels of professional autonomy regarding pedagogical autonomy. Teachers agreed that they have complete independence

to educate in their chosen manners. Angie Gray believes she has access to the curriculum, but she can substitute other resources if they are better suited to classroom learning. She shared a different view on how supervisors at the school promote autonomy from what most of her coworkers shared. Gray shared the following:

Supervisors do not promote teacher autonomy; however, each teacher teaches and manages their classroom as they choose. Teachers may choose their curriculum and teach how they want with complete professional independence.

Gray's coworker, John Bell, believes an educator's experience level and education contribute to pedagogical autonomy. Once a teacher "proves" himself or herself, he or she should receive complete autonomy, and he stated the following:

I believe that a teacher should choose how to present material in the classroom. The curriculum should be within specific guidelines, but a teacher needs to know when to stop and reteach rather than press on regardless of students' abilities. Additionally, teachers need to recognize when a skill area lacks and implement additional resources to teach that skill. Our instructional leaders let teachers do their thing. They observe our classes to see how it's going and then gauge how much autonomy each teacher gets based on their performance, standardized test results, and student grades. This school grants more autonomy than any other place I have taught.

Sarah Parks confirmed her coworkers' beliefs about autonomy and flexibility in the classroom. She also recognizes the controversial subject of standardized testing. Parks also acknowledges the importance of understanding the needs of the learner in the classroom setting. She stated the following:

I believe our teachers feel fully equipped to make educational and teaching decisions. To do this, leadership must allow teachers to be flexible in their teaching methods and curriculum needs if they are consistent standards. A teacher should have complete autonomy but should also have documentation to support their reasoning behind specific methods or materials used. Autonomy allows teachers to “read a room” and apply their experience and training to teach a particular group of students in the content area.

Instructional leaders at Charter School A believe in supporting their teachers and allowing them complete autonomy to teach their content once each teacher proves efficient. Supervisor Rachel Lyon believes content area teachers are experts in their field and should have plenty of leeway to educate students. She shared the following:

Although teachers probably do not feel they have the autonomy they would like to have because of state-mandated standards, I believe educators should have the freedom and flexibility to teach in a way that they feel will best meet the needs of their students. If someone spends time earning a degree or credentials to do a job, they should do their job without a forced script. I trust my teachers to be effective. We are small enough in the high school to where the teacher is usually the only one trained in the area and the only one teaching a subject. Because we are a charter, we can be flexible with the curriculum choices and presentations.

Curriculum Autonomy

Content area teachers in Charter School B and Public School C have little input in curriculum implementation. Some teachers are okay with not have input about curriculum, and some believe they should have more say in what they teach students.

Instructional leaders and educators understand that the limitations stem from the demands of standardized testing.

Teacher participants at Charter School B acknowledged they should have control of their curricula, but they do not. Vanessa Anson believes that administration controls what you are allowed to teach and what you are not allowed to teach. She also feels there is a stigma about educators and the test scores students earn on standardized testing.

Regarding curriculum choice, Anson maintains the following:

As a person with many years of expertise in my field, I should know the proper curriculum and standards to teach my students. At my school, I must follow the mandated scripted curriculum with fidelity.” While this is great, it leads to boring lessons and truly unneeded information. The end goal is for students to pass a standardized test at the end of the year, and teachers are told numerous times that we are nothing but our scores. So, to govern my classroom most effectively would be the best way to improve my professional life.

Anson’s colleague, Sheila Hardy, recognized the importance of her students’ passing standardized testing, and that is why the administration implements most of the curriculum decisions. However, she feels that the people who work with the students daily know the needs of the students and should be more involved with curriculum implementation. She stated,

Teachers should be the deciding voice within the classroom based on the background of the teacher, education level, and certifications. Teachers recognize that it is vital to make these educational decisions to teach their students best and guide them to pass standardized testing. Leadership does allow us to review

material and present it to the administration; however, ultimately, leadership decides on the curriculum. We are encouraged to follow the state curriculum, but we can use other materials to support the curriculum. It would be nice if we had complete control over the curriculum.

Supervisors at Charter School B have diverse beliefs about their teachers' participation in choosing curricula. One supervisor maintains complete control over curriculum choice, whereas another bases his decision on input from experienced teachers. Both supervisors concluded that the curriculum must adhere to state standards. Cassie Adams explained why she is so structured with curriculum choice. She explained, State standards and curriculum we choose to affect the level of teacher autonomy therefore, she allows for a few minutes of PLC [Professional Learning Community] meeting time to discuss and hear concerns from teachers about curriculum changes. However, while observing classrooms, I have realized it's easy for a teacher to add to a lesson or change it up and feel like she is doing better when in actuality, she has moved away from the outcome students should have learned. I do not allow teachers to stray from the mandated curriculum in most cases.

Colleague Patrick Banes prefers to trust input from his teachers to help choose the curriculum. He maintains the following:

If school administration is not strong enough to allow teacher autonomy and presents them with every advantage to be good teachers, the entire educational structure is doomed to failure. We direct teachers to use a curriculum such as

Engage New York, Springboard, or iHUB Curriculum, and I give teachers the leeway to plan, teach, and supplement the curriculum.

Public School C teachers reported mixed levels of autonomy. Some feel they have limited autonomy to teach how they want, while others do not feel limited. All high school teachers report to the same supervisor. Teacher Ken Albritton expects autonomy and claimed “educators must retain the power to make critical decisions in their respective classrooms. Educator autonomy should depend on their classroom management and pedagogical skills.” Justin Wilson also maintained “teachers should have full autonomy to select their curriculum as long as the school rules and test scores reflect that their autonomy is working.” Amy Tanner, on the other hand, believes that “teachers must accommodate all the state mandates no matter how ridiculous and frivolous they are.”

Charter School A teachers have varied levels of autonomy regarding curriculum choice. Most educators concur that mandated state-testing limits autonomy levels for choosing curricula. Jacy Saint shared exactly how much autonomy she has and stated, I have about 90% autonomy and that the other 10% comes from the mandated curriculum. We should choose our curriculum because educators know what research-based practices are best for their students. The curriculum should be within specific guidelines, but each teacher needs to know when to stop and reteach rather than press on regardless of students’ abilities. I also feel that a teacher needs to know when a skill area lacks, and which additional resources will help reteach a skill.

John Bell concurs that professional autonomy empowers teachers and he shared the following:

Educators who choose what and how to teach the content have ownership. People work harder and appreciate the payoffs when they have ownership. Additionally, it shows trust between the administration and the educators. As long as teachers show they are teaching state-mandated standards, everything else should be autonomous. Not saying there can't be some unification. For example, our math department decided jointly on a curriculum resource we were all willing to implement. We have the freedom to pull from any source because, in my opinion, there is no one end-all, be-all curriculum due to the variety of materials and also the variety of learners we have in our classrooms. I think experience and education level are the top factors.

The middle school supervisor has clear expectations for her staff to “stick to” the state-mandated curriculum. Michelle Stephens stated, “The supervisors make all decisions regarding the curriculum; however, teachers can select supplemental resources as long as it does not stray from the state-approved standards.”

The high school supervisor Rachel Lyons has an entirely different stance on teachers' abilities to choose their curricula. She believes that once teachers have proven themselves in the classroom, they deserve complete independence in their subject areas because they are the “experts” in their fields. Her teachers have some of the best-standardized test scores in the state, and her staff respects her leadership style. She maintained the following:

As a leader, I feel a responsibility to ensure students receive accurate material in a meaningful way. With that comes a massive commitment to the supervisor for accountability to parents to ensure students are taught the correct curriculum. Educators and school leaders should research and study the curriculum to ensure all requirements are met, but to the greatest extent possible, I feel teachers should be able to teach how they think best fits the needs of their students. Educators need the freedom and flexibility to teach in a way that they feel will best meet the needs of their students.

Decision Making

Educators agreed that teachers earn decision-making authority within the classroom with proven work ethic and experience. Many participants also agree that they have complete independence in the classroom to make decisions for their students. Fundamental decisions are within their control, and they have the freedom to manage the daily operation of the classroom as they see fit.

Charter School A educators reported high autonomy over curriculum choice, classroom management, and teaching flexibility; however, most teachers and one administrator declared that teachers could not make decisions outside their classroom for school-wide programs. Teachers believe that they do not influence outside of their classroom and are to remain in their lane within their classroom setting. Angie Gray was very outspoken about the subject and maintained the following:

Only privileged teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs. Teachers can impact decision-makers by their effectiveness in their classroom on student learning, rigor, and structure. I also

believe the organizational structure is deficient, so teachers have more autonomy than they should within their classroom than they would have at other organizations.

Jacy Saint believes that teachers have full autonomy to make decision within the confines of their classroom settings. She shared the following:

I believe school leaders allow the teacher to be experts in the classroom, and they provide support when I ask. Some supervisors “micromanage” the curriculum, making the teacher feel overwhelmed. Teachers do not make decisions outside of their classroom.”

John Bell conceded there is more of a balance than other teachers at the school reported with the following thoughts regarding autonomy outside of the classroom. He explained,

We have a degree of autonomy outside of the classroom. School leaders are receptive to evidence-based conversations. If there is a different way to do something, reception and adoption are easier when measurable data is used, or examples of successful institutions doing things a certain way are used.

Macy Taylor believes as far as programs, leadership is willing to listen to new ideas from teachers and staff members. She maintained the following:

Since we are not very big change requires time, and not everyone is ready to give up more time during the day. Admin doesn't always grant what I ask for; however, I think they are looking at a bigger picture than I am. Leaders challenge teachers to try new things and think outside of the box.

Sarah Parks believes she does have influence outside the classroom. She thinks autonomous teachers find ways to participate outside the classroom. She maintained, “We can be more involved in activities outside of the classroom, attend school board meetings, and provide helpful information from teacher-student interactions or classroom activities.”

Teacher participants have varying thoughts about their involvement outside the classroom, and their opinions may surprise leaders at the school. Supervisor Tammy Martin at Charter School A stated that administration must be willing to hear and create change. She conceded that “we don’t see the critical areas of need if we do not ask for feedback. If teachers are part of the decision-making process, there is buy-in from them.”

Rachel Lyon understands that there are times when teachers feel left out of the decisions that they think they are more qualified to make since they are on “front lines” day in and day out. However, she conceded the following about decision making. Lyon’s stated the following:

Certain decisions are only made by supervision. Any decision made about a student that is not consistent with everyone else would have to be approved by the director. Anything that affects the entire school would first have to be approved by the director.

Teachers at Charter School B reported varying amounts of autonomy outside the classroom for teachers and decision-making. Nathan York theorized that supervisors need something to supervise. He stated,

The more layers of bureaucracy, the more each layer will infringe on teacher autonomy. I do not see where teachers have the freedom to make decisions about

students and school-wide programs outside of the school. My perception is that teachers tend to push for what we see as the best interests of ourselves, and our students and that decision-makers tend to focus on SPS and public relations.

Sheila Hardy maintains that teachers may feel unsupported without a strong, organized structure. She stated, “Teachers can review material and bring their findings to the administration, and we do not have much say in decisions outside of our classrooms.”

Supervisors respect and conceded that teachers want pedagogical autonomy; however, sometimes, it is difficult to grant it. Cassie Adams from Charter School B explained,

I try to give some autonomy leading up to holidays by letting teachers add to their curriculum with holiday-themed activities. I involve teachers in the decision-making for events, activities, themed days, etc. I’m big on asking my teachers their opinions. We’re in this together, so it’s not just I. It is we. Would they do other things with the curriculum if I allowed it? Yes. I give very little autonomy over the curriculum as a whole. I did allow them to add a program to fill in where we felt there was a gap in learning. I enable teachers to swap some activities for others, but I still need to see them before approving them.

Adams’s leadership style confirms teachers’ opinions regarding making decisions outside the classroom and the curriculum. She is very restrictive in granting autonomy regarding the curriculum, yet she does ask for teacher input for fun activities that do not involve the curriculum. When asked how leaders at the school promote teacher autonomy, Adams offered the following explanation:

Teachers are allowed the freedom to arrange their classrooms and group students. It is their classroom, and students are first answerable to their teacher. Teachers discipline using parameters within their classrooms. When major discipline issues arise, teachers are sometimes given the autonomy to determine those behavioral consequences. We use a few minutes of our PLC meeting time each week to discuss and make decisions regarding curriculum changes and other changes. By providing that time each week, I am promoting autonomy.

During a follow-up with Cassie Adams, she further elaborated on the PLC meeting procedures, which expands the levels of autonomy for teachers. She explained the following:

I lead some of the meetings. Teacher leaders in math, ELA, science, and social studies lead meetings occasionally. We meet in person for an hour once a week, and sometimes we break into smaller groups to discuss similar topics in grade levels. On in-service days, we may meet longer, and I usually create an agenda and ask for input if needed. The weekly meetings address curriculum, activities, and parent communication issues. They make decisions as a team.

Also, at Charter School B, Patrick Banes reiterated the importance of the PLC meetings. Administration meets weekly, which generates topics to discuss at the PLC. Banes believes he advocates for the teachers, and he wants the classroom environment to be conducive to teacher empowerment. Interestingly, the two leaders have different views of autonomy, and it explains the teachers' mixed results. Banes provided more details about the PLC meetings in a follow-up meeting. He shared the following:

Sometimes the PLCs are quite short, disseminating information for changes in regular schedules, testing, etc. Sometimes they deal with specific issues that can be student-specific, be it grades, attendance, discipline, etc. This year we are back to conducting the PLCs in person. I direct the PLCs for high school. I have an open-door policy with my teachers, so there are issues weekly in our PLC that originate from those meetings or emails from teachers expressing concerns.

Public School C is unique because while many teachers feel they do not have autonomy over curricula, they do have autonomous decision-making for the daily running of their classrooms. They also reported higher levels of involvement in school-wide decision-making than the charter schools. This school has a representative body called the Senate comprised of teachers, and teachers can deliberate and debate changes in curriculum, discipline, and programs outside the classroom and have them addressed by the administration.

Lisa Ward has strong opinions about organizational structure and teacher involvement regarding decision making outside the classroom. She maintained the following:

I believe that when the organizational structure of [Public School C] is directed downward to teachers, autonomy is impacted negatively. Our organizational structure allows for much give and take among all staff from top to bottom, and I do not have the autonomy to make decisions about schoolwide programs at my school.

Ken Albritton believes administrators believe they need to control teachers more. He understands that there is a process for teachers to implement change and conceded the following:

Based on the organizational structure, if we want to initiate change, teachers are more likely to implement the new policy by their representative body, the Senate, where change may occur. Teachers influence decision-makers by providing data.

Chad Long believes the organizational structure at the school has diminished teacher autonomy and guided and scripted curricula have largely dismantled teacher autonomy. However, in some cases, teachers may have a say in school-wide programs by implementing the Senate's representative body. This group meets with school leaders to make decisions that impact students and the everyday operation of the school.

Morale

Ken Albritton from Public School C summarized the importance of morale with, "The higher a teacher's morale, the higher the autonomy. Leadership often includes us in discussions related to our curriculum and its implementations, so to me, that is the ultimate form of independence." His coworkers experience similar opinions. Lisa Ward advocated the following:

Professional autonomy would raise the morale of teachers when they know decision-makers believe in their teachers enough to allow them to make the best decision for their classroom. I think my school leaders trust me, and I view my self-efficacy in the school as strong and well supported.

Amy Tanner believes morale highly affects teacher autonomy, and she provided the following:

Employee morale is critical to the success of any company or school, and it can also be the most rewarding. The lack of discipline in today's classrooms has a significant adverse effect on the morale of the faculty. I have always been self-confident and willing to make hard decisions. Lately, I don't always feel someone will back me up if a decision is unpopular.

Andrea Denny also believes autonomy significantly affects morale and shared the following:

When teacher morale is low, it leads to teacher burnout and leaving the field. I think the profession, in general, is on a downward spiral if things do not change. School leaders can promote autonomy simply by allowing teachers to make decisions for their classroom and stepping in only as needed. Teachers are preoccupied with getting in trouble if they make decisions about which school leaders would be upset.

Supervisors at the school recognize the importance of morale. Mike Snell understands that teachers who do not have autonomy will sub-perform if they do not produce or advance.

Teachers at Charter School A have strong opinions regarding morale and its importance to teacher autonomy. There is a common theme of controlling what is taught, teacher performance, and evaluation results. Following are the opinions of the teachers regarding their beliefs about how morale affects teacher autonomy.

John Bell shared,

I believe autonomy and morale share an inverse relationship. I think teachers' morale is higher when they have autonomy. We spend years getting degrees and

learning our craft, and it's almost an insult of intelligence to have someone micromanaging you. The ones who need micromanaging don't belong in the profession.

Mandy Carter highlighted the importance of morale and conceded, "When teachers feel respected and valued, they are happier, more productive, more passionate, and strive to do more."

Angie Gray reiterated, "If teachers are not trusted in the classroom or are not provided guidance in helping them be productive, they will develop a poor attitude, evident in their teaching and student learning outcomes."

School leaders agreed on the importance of morale. Tammy Martin maintained that teachers would feel discontent and not feel valued if they do not have autonomy." Rachel Lyons believes that "when morale is high, we perform at a higher level and are more open to suggestions and learning."

Research Question Responses

Research Question 1

Research Question 1: How do school leaders enable teacher autonomy in the classroom?

There is evidence that school leaders believe they enable teacher autonomy as much as possible within policy and other contextual constraints. Teachers reported they have the flexibility to manage their classrooms and teach the curricula. There is evidence that teachers at Charter School B and Public School C do not have as much input about the curriculum as teachers at Charter School A. The most significant barrier for leaders at all three sites to allow full autonomy is the pressures from standardized testing. Even

Supervisor Rachel Lyons from Charter School A, who appears to be the most liberal with encouraging autonomy, maintained the following:

Teachers probably don't feel they have the autonomy they would like to have because of state-mandated standards. Not every teacher has the same level of autonomy because some are more experienced than others, and some take more initiative than others to learn the curriculum and student abilities. Leaders manage some teachers more than others in classroom management. State test scores and student growth, discipline in the classroom, and peer evaluations all determine to some degree the level of autonomy given to each teacher.

Teachers agreed that leaders do not promote opportunities for teachers to influence school-wide initiatives. Public School C offers the most options for teacher input with the Senate committee, a forum for select teachers to meet with school leaders to initiate and discuss ideas or changes for the school. Teacher Ken Albritton from Public School A shared the following, which indicates leadership is receptive to ideas from teachers. He stated,

Our teachers provide feedback and suggestions to their receptive senators, who propose solutions at regular Senate meetings. If teachers view themselves as effective, they will be confident to make critical decisions for their students and the school.

Sarah Parks, Charter School A teacher, believes teachers can be more involved in activities, attend school board meetings, and provide helpful information from teacher-student interactions or classroom activities. The perspective of Albritton and Parks begs the question, what if teachers took the initiative to be involved more in school-wide

activities instead of waiting for leadership to encourage it? Instructional leaders Rachel Lyons from Charter School A and Patrick Banes from Charter School B explained that the director and often the school board must approve schoolwide programs. Instructional leaders from all three sites understood how busy teachers were and were already overwhelmed with responsibilities.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2: How do teachers perceive autonomy in the classroom?

Teachers at the three sites agree that they have complete professional autonomy to manage their classrooms and teach curricula without administration interference. They are free to arrange their classrooms, establish routines, group students when necessary, and, in most cases, handle discipline issues when needed. Charter School B and Public School C teachers do not have as much input with curriculum choice as Charter School A teachers.

All instructional leaders maintain that teachers are encouraged to establish autonomous learning environments within their classrooms. There are restrictions about curriculum choice. Instructional leaders at all three schools insist teachers teach the mandated state standards; however, teacher flexibility levels to adjust or supplement curriculum varies from school to school. Charter School A high school supervisor Rachel Lyon offers her experienced teachers the most liberal autonomy with curriculum choice, and she trusts her teachers to adjust curriculum when necessary. Charter School B and Public School C instructional leaders are adamant that teachers in testing subjects use a specific curricula and only stray from it to reteach or supplement a skill.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3: How do teachers perceive the influence of school leadership on their classroom autonomy?

Most teachers at all three sites appreciate the autonomy they have within the walls of their classrooms. They respect that leadership allows them to manage classes, establish routines, and teach the curricula. Teachers from Charter School A feel well supported by the administration, and they are comfortable approaching leadership for guidance and help. Charter School B teachers report less support by leaders in their classrooms regarding autonomy. Public School C teachers report mixed levels of influence of school leaders. Teachers who are confident to speak up and seek guidance are satisfied with the level of impact from leadership. Other teachers are dissatisfied with leadership influence. There is some contention on curriculum implementation.

Charter School A teachers report the most support from school leadership on classroom autonomy, and they feel they are free to teach the curricula and manage their classrooms the ways they want. Long-time teacher John Bell expressed the respect that many coworkers mirrored about teaching in the following:

My current boss believes in hiring the right people and letting them do their job. He places a lot of emphasis on job screening and personnel interviews, which is the best approach for an administrator. If you have more than two direct supervisors, that's when things get convoluted. I have been at places where you had a principal, an assistant principal, a curriculum coordinator, and a content-area specialist, and they all want input on how you teach. That's too many talking heads, in my opinion.

Charter School B teachers feel the most influence from school leadership in the curriculum area. They are mandated to teach a specific curriculum with fidelity, and the administration must approve supplemental material. Some of the teachers at Public School C mirror the same feelings as teachers at Charter School B. However, some teachers are more assertive about what and how they teach and they have more of a take charge attitude and manage their classes as they see fit.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4: How do school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?

Instructional leaders who participated in the study believe they are effective leaders and do everything to support, guide, and lead teachers. Cassie Adams at Charter School B admitted she limits autonomy regarding curriculum. Patrick Banes from the same school believes teachers “should be given a ton of autonomy,” although he conceded that they must teach from a mandated curriculum. He did report that all of his teachers but two are seasoned veterans, and he gives them the leeway to teach.

Research Question 5

Research Question 5: Why do some teachers have no autonomy, limited autonomy, and complete autonomy?

This study determined that teachers at all three sites have at least some level of autonomy. Teachers who feel limited are limited in selecting their curricula and having input in school-wide initiatives or activities. Supervisors allow more autonomy to experienced teachers who have proven themselves through test scores, evaluations, and overall performance.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this qualitative multi-site case study was to examine teacher autonomy and the practices that school leaders implement to promote teacher autonomy at a public school and two charter schools located in the same district in the southern United States. The study provides a rich, thick description of how school leaders influence teacher autonomy in the classroom. This study is important because there are varying opinions about how much independence teachers should have within their classrooms (Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Lin et al., 2018; Oberfield, 2016).

The study involved three sites in a small rural town in the southern United States. The Institutional Review Board granted permission to conduct the study (Appendix A). The superintendent of the public high school and the director at each charter school permitted the research to occur within each site.

This chapter includes a discussion about the significant findings and themes, conclusions about the research questions, and recommendations for further study. The findings are explained, and recommendations based on the results are provided. The conclusion of the chapter follows recommendations for future research.

Discussion of Findings

Decision-making about classroom management and curriculum choice is directly linked to positive levels of autonomy for educators at all three sites. State mandates are meant to be strictly adhered to and supplemented with a curriculum usually chosen by supervisors with guidance from select teachers. Teachers shared the understanding that autonomy is to have the ability to teach flexibly. Most participants had a strong understanding of autonomy and openly and willingly expressed their opinions.

School Leaders Enable Autonomy

Many teachers feel that leaders promote autonomy in the classroom by empowering the teacher to assess, select and teach the curriculum, be the expert in the content area, and manage the classroom effectively. The role of leadership is to provide support when necessary. Teachers are encouraged to be autonomous, and administrators only interfere when necessary. Most teachers feel supported and encouraged to try new things. Autonomous teachers feel empowered because they may select the curricula, teach the curricula, and manage their classrooms as they see fit. Teachers feel trusted and empowered to make decisions. School leaders who demonstrate consistent leadership and maintain high standards of integrity when making decisions promote idealized influence under the transformational leadership model (Arifin et al., 2014; Bass & Riggio, 2005; Burns, 1978; Hauserman & Stick, 2013). A few teachers feel that administration does not necessarily promote teacher autonomy; however, each teacher teaches and runs his or her classroom as he or she chooses.

Some instructional leaders stress the importance of hiring the right people to promote autonomy. The administration prefers to hire professionals who have experience

within their content areas. They also encourage autonomy with unannounced observations to understand how educators teach the curricula and manage their classrooms. Once teachers prove themselves, they gain the administration's trust and are empowered to manage their classrooms with more autonomy. New teachers are assigned mentors, and they are encouraged to seek out autonomous teachers to interact, observe, and learn. Effective school leaders implement some transitional leadership qualities by getting to know their staff, providing coaches or mentors, and meeting teams members' individual needs (Arifin et al., 2014; Bass & Riggio, 2005; Burns, 1978; Hauserman & Stick, 2013).

Teachers feel empowered by instructional leaders to manage their classrooms and to teach the mandated curricula with some flexibility with the supplemental curriculum. Many teachers believe instructional leaders do not intentionally promote autonomy because of the mandate to adhere to state standards. Anderson (2021) found that instructional leaders contribute to classroom teachers' commitment and satisfaction levels. Teachers want respect for their experiences and abilities, and they want supervisors to empower them to select their curricula to teach the standards creatively and flexibly.

Some school leaders believe they promote autonomy as much as possible in areas where it is appropriate. They want to support their teachers; however, there is constant pressure to have a successful school score based on standardized test scores. Supervisors who have an open-door policy are open to teachers' suggestions that empower autonomous teachers. There is a disconnect on how supervisors perceive how their

teachers view their autonomy levels. How teachers perceive instructional leaders is significant to teacher commitment and job satisfaction (Anderson, 2021).

School leaders enable autonomy by trusting educators to do their jobs. Teachers feel empowered to manage classrooms and daily operations. Leaders recognize that teachers must earn independence and that leaders grant more autonomy to highly effective teachers. If teachers are consistent with curricula and do not stray from the lesson, they may teach flexibly. Educators with strong self-efficacy who have proven that they are effective teachers with highly effective teaching skills, high test scores, and high levels of student achievement report the highest levels of autonomy.

Instructional leaders encourage and reinforce autonomous teaching in the classroom if the curricula remain structured around the standards in tested subjects. Teachers earn more autonomy by proving themselves and guiding their students to pass standardized tests. Leaders acknowledge that educators who do not teach tested subjects have more autonomy than those who do.

Teachers Perceive High Levels of Autonomy in the Classroom

Teachers at all three sites agreed that they have at least some professional autonomy to manage their classrooms and teach curricula (albeit scripted in some cases) without administration interference. Most teachers reported full autonomy to manage their classes, teach the curricula, and supplement the curricula with other resources when necessary. Educators are free to arrange their classrooms, establish routines, group students when necessary, and, in most cases, handle discipline issues when needed. Teachers feel empowered when trusted to lead and teach students within their classrooms.

All instructional leaders maintained that teachers are empowered to establish autonomous learning environments within their classrooms. There are restrictions about curriculum choice. Instructional leaders at all three schools insist teachers teach the mandated state standards; however, teacher flexibility levels to adjust or supplement curriculum varies from school to school. Instructional leaders recognize that some teachers may not be happy with their levels of autonomy. Stein (2020) maintains that teachers are leaders because they influence students; therefore, teachers want respect from instructional leaders.

Leaders Grant Autonomy to Teachers Who Earn It

Instructional leaders at the school confirmed that they monitor autonomy levels based on each teacher's experience, performance, and student achievement outcomes. Many other teachers at the school perceive school leader influence as encouraging because teachers are empowered to be autonomous with classroom management and with selecting and teaching the curricula. Teachers recognize that experienced teachers who are highly effective experience more autonomy from leadership than others.

Teachers perceived that school leadership directly affects their levels of autonomy. Teachers feel restricted with curriculum choice, but they appreciate that they are empowered to manage their classrooms. Teachers concede that the administrators feel pressure to implement the right curriculum that supports mandated standards and helps with acceptable standardized test scores.

Public School C teachers have fluctuating perceptions of the levels of influence leaders have on teacher autonomy. Some teachers believe teachers should all have the same level of autonomy; however, that is not the case. Some teachers are more assertive

and insist they can educate creatively and flexibly with the support of instructional leaders. Highly effective veteran teachers have more autonomy than less experienced teachers. Teachers recognize that while they can teach flexibly, they must follow the mandated curricula. Teachers have different levels of perception of how instructional leaders grant autonomy.

Teachers Are Leaders

Instructional leaders believe they are influential to their organization, and they do their best to guide, lead, and empower teachers. Many leaders believe they are responsible for ensuring teachers perform their daily duties and teach the curricula effectively and meaningfully. Some teachers need more guidance than others; however, leadership empowers highly performing and effective teachers with complete autonomy.

Most instructional leaders want to advocate for the teacher; however, there is a disconnect between school leaders' own perceptions of how much autonomy they grant to teachers. While leaders do a better job of including teachers in some decisions, leaders do not seem to connect to the idea that teachers want more autonomy in curriculum choice and pedagogy. Leadership feels that they encourage teacher autonomy, and they do not realize that the teachers are not fully satisfied with their levels of autonomy.

Many instructional leaders also confirmed that state mandates and school procedures hinder teacher autonomy. Leaders feel they must limit autonomy and empowerment on the curricula because of the demands of mandated curricula to ensure teachers teach the state standards. School leaders promote autonomy to experienced, highly effective teachers and teacher leaders.

None of the instructional leaders except Patrick Banes at Charter School B reported working directly with teachers to support student instruction. Banes teaches a dual enrollment math class; therefore, he has opportunities to remain hands-on with the learning culture at the school. Transformational leadership has proven that collaboration between teacher and student, teacher and leader, and leader and student often improve student achievement and standardized test scores. Anderson (2021) asserts education is in a new era, and transformative leaders who engage and guide teachers to become transformational leaders will, in turn, inspire and motivate students to be successful.

Autonomy Levels Vary Within Educational Settings

This study determined that participants at all three sites have at least some levels of autonomy. No teacher reported not having any autonomy. Many teachers have complete autonomy in managing their classrooms and teaching flexibility. Teachers who feel limited are limited in selecting their curricula and having input in school-wide initiatives or activities. Many supervisors confirmed that they allow more autonomy to experienced teachers who have proven themselves through test scores, positive evaluations, and overall performance. There is a trend of highly qualified veteran teachers with strong standardized test scores having complete autonomy.

Summary

School leaders and teachers have varying opinions on how school leaders enable autonomy and how teachers perceive their levels of autonomy. Even the supervisor whose leadership style is the most liberal with granting autonomy had two teachers who felt limited in teaching. Additionally, although some teachers greatly appreciate the autonomy they do have, some feel isolated because, in many cases, they are the only

teachers teaching a subject, and they do not feel supported. Neither teachers nor instructional leaders at one of the schools reported participating in PLCs or other professional developments like the other two schools do during the school year.

Emphasis on putting the right person in the right classroom and allowing him or her to flourish is suitable for both the teacher and the instructional leader. It demonstrates that the supervisor trusts the teacher to do his or her job. Arifin et al. (2014) concluded that transformational leadership improves work engagement and teacher intellectual stimulation.

Supervisors feel that they enable their teachers as much as possible even though they feel pressured to ensure their teachers teach the proper curricula. Teachers appreciate the autonomy they have to manage and run their classrooms; however, teachers want more input about curriculum choice and implementation. Instructional leaders at all three schools reported that observations and providing feedback to teachers are valuable tools to enable autonomy in the classroom; however, teachers did not indicate that they thought observations were practical.

Participants mentioned resenting the unannounced observations because the outcome was not helpful to the teacher. They feel critiqued and resented when instructional leaders highlight their mistakes. There is a commonality among educators that they are the experts in their content areas, and many feel supervisors should trust them to teach the curricula. Buckingham and Goodall (2019) maintain that when leaders focus on a person's shortcomings, it impairs learning instead of empowering learning.

In response to Research Questions 3 and 4, there seems to be a disconnect from how teachers perceive the influence of school leadership in their classrooms and how

leaders perceive their influence over teachers in the classroom. Some teachers earn the amount of autonomy and flexibility required to teach. Leadership does not want to micromanage teachers; however, leaders are responsible for ensuring teachers are doing their jobs. When teachers do their jobs effectively, there is evidence of student achievement. The projected school score from the 2020-2021 school year would have maintained the letter grade of A at Charter School A. Charter School B's and Public School C's projected school scores were each a C. The COVID-19 pandemic nullified the scores; however, the scores may indicate the benefits of empowering teachers with more autonomy. Experienced teachers at Charter School A who have taught in other charter and public schools reported how much they greatly appreciate the freedom and trust to manage their classrooms and implement the curricula they want. The experienced veteran teachers are grateful to have complete autonomy to manage their classrooms and curricula.

Instructional leaders at all three schools recognize the importance of autonomy and even relate it to their backgrounds and experiences. They all feel like they grant it wherever possible, and they realize that most autonomous limitations stem from state standards and standardized testing demands. Unfortunately, leaders did not acknowledge that they were aware that their teachers were not happy with autonomy levels in many cases.

In response to Research Question 5, the educators who participated in the study desire autonomy to teach and manage their classrooms as they see fit. The teachers selected to participate in the study have various levels of autonomy. Instructional leaders indicated that teachers at their schools have minimal autonomy because of minimal

experience. A common theme among granting autonomy is that teachers who have proved themselves with overall performance, work ethic, test scores, and favorable evaluations have more autonomy than inexperienced teachers.

Recommendation for Leadership Practices

There should be procedures to assess the morale and self-efficacy that teachers experience in the classroom. Instructional leaders must offer meaningful feedback where teachers can discuss their performance and receive feedback about their teaching practices. Educators want autonomy, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction that stems from transformational leadership to avoid burnout (Choochom, 2016; Eren, 2020; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Oberfield, 2016). Instructional leaders should initiate a morale and self-efficacy survey to understand their teachers' needs to do their jobs effectively.

Instructional leaders should prioritize and model practices that promote teachers as leaders within the school to students and parents and provide opportunities for teachers to lead outside the classroom. Stein (2020) asserts that teachers are leaders in their classrooms, which instructional leaders should model and encourage students and parents to understand that teachers are in leadership positions. Teachers need to perform as leaders and accept the challenge of being integral members of their organizations. Adarkwah and Zeyuan (2020) determined that instructional leaders who adopt the transformational leadership style motivate teachers who in turn motivate their students.

All three schools are relatively small, and in many cases, one teacher is the only content area teacher for the whole school, and he or she does not have the opportunities to collaborate with others in his or her field. Instructional leaders should bring in content area coaches to collaborate and work with teachers. Goddard et al. (2015) indicated the

positive effects when teachers collaborate in various ways. Even if the teachers within the same district collaborated, they might find that they have a lot to learn from each other.

Although it was not addressed in the original plan for this study the topic of school involvement was addressed at all three sites. Many teachers indicated a desire to be more involved in school-wide initiatives and activities. Schools are more productive when principals collaborate with teachers and provide leadership opportunities (Goddard et al., 2015). Teachers indicated that because they see and work with students daily, instructional leaders should actively seek input and recommendations from teachers about programs that affect students.

Leadership must make it a priority to assess teacher efficacy, morale, and autonomy levels. One disconnect in the study was that leaders do not seem to be aware of how teachers feel about their actual autonomy levels. Most teachers reported high regard for the field and felt it was a privilege to teach. Leadership could assess teacher morale by creating a morale survey.

The most valuable recommendation is for instructional leaders to entirely implement a transformative leadership style and lead from within the classroom instead of with a clipboard and a regimented checklist. Hauserman and Stick (2013) confirmed that principals who incorporate transformational leadership successfully facilitate organizational learning. Teachers who have autonomy appreciate the freedom it gives them to teach, and teachers who endure constant observations tend to resent when they results are overly critical because they feel severely critiqued. Teachers and principals have indicated that they enjoy working together to teach students. Instructional leaders should engage in the classroom as mentors or coaches and teach alongside the teacher.

Adarkwah and Zeyuan (2020) determined the importance for principals to organize training opportunities for school leaders to effectively motivate teachers.

Recommendations for Further Study

Teacher autonomy affects every educator and instructional leader. Teachers, especially experienced teachers, value autonomy. Instructional leaders support autonomous teachers and recognize where they must limit autonomy. Future research would be helpful to understand why many educators are leaving the field of education because of a lack of autonomy. The global pandemic has affected schools and classrooms across the nation and has brought more teacher demands. Several reporters at news affiliates are currently reporting that 30% of educators consider leaving the field altogether (Williams, 2022). Williams reported that in addition to teachers enduring low pay and burnout, the added burdens from COVID-19 virtual teaching requirements is an additional reason why teachers are leaving the field.

Many instructional leaders indicated that high school teachers have more autonomy than teachers who teach elementary or middle school. It would be valuable to examine how leaders enable autonomy across grades kindergarten through 12th grade.

One novice teacher participated in survey process at Charter School A. She did not have enough experience with autonomy to participate in the whole study. She did help beta test the interview questions from the perspective of someone with fewer years of teaching experience than some of the others who helped with the process. This teacher did not feel that she had any autonomy or decision-making authority as a high school teacher. When asked to clarify, she stated, “I do not feel my supervisor does her best work to supervise and motivate me, so I do not feel motivated to do my best work to

teach students.” Another area for further study is to examine autonomy from the perspective of first-year teachers on how they perceive their supervisors and the supervision methods.

Teachers repeatedly stated they only have autonomy within their classrooms. Although it was not addressed in the original plan for this study many indicated they would appreciate having more influence in school-wide initiatives and activities. Further study on how school management and policy affect teacher autonomy outside the classroom would clarify teacher efficacy for teachers to be more involved in school-wide decisions.

School leaders must incorporate more transformational leadership qualities in all three schools to encourage leadership and educators to work together to instruct students and build teams of educators. One of the goals of transformational leadership is for teachers and instructional leaders to motivate educators to perform at higher levels in both the classroom and the educational organization (Hauserman & Stick, 2013).

Conclusion

This qualitative case study assessed teacher autonomy and the practices school leaders implement to promote teacher autonomy at three public schools in the same district in the southern United States. The study provided a detailed description of how school leaders influence teacher autonomy in the classroom. This study is important because there are varying opinions about how much independence teachers should have within their classrooms (Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Lin et al., 2018; Oberfield, 2016).

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APPENDIX A

HUMAN USE EXEMPTION LETTER



LOUISIANA TECH
UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF SPONSORED PROJECTS

EXEMPTION MEMORANDUM

TO: Ms. Carrie Manning and Dr. Bryan McCoy

FROM: Dr. Richard Kordal, Director of Intellectual Properties
RJK
rkordal@latech.edu

SUBJECT: HUMAN USE COMMITTEE REVIEW

DATE: April 30, 2021

TITLE: "Teacher Autonomy: A Case Study at a Traditional
Structured Charter School"

NUMBER: HUC 21-091

According to the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46, your research protocol is determined to be exempt from full review under the following exemption category(s):
46.104(a) (d) (1) ((2) (i) (ii).

(a) Unless otherwise required by law or by department or agency heads, research activities in which the only involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the categories in paragraph (d) of this section are exempt from the requirements of this policy, except that such activities must comply with the requirements of this section and as specified in each category.

(d) Except as described in paragraph (a) of this section, the following categories of human subjects research are exempt from this policy:

(1) Research, conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings that specifically involves normal educational practices that are not likely to adversely impact students' opportunity to learn required educational content or the assessment of educators who provide instruction. This includes most research on regular and special education instructional strategies, and research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

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(i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

(ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

Participants are assigned pseudonyms, schools are assigned pseudonyms, content areas are de-identified, there is no treatment or physical contact by the researchers, and the data are stored on a password-protected file folder.

Thank you for submitting your Human Use Proposal to Louisiana Tech's Institutional Review Board.

APPENDIX B

TEACHER OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Teacher Open-ended Interview Questions

1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.
2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?
3. Why is autonomy important to educators?
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?
7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?
10. How much autonomy DO the teachers in this school have?
11. Do all teachers have the same level of professional autonomy?
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs in your current setting?
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?
15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.

APPENDIX C

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER QUESTIONS

Instructional Leader Questions

1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.
2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?
3. Why is autonomy important to educators?
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?
7. How do leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?
10. How much autonomy DO the teachers in this school have?
11. Do all teachers have the same level of professional autonomy; if not why?
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs in your current setting?
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?
15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.

APPENDIX D

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER INTERVIEWS

Instructional Leader Interviews

Name: Rachel Lyon

Question

Response

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education. | I taught courses in child development, housing, nutrition, job training, budgeting, and all things family and consumer sciences related. For four years I was back in the Family and Consumer Sciences area. This time also included an opportunity to run a High School Redesign Drop-out Prevention Program and grant. I went from Home-etc teacher to BESE Board petitioner to politician. |
| 2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy? | I believe that an educator should be able to have the freedom and flexibility to teach in a way that they feel will best meet the needs of their students. Specific standards are state required but curriculum to some point, should be the decision of the one who knows best the student needs |
| 3. Why is autonomy important to educators? | If someone spends time earning a degree to do a job, then they should be able to do the job without a forced script. I would think it's somewhat insulting for someone who doesn't really know the students, to come into a classroom a force specific material and ways. |
| 4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom? | I feel like as much as possible. Curriculum needs to be studied and made sure that requirements are met, but to the greatest extent possible I feel teachers should be able to teach how they feel best fits the needs of their students. Now, with that, comes a huge responsibility to the supervisor for accountability to parents to ensure the right curriculum is being taught. |
| 5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has? | Teacher experience, test scores, transparency |
| 6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy? | Probably so. I'm going to assume that a teacher's idea of autonomy is complete free reign of ideas and style. A leader's idea is probably more of a controlled autonomy, you have freedom as long as the leader can approve that the correct material is being presented in a way that is effective and representative of the community to some degree |
| 7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom? | Leaders are responsible for making sure the teachers are doing their jobs and doing them effectively. As a leader, I feel a responsibility to ensure students are receiving accurate material in a meaningful way. Every teacher that is hired is not always a self-starter, follow the rules, go above and beyond kind of teacher so I believe a leader feels like a teacher must first "prove" themselves to be effective before complete autonomy is given. Accepting guidance, attending professional development, taking the initiative to observe and learn from the best peers in the building, showing student growth, are all ways that a teacher can earn autonomy in the classroom. |

Name: Rachel Lyon

Question

Response

8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.

The organizational structure design can affect the autonomy or the perception of autonomy. Depending on the size of the school, a teacher may be the only teacher in their subject area and may be expected to independently learn and present material freely. If there are multiple teachers teaching the same material then there may be a lead teacher that coaches and requires material and the presentation be the same across the board. If there is a supervisor over a group of teachers, then depending on the supervisor's job description and background knowledge of the subject matter, true autonomy might be affected, as well as expectations of the teacher.

9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?

Leaders can promote autonomy by first off, making the right hires. Hiring a teacher, that is trained and a professional in their area is a way that a leader can allow autonomy in the classroom. Secondly, unannounced observations can give a leader a real perspective of what's being taught and how it is being taught. Once a trust is built by peers a teacher earns the right to be the professional and do their job without having someone "stand over them." Having a specific mentor in the beginning of a career or a school move can be an effective way for leader to promote autonomy slowly.

10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?

I feel like teachers probably have more autonomy than most. As a charter, we can be flexible and with curriculum choices and presentations. We are small enough in the high school to where the teacher is usually the only one trained in the area and the only one teaching the subject. Teachers are trusted to be effective. There is accountability to oneself.

11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?

No, all teachers do not have the same level of autonomy. Some are more experienced than others, some take more initiative than others to learn curriculum, to learn students' abilities, and some have to be managed more than others in areas of classroom management. State tests scores and student growth, discipline in the classroom, and peer evaluations all determine to some degree the level of autonomy given to individuals.

12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?

Not necessarily. Anything that affects the entire school would first have to be approved by the director. Any decision made about a student that is not consistent with everyone else, would have to have the approval of the director

13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.

Teachers can plead their case by presenting facts and plans in a way that will show benefit to all students. The director usually will ask questions like, "how will this decision affect your peers now and in the future?" How will this decision directly impact student learning and the overall student experience?" If you can get the buy in from the highly motivated, highly effective teachers, then, because of their influence, they can usually persuade the leaders on decisions.

Name: Rachel Lyon

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?	Teachers probably don't feel they have the autonomy that they would like to have because of state mandated standards. There are times that teachers feel left out of the decisions that they feel they are more qualified to make since they are on the front lines day in and day out. Having current classroom teachers in the room when some decisions are made, that directly affect them and their students would increase their self-efficacy.
15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.	Morale can directly impact teacher autonomy. As in any area of our lives, if morale is high, we perform at a higher level and we are more open to suggestions and learning. If morale is low, the want to is just not there.

Name: Anne Thomas

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.	11 years of experience. Three of those years have been in supervision.
2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?	The ability to teach your students as you see fit. The ability to assist and choose the best curriculum for your students. The ability to make decisions on how you teach and how you further the education in your classroom.
3. Why is autonomy important to educators?	I think sting teachers would think autonomy is important. A newer teacher or one who is weaker in education would probably need more direction.
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?	As long as students are learning and standards are being covered I believe great teachers should be left over their own classroom. Micromanaging is rarely effective.
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?	As a supervisors my walk through observations will determine the amount of autonomy a teacher will have.
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?	Depends. Our superintendent believes in teacher autonomy.
7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?	I believe that when I give my teachers the ability to teach as they see fit they trust me more? This is a hard question.
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.	Our superintendent believes that great teachers are effective in management and testing. Once a teacher has shown effectiveness he believes on checking in often without micromanaging.

Name: Anne Thomas

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?	Check in frequently, as input on curriculum, as input on scheduling. Great teachers are capable of assisting in larger decisions. I believe we ask input frequently.
10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?	Most teachers have complete autonomy.
11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?	They do not. Some teachers are unsuccessful at running a classroom without intervention and assistance from supervisors.
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?	Yes, input is always accepted.
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.	Teachers always have the ability to give input on curriculum and school events. Supervisors and our principal love input and take it seriously.
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?	We have many teachers who reach out to supervisors with input. Our teachers know their input is heard and taken into account in decision making.
15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.	I believe morale is boosted with autonomy. Micromanaging is never effective. I think all stakeholders (even paras) should have input in many areas. This is one plus of a charter school. All district decisions are based on our teachers' needs, and not decided at a disconnected school board.

Name: Tammy Martin

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.	I have taught college through 5th grade. I spent 7 years as a college head coach and taught freshman orientation and tennis. The rest of my years were at the high school and middle school level.
2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?	To be able to teach a subject that I am passionate about in the way the students will be engaged and maintain rigor of the subject.
3. Why is autonomy important to educators?	The teacher knows the subject and the best way the students can learn the subject. If the teacher is a veteran, then they will adapt and change if the students are not engaged or learning the material.
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?	I believe that a teacher with high accountability in a school of excellence will be given the tools and resources to be successful. The autonomy should be a balance between the teacher and the administration.

Name: Tammy Martin

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?	The factors would be academic success, years of experience, and a past history of success in the classroom.
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?	Yes, I think so.
7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?	I do not think they really understand how the teacher feels.
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.	This is huge. If the organizational structure does not advocate this it will fail. The teacher will be miserable and student achievement will suffer.
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?	I honestly do not know
10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?	I honestly do not know
11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?	I don't think so. Success in the classroom builds this relationship between admin and teacher.
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?	Hard to speak to this. I would say no.
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.	Communication is the key. Assuming decision makers know what is important is a mistake. You know your subject and your classroom. Change will happen when the decision makers step up and voice opinions. However, the administration drives "the bus" in this area. They must lead the way.
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?	I believe this is crucial to attitude and effort for the teacher. If they are part of the decision making process, then "buy in" for the teacher is there. If they do not have the "seat at the table", how can they feel valued? I feel this is needed at . More interaction and dialogue on a weekly basis to have a true pulse of what is going on.
15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.	It affects it greatly. If you do not have autonomy, you will become discontent and you will not feel valued. Yearly surveys would be helpful. You don't see the critical areas of need, if you don't ask for feedback. The administration must be willing to hear and create change

Name: Michelle Stephens

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.	I've been in education for the past 11 years. I've taught 2nd, 4th, and 5th grade, and currently supervise grades 4- 8.
2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?	To have some freedom within their classroom and teaching methods.
3. Why is autonomy important to educators?	To allow teachers the freedom to explore new ideas and excel in their talents.
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?	My belief is that a teachers should have some free will in how they want to teach; however, in today's time, we have to still guide curriculum to ensure it falls within all beliefs.
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?	experience, content, and work ethic
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?	Probably so
7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?	I feel that my influence is received well. When I make suggestions, I provide the guidance needed to implement a change.
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.	Our executive director and supervisor meet to make decisions regarding placement. The supervisor makes all decisions regarding curriculum.
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?	Through guidance, professional development, continued education, and being encouraged to be problem solvers
10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?	moderate
11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?	No, some teachers need more structure.
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?	Yes; however, it has to first be approved.
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.	Bringing the idea and solution when revealing the task.
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?	Highly

Name: Michelle Stephens

Question

Response

15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy. Employee morale directly impacts employee engagement, which ties straight into their level of productivity.

Name: Patrick Banes

Question

Response

1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.

27 years as a mathematics teacher or administrator.

2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?

For me, I have always been given leeway to plan my curriculum regardless of the particular level of mathematics. Early in my career, before No Child Left Behind, LEAP tests, Graduate Exit Exams

(GEE), or End of Course Tests (EOC), all teachers were given this ability. Occasionally decisions were made about which textbook to use, but how that text was taught was left to the teacher. Now, we live in an age of robo-teachers. Teachers are given a curriculum (Engage New York, Springboard, etc.) and commanded to teach it with fidelity. The very opposite of autonomy.

3. Why is autonomy important to educators?

A teacher is supposed to be an expert in their field. I understand the need to help new teachers find their footing. I could have used a little help 27 years ago. Instead, you were “thrown into the deep end and expected to swim.” Now, regardless of expertise, education, or experience, teachers are disparaged by the “powers that be” to teach like automatan. The discredit to the profession is galling.

4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?

Young teachers should have less autonomy because they have yet to prove themselves. A teacher with experience, who brings in the “numbers” (test scores, etc.), should be given a ton of autonomy.

5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?

6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?

No idea. I do not speak of anyone but myself.

7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?

For me, I try to be an advocate for the teacher. I do not think that exists nearly enough in this profession. I try to make the classroom environment as conducive to teacher empowerment as I can and hope that it helps to drive them to encourage, involve, and inspire their students.

Name: Patrick Banes

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.	If school administration is not strong enough to allow teacher autonomy, and present them with every advantage to be good teachers, then the entire educational structure is doomed to failure.
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?	I think so, but that would be a question better answered by someone who is not an administrator.
10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?	In the high school particularly, almost all of the teachers, bar two, are seasoned veterans and have a good deal of autonomy in the classroom regarding their subject matter.
11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?	No. Young/new teachers should have less autonomy. As discussed earlier, they need help settling into the profession. Once a teacher has proven himself/herself, then they can be given more leniency and autonomy. An experienced teacher who has proven their worth over the years should be given almost total autonomy. They should be treated and respected as being an expert in their field.
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?	No. No individual has the autonomy to make decisions about students and school wide programs. Even the executive director must get board approval for most school wide programs.
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.	S uses weekly PLC's to discuss various aspects of school with the faculty. This includes student concerns, testing concerns, etc. It has proven to be a very effective form of communication between administration and staff.
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?	Again, this is a question better asked of teachers. I would like to think that our teachers feel effective, professional, and respected, but I cannot say for certain that they do indeed feel that way.
15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.	For me, as a former full time teacher turned administrator who still teaches dual enrollment college algebra, I think the it is the reverse. To be given the professional trust and respect to be autonomous in what I do in the classroom positively affects my morale.

Name: Cassie Adams

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.	Elementary Principal, have taught all subjects in grades K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8.
2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?	To be able to make decisions regarding the curriculum you teach

Name: Cassie Adams

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
3. Why is autonomy important to educators?	It lets the educator have some control in the decision making. It makes their voice count. It empowers them.
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?	They should have the autonomy to make classroom decisions that work best for their students. If they need to reteach or pull something extra to help with teaching, they should be able to. I would hope that we have trained them well enough to do that and still be able to adhere to the standards.
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?	State standards and the curriculum we choose affects the level of teacher autonomy. State assessments and the timing of these assessments also affect the level of their autonomy.
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?	Probably. Everyone feels they know best. I can only give so much autonomy due to outside influence. The teacher may ask to do certain activities, but I have to look at the whole elementary whereas that teacher only has to consider her classroom.
7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?	I try to give some autonomy leading up to holidays letting teachers add to their curriculum with holiday themed activities. I do more of trying to involve them in the decision making for events, activities, themed days, etc. that go with the curriculum. I'm big on asking my teachers their opinion. We're in this together, so it's not just 'I', it's 'we'! Would they do other things with the curriculum if I allowed it, yes. I give very little autonomy over the curriculum as a whole. I did allow them to add an additional program to fill in where we felt there was a gap in learning. I do allow some activities to be swapped for others, but I still feel the need to see those activities before I approve them.
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.	We are divided by elementary, middle, and high school. There is more teacher autonomy in high school due to those teachers having specific knowledge of their content. As you move down to the elementary grades, teachers are not as versed in the content they are teaching. I ask them to stick to their lesson plans unless otherwise approved by me. From observing in the administrative capacity, I have come to realize it's easy for an elementary teacher to add to a lesson or change it up and feel like she is doing a better job with the lesson when in actuality, she has moved away from the outcome students should have learned.
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?	Teachers are allowed the freedom to arrange their classrooms and group students. It is their classroom. Students are first answerable to their teacher. Teachers discipline using parameters within their classrooms. When major discipline issues arise, at times teachers are given the autonomy to determine those behavioral consequences too. Teachers formed the PBIS program, so they all had a hand in building that program. We use a few minutes of our PLC meeting time each

Name: Cassie Adams

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
	week to discuss and teachers make decisions regarding curriculum changes as well as other changes. I feel that by providing that time during PLC each week, I'm promoting teacher autonomy.
10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?	They have autonomy in their classroom. They are provided a set schedule, but can make changes to fit an activity, etc. Teachers are provided a set curriculum, but do add to the curriculum. Teachers may make changes around certain activities, holidays, etc. Outcome/objectives must be taught, but substitutions are allowed with approval. Discipline is determined by teachers in most instances. Grades are given by teachers, but a variety of test types should be used. Teachers are involved in decision making weekly during a set time in PLC.
11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?	Yes, but new teachers are provided assistance/feedback the first two years in the classroom with curriculum, lesson planning, management, etc.
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?	Yes, in the elementary, we set aside a time in PLC each week to discuss programs, etc. Teachers are given the opportunity to provide feedback and make decisions regarding the topics that week.
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.	During PLC time, I may express an idea, then teachers take the idea and build on it. Sometimes those ideas lead to other ideas.
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?	I think for the most part, they are confident in their abilities to set goals, timelines, teach to the standards, etc.
15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.	Morale needs to be high for teachers to make effective decisions regarding all students in their classroom. Sometimes morale falls, and teachers have negative feelings that can impact the choices they make for their students and the curriculum they teach.

Name: Mike Snell

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.	29 years in Education 31 years working with Youth Groups at Churches

Name: Mike Snell

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?	Teacher having the ability to bring in personal experiences to help relate the information to the students to attain knowledge
3. Why is autonomy important to educators?	It gives educators by in and ownership to what they are teaching
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?	Teachers should have the freedom to make connections with the curriculum for student comprehension.
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?	The curriculum that is mandated from the state or local Administration.
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?	Yes, depending on the experience level of the Teacher and the complexities of the curriculum.
7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?	Teacher leaders have a strong influence on teacher autonomy, based again on experience.
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.	State mandates and Parish requirements hinder Autonomy at times because it drags the Teacher away from areas they would like to pursue.
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?	Encourage and Reinforce when it is appropriate
10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?	As much as the curriculum allows.
11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?	No, it depends on the Curriculum and if the subject is Mandatorily tested.
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?	Yes
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.	By helping with Student placement in classrooms as well as helping implement strategies across the subject areas.
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?	It varies from teacher to teacher depending on the amount of devotion they have towards their job.
15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.	Morale is a huge factor. If you feel that you are not producing or advancing you tend to sub perform. There needs to be consistent and real encouragement

Name: Chance Strong

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.	Middle school and high school history
2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?	It is positive so long as alignment with state standards
3. Why is autonomy important to educators?	Genuine authentic instruction from a teacher will buy in. Always going to be higher order.
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?	Depends on how alignment goes and the total amount of quality material a teacher can blend into meaningful lessons
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?	High level observations, observable outcomes in student output, disciplined approach
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?	Yes. Ed leaders want consistency and competence.
7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?	Strong influence
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.	Supervisor requires teachers to give account of the plan.
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?	Get involved in thematic planning and encourage open communication
10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?	A lot in non-tested subjects. Less in tested subjects.
11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?	No. Consistency and competence for owning subject and alignment.
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?	Some are confident amid some are insecure
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.	Regular meetings can and should be held.
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?	Some are very confident and self-assured basing their decisions on data or proven theoretical and practical framework. Others are always in a state of insecurity and hesitation

Name: Chance Strong

Question

Response

15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.

High morale is critical for Autonomy. Low morale caused by micro-management destroys the high quality educators drive.

APPENDIX E

TEACHER RESPONSES

Name: Jacy Saint

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.	I currently teach 5th grade. I have taught 1-5 grades for 13 years.
2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?	It means that an educator has the ability to make decisions regarding how and what is taught to their students because whatever they are doing is founded in research based practices.
3. Why is autonomy important to educators?	It gives teachers the opportunity to take responsibility for their students. It allows them to know that they have the capability to do their job with fidelity.
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?	I believe that a teacher should choose how to present material in the classroom. I feel that curriculum should be within certain guidelines, but that a teacher needs to know when to stop and reteach rather than pressing on regardless of students' abilities. I also feel that a teacher needs to know when a skill area is lacking and additional resources are needed to teach the skill.
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?	experience, supervisors, principals
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?	Yes
7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?	Some school leaders "micromanage" and it makes teachers feel overwhelmed. I think that this largely depends on the atmosphere of the school.
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.	Teachers need to know who they answer to. Our school has an immediate supervisor for groups of grades which enables the supervisor to be well-versed in their respective grades.
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?	They allow the teacher to be the expert in the classroom and provide support when necessary.
10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?	I feel like I have 90% autonomy. The 10% comes from mandated curriculum.
11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?	no
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?	yes
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.	Teachers have the ability to influence the decisions by showing specifics on how certain things with positively or negatively impact students.

Name: Jacy Saint

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?	I don't think many teachers give themselves enough credit and they second guess their abilities.
15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.	Teacher morale is a very important part of teacher autonomy because it allows teachers to feel good about themselves and what they can do.

Name: Angie Gray

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.	I have been teaching for 24 years and have taught grades 3-6 (all subject areas), 8 (history) , 9-12 (English).
2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?	For an educator to have professional autonomy they have the freedom to choose the content and material used to teach their subject area.
3. Why is autonomy important to educators?	Autonomy is important because it gives educators the ability to reach each child in their classroom no matter what level they may be on.
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?	I believe a teacher should have about 75% autonomy. Teachers need to have a curriculum that they use to direct their teaching, however, should be able to substitute something if it better fits the learning in the classroom.
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?	Factors determining the level of autonomy a teacher has would be teaching experience, classroom structure, test scores.
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?	Yes
7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?	Most school leaders feel they should control teacher autonomy and have the final say in what is taught in the classroom
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.	At our school there is a deficiency in organizational structure, so teachers have a lot of teacher autonomy in the classroom.
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?	Teacher autonomy is not promoted; however, each teacher teaches and runs their classroom as he or she chooses.
10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?	Teachers have complete autonomy
11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?	Each teacher at has the same level of autonomy.

Name: Angie Gray

Question

12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?

13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.

14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?

15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.

Response

Only certain privileged teachers at have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school wide programs.

Teachers can impact decision makers by the effectiveness that they have in their classroom on student learning, rigor and structure. If a teacher is productive then leaders will listen to input from the teacher.

Most teachers feel they are very effective in their teaching and decisions that they make regarding students.

If teachers are not trusted in the classroom or they are not provided guidance in helping them be productive, then they will develop a poor attitude and this will be evident in their teaching and student learning.

Name: John Bell

Question

1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.

2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?

3. Why is autonomy important to educators?

Response

I received my bachelor's in Computer Science, worked 3 years as a software engineer, and then decided to change careers to teaching mathematics and coaching athletics, specifically football, powerlifting, and occasionally baseball. I've taught 2 years in traditional public schools (one in an A-rated public school, another in a D-rated public school system) and have spent the remainder of my career at two public charter schools. I've taught a variety of courses, the majority of which have been mathematics, both at the middle school and high school level. I've taught 7th Grade Math, 8th Grade Math, Keyboarding, Business Computer Applications, Algebra 1, Algebra 2, Algebra 3, and Dual Enrollment College Algebra.

I believe autonomy lies in administration trusting their teachers to know the standards, they must cover, while having the freedom to select textbooks, curriculum, exercises, etc. to teach said standards in the order and manner that they see fit.

Professional autonomy empowers teachers - if you get the choose how you teach your content, there is ownership and from my experience people work harder and appreciate the payoffs better if they have had ownership. It also shows trust between administration and educators - if you don't trust me to do the job, they why did you hire me?

Name: John Bell

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?	I believe as long as teacher's can show they are teaching state mandated standards, then everything else should be autonomous. Not saying their can't be some unification, for example, our math department got together and decided jointly on a curriculum resource we were all willing to implement, but we also have the freedom to pull from ANY source, because in my opinion, there is no one end-all, be-all curriculum due to variety of materials and also the variety in learners we have in our classrooms.
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?	I think experience & education level are the top factors. Younger, newer teachers still deserve a level of autonomy, perhaps with the mentorship/collaboration of a more experience teacher in their field. Veteran teachers should have total autonomy so long as their test results/benchmarks are continuing to be acceptable.
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?	I think it depends upon the school - some school leaders are dictators who want to micro-manage every aspect of the school, including curriculum and how teachers work in their classrooms. Others (the better ones) focus on screening & hiring capable teachers and then trust them to do their job.
7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?	Well, I think it depends on the administrator. My current boss believes in hiring the right people and then letting them do their job. He places a lot of emphasis on job screening and personnel interviews. I believe this is the best approach for an administrator.
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.	I think that if you have more than two direct supervisors, that's when things get convoluted. At my current school with have a director (over the entire school) and a high school supervisor (over 9-12). I've been at places where you had a principal, an assistant principal, a curriculum coordinator, and a content-area specialist - and they all wanted input into how you teach. That's too many talking heads, in my opinion.
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?	I think as school leaders they have to just let the teachers do their thing, observe their classes to see how it's going, and then gauge how much autonomy they need based on end-of-year tested results and/or student grades.
10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?	I feel this is the most autonomy I've had in any of my employment locations.
11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?	I feel like everyone has the same level of autonomy, but I do feel like administrators do keep closer observation on the ones they deem need it.
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?	To some degree - I think we do within our content areas, maybe not so much school-wide decision making.

Name: John Bell

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.	I think evidence based conversations - if there's a different way to do something, reception and adoption is more easy when measurable data is used, or examples of successful institutions doing things a certain way is used.
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?	Perhaps as suggestions to administration?
15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.	I think it's an inverse relationship. I think teacher moral is higher when they have autonomy. We spend years getting degrees and learning our craft, it's almost an insult of intelligence to have someone micro-manage you - and the ones who need micro-managing probably don't belong in the profession

Name: Mandy Carter

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.	Teacher 7 Years Business
2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?	Research and Select the Content/Material that I use to convey the information to my students.
3. Why is autonomy important to educators?	If I believe in the content of what I teach (and I Do) then the passion and excitement I have will be transferred to the student!!!
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?	I believe the more you give the teacher the better the students will learn!
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?	State Testing ,School Scores, Administration Prior Experience in the Classroom
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?	Yes, Depending on their experiences in the classroom
7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?	Depends on their experiences in the classroom.

Name: Mandy Carter

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.	If they are micromanaged, the teacher will not be very productive.
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?	Encouraging professional development
10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?	From my perspective, I think they have a lot.
11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?	No, Testing Subjects probably have certain material that must be taught. Delivery of the content I feel would be left to the teacher
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?	Yes
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.	Show the Administration the plan; try the plan.
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?	They could feel as if they are limited to the tested content only.
15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.	Great. When a teacher (anyone) feels respected and valued they are happier, more productive, more passionate, always striving to do more!

Name: Renee Collins

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.	I've taught for 24 years in both private and public schools. I've been in the business long enough to have a lifetime license. I have a major in physical education with a minor in math. I've taught math every year and receive many calls throughout the year to teach at different schools.
2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?	Freedom and trust in the classroom for most teachers is more than rewarding! When a teacher is successful, they should be able to have the professional autonomy. While I feel autonomy is necessary to allow me to be the teacher I would like to be, but some teachers especially young teachers feel unmentored. I'm sure autonomy is a very fine line with administration!

Name: Renee Collins

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
3. Why is autonomy important to educators?	For educators that thrive in autonomy, it is one of the most important traits of a prospective school. Being able to adjust a curriculum is EXTREMELY important and being trusted by administration to make those adjustments is golden!
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?	As an educator, I would like plenty of leeway. Looking in an administrator's standpoint, I could see that it could be quite a bit different.
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?	Sadly, standardized testing should be successful. (I've never been a fan of pressured standardized testing!!!) The teacher's confidence, relationships, classroom management, and discipline should be a factor. How to measure those things is a mystery.
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?	Yes, and they should. Different teachers need different things. Not every teacher should be treated the same. Some need more guidance than others.
7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?	Trust is a major factor.
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.	People follow leadership.
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?	When teachers feel trusted and appreciated, I believe the teachers will strive even more to reach their potential and also get the most out of their students.
10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?	I believe we have a lot of autonomy at . We changed curriculum last year for Algebra 1 without any data but only because I believed in the program and 'sold' it to my math colleagues as well. There is not a perfect curriculum so we all still had the freedom to pull from things we've used in the past.
11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?	The math people have the same level of autonomy for sure! I'm not sure about other teachers.
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?	For the most part I believe there is some influence by teachers.
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.	This is only my second year at I feel like administration will listen to all suggestions.

Name: Renee Collins

QuestionResponse

14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?

Most feel confident.

15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.

When leadership conveys trust and confidence in a faculty I believe the staff goes above and beyond to make the leadership and community proud.

Name: Macy Taylor

QuestionResponse

1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.

I am currently teaching in a public charter school. I have also taught at two high schools in North LA as well as a 5A high school in East Texas. I started out as a math teacher/coach. I have coached softball and cheerleading throughout my career. I also now help evaluate curriculum for Edreports.

2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?

In my opinion having autonomy is very important. Although I am good at following directions I am not a robot.

Every state has standards that students need to master, but how teachers get there should be up to them. Educators need to utilize their strengths and make the classes and lessons their own in order to best have students ready for the next level.

3. Why is autonomy important to educators?

Educators are professionals and we have spent countless hours honing in our craft. We know our students better than anyone else. Educators need to be able to make choices in lesson planning and even during a lesson to better reach students. Being able to make the decisions on how state standards are taught is a beautiful thing.

Never have I ever taught a class the same exact way hour by hour much less year to year.

4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?

This is a great question. Not every teacher can be trusted with autonomy. So many teachers who do not do the right thing have ruined the ability for states, districts, and schools to offer this to everyone.

Teachers should be able to get their students to the end goal (EOC tests, graduation, ACT, and college ready) in their own way. It needs to be productive, won't always be student lead, planned out (but not everyone plans the same way), fills the class time, meaningful, there should be some laughs (even if its at me). Students will have to work through the hard times too in order to see the success on the other side.

Name: Macy Taylor

Question

Response

5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?

Success on students reaching their goals (ACT, college, tech school whatever it is) visible learning experiences are happening for student's teacher is trying to get better at their job not just talk teacher is supporting students to be successful

I know I am doing my job if students are ready for what they want to do, they may not love the process of getting there. Eventually when they are doing what they love then I have succeeded in helping them get there.

6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?

I believe at public schools there is definitely different perspectives. In public school I did not have the autonomy I have at a charter school with leadership we have. I have taught where all the teachers in a subject had to be on the same page every day. That was hard and it did not lend itself to reteaching much or slowing down when needed. At the charter school I love that as an educator I am trusted enough to do my class how I see fit to get the students ready. I do not believe one curriculum is the answer. I pick and pull and create all the time.

7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?

I am very fortunate! I can choose my curriculum and teach my students as I see fit. Each class is not done exactly the same. The admin at my school gives teachers the choice, this is good for most but then its detrimental to the ones who are not effective.

8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.

As a math department we went to the administration for high school and presented them with a curriculum idea for last year. We all gave our opinions of it. I was very hesitant as I do not just use one thing and that's it. I was told I did not have to use this same curriculum; it was my choice. I wanted to keep the homework for the high school math students similar, so I chose to go with the other teachers with the idea that I would not only be using this curriculum but would fill in and piece together as needed. It was a successful year. Kind of scary at first but the hard work of the students who did what I asked them to do paid off.

If the leaders are not in and out of the classes they cannot see who flourishes with autonomy and who really needs help. They need to see who can.

9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?

They say sure a lot when random ideas are thrown out to try teaching a lesson a little outside the box. They are supportive. "It's your class, you do it how you see fit"

Leaders can be encouraging to try new things, challenge teachers to think outside the box

Name: Macy Taylor

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?	I may have been partially answering these questions above, sorry if I did not answer those correctly. I feel like we are all given it, I wish the new teachers were more receptive to help and suggestions.
11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?	I feel like we are all given it. Autonomy may not last forever though because of some who do not do their job. I pray I never lose it. If I had to follow a script I don't think I could be a teacher really. Do we all need to have it no, but I do not know how a leader could right off the bat decide who gets it and who does not. Being in the classes would definitely help.
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?	I do think they listen when I do have concerns over students. Does Admin always grant what we ask for no, but I think sometimes they are looking at a bigger picture than I am. As far as programs, they are definitely willing to listen to new ideas
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.	Since we are not very big changes mean more time will need to be given and not everyone is willing to give more
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?	I work with some very talented educators. I believe they thrive because they are capable of making the best choices for their class and material. I also believe I work with some teachers who really don't want to be educators. They do not want to get better at what they do and try new strategies. I do not know how to fix the problems. I am hoping the administration will see them and do what they can. We need to have strong links in each aspect of the students education so we can help the students reach their dreams (and not feel like they are limited or stuck doing something in their future)
15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.	Morale is a huge deal. I do not know if it specifically "decides" if I have autonomy or not but it definitely can affect the motivation of people to be willing to spend the time and energy to make the best decisions for their classroom. A few bad apples can really spoil it for everyone

Name: Sarah Parks

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.	I have taught in the private schools for 10 years and in the charter school for 11 years.
2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?	An educator that has professional autonomy has earned a degree in a particular area of education and should have the freedom to apply their education to the role of educating of young minds in

Name: Sarah Parks

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
	the classroom using methods and materials that are deemed applicable to the group.
3. Why is autonomy important to educators?	Autonomy allows a teacher to “read the room,” and apply their experience and training to best teach that particular group of students in the content area.
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?	I believe a teacher should have full autonomy, but should also have some documentation to support the reasonings behind certain methods or materials used.
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?	In my opinion, positive previous outcomes and experience should factor in to the level of autonomy a teacher has. Some things cannot be completely taught in a college classroom or field experiences and must be learned by trial and error in their own environment.
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?	Possibly
7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?	I believe there needs to be some measurable objectives to achieve and some accountability in place to determine if a teacher is effective; however, this should be over a span of time, not in just one year with one group of students.
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.	I believe it needs to be consistent and motivating. (I may have misunderstood the question here)
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?	I believe this happens by allowing teachers to be flexible in their teaching methods and materials, yet maintain a set of consistent standards to be met.
10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?	I feel the teachers at have a medium range of autonomy. We have flexibility in the curriculum we want to use and methods. For core subjects, however, there could be some temptation to “teach to the tests.”
11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?	I honestly do not know.
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?	Yes, they do.

Name: Sarah Parks

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.	Teachers can be more involved in activities, attend school board meetings, and provide helpful information from teacher-student interactions or classroom activities.
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?	I believe our teachers feel fully equipped to help make educational decisions.
15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.	Morale plays a strong role in teacher autonomy. Morale would be at a higher level when educators can “own” their methods and materials.

Name: Nathan York

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.	I discovered a love of teaching while tutoring other students in my undergraduate science program. I earned a MAT in 2011, and worked for one semester as a long term substitute teacher at a public school. Following that I worked as the Chemistry and AP Chemistry teacher at Cedar Creek for three years. Having decided I wanted to actually support my family I switched back to public school and worked for two years teaching Physical Science, Chemistry, and Anatomy. After those two years I moved to and have remained ever since teaching whatever high school science gets planned.
2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?	To decide, on my own or through collaboration with colleagues, the content to be learned and the skills to be mastered by students enrolled in a course. Then, having done that, to similarly decide what methods should be used to meet that goal.
3. Why is autonomy important to educators?	People capable of making wise and effective decisions expect to be allowed to make wise and effective decisions. The less autonomy educators have, the more “brain drain” our profession will have because many people will choose to work where their abilities are valued rather than prohibited.
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?	Near total, unless there is a good reason for administration to overrule the teacher. Within our system where the state sets the standards, a teacher should be able to plan their lessons, activities, work, etc. to meet those standards. At the least a department should collaborate on it under a faculty department head without undue administrative meddling. I do think, however, that a local community (school board?) should set or adopt standards for their schools to rather than relying on the state to set standards. The current system of the state setting standards and then testing for those is a deeply flawed system

Name: Nathan York

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?	that needs to be reworked, particularly because of the role that system plays in limiting teacher autonomy. I'm not sure I understand the question. 1) State standards and whether a teacher is forced to use a "tier 1" labeled curriculum. 2) Degree to which an administrator trusts a teacher. Sadly, this is controlled entirely by standardized test scores. 3) Ability of a teacher to make functional curricula that meets the needs of students.
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?	Yes. Teachers want to teach useful things to students that will follow them into life, or at least expose them to new concepts/skills so students can decide if they want to pursue that topic further. Administrators want good standardized test scores.
7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?	I do not think it is something administrators give serious thought. They are hemmed by the need to get good test scores or to make sure teachers are using a curriculum labeled "tier 1", even if that curriculum is hot garbage. I think administrators probably value teacher autonomy as an abstract concept, but that abstract concept doesn't translate directly to test scores in the short term so it winds up not being a priority.
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.	Supervisors need something to supervise. The more layers of bureaucracy, the more each layer will infringe on teacher autonomy.
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?	I genuinely do not know. I have never experienced teacher autonomy as an intentional collaboration between school leaders and teachers. I think that the system we are in severely limits local control and therefore the ability of school leaders to promote teacher autonomy.
10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?	Some? I have near total autonomy in my classes where the state does not require a standardized test. I have very little autonomy in my biology class. You can see this by looking at how many teachers use the iHUB biology curriculum (from CO) in our state.
11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?	No. Same as the previous answer. It depends on the course we teach and how those classes affect the SPS. Teachers with good test scores have more autonomy and teachers with less good test scores have less autonomy.
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?	Not that I can see.

Name: Nathan York

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.	My perception is that teachers tend to push for what we see as the best interests of ourselves and our students and that decision-makers tend to focus on SPS and public relations.
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?	I think most teachers have a very positive self-efficacy when it comes to making wise educational decisions and that it is usually justified.
15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.	I'm not sure. I think teacher autonomy dramatically affects morale. I'm not sure morale directly affects autonomy. Our state needs to make teaching a more attractive profession in order to attract and retain high quality, dedicated educators. People don't leave this profession over money very often, but in my anecdotal experience and reading is any indication, then people do leave over issues like teacher autonomy and the system that robs us of it.

Name: Sheila Hardy

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.	I'm a fifth year teacher at where I teach the social studies curriculum.
2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?	An educator is supposed to be the 'specialist' in their field and should be able to decide what information is important to their students
3. Why is autonomy important to educators?	It means they have control over their curriculum
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?	Teachers should be the deciding voice within the classroom
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?	Background of teacher, education, certifications
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?	I think school leaders and teachers have different concerns. School leaders are focused not just on the education of the student, but the community's perception of the school
7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?	School leaders have the main ability to approve or disprove of teacher autonomy

Name: Sheila Hardy

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.	Without a strong, organized structure teachers can feel unsupported even while being allowed their own autonomy. Teachers need support from school leaders
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?	Allowing teachers to have a say in curriculum or supplemental material
10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?	Most are encouraged to follow state curriculum, but are allowed to use any materials that support the curriculum
11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?	No. Level of experience is important in the amount of autonomy experience by teachers
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?	Sometimes. it depends on the situation
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.	Teachers can review material and bring their findings to administration
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?	Teachers recognize it is important to make these educational decisions to best teach their students and ensure they pass standardized testing
15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.	I think they're connected. Morale increases as teachers are allowed more freedom

Name: Vanessa Anson

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.	I am a secondary English teacher. I have a bachelor's in English, a Masters in Teaching, and in March, 2022, I will have a Masters in English.
2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?	As a person with many years of expertise in my field, I should be able to know what is the proper thing to teach to my students. At my school, I must follow the curriculum with fidelity. While this is great, it leads to boring lessons and truly unneeded information. The end goal is the LEAP test at the end, and we have been told numerous times that we are nothing but our scores. So, to be able to govern my classroom in the most effective way (i.e. they are LEARNING), would be the best thing for my professional life.

Name: Vanessa Anson

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
3. Why is autonomy important to educators?	If a person cannot govern themselves in a professional setting, why would they hold that job? As a person who is educated, I have the wherewithal to handle my students' education. When the state comes in to criticize the teachers, they are saying those teachers cannot do their job, which is asinine.
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?	A teacher, just like any other professional, should be evaluated, but their evaluations should not be used against them. They should be used for developmental purposes.
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?	Administration - They control what you are allowed to teach and what you are not to teach - especially in the younger grades.
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?	Yes, I have been told by admin that I am an expert in my field, so teach the class how I see fit. But when I am observed, I am told by that administration that they wished they could push me out of the way and do it themselves. That is not autonomy.
7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?	Most administration I know hold a tight thumb on their teachers. But that is probably a more localized thing.
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.	Currently, my school's administration has changed internally creating a position for a high school principal, middle school principal, and elementary principal as well as an executive director. This has helped with our autonomy
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?	Trust!!!
10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?	We have more than most honestly.
11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?	No. If a teacher has been at the school for longer, they are free to do what they want. If they are new to the school, they are watched with scrutiny.
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?	No
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.	I really don't know.
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?	We believe that we are professionals and should be treated as such. As teachers, we often get treated as though we are children ourselves.

Name: Vanessa Anson

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.	If teachers are mistreated by unrealistic Student Learning Targets or COMPASS evaluations, then the group as a whole goes down.

Name: Justin Wilson

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.	I teach high school social studies. I have received a Master's Degree in secondary education from Louisiana Tech University.
2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?	To have the freedom to plan and organize your lessons as you deem necessary.
3. Why is autonomy important to educators?	Educators are the ones meeting with the students daily and have to adapt to different situations that are just as different as the kids they teach.
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?	Full autonomy as long those teachers are following school rules and test scores reflect their autonomy is working.
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?	Administrator involvement, discipline, teacher duties and SPS scores.
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?	No.
7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?	I believe they believe autonomy should be the same for every teacher. And what's good for one is good for all.
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.	Teachers report to assistant principals, assistant principal reports to principal, and principal reports to school board president.
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?	By making periodic classroom visits and asking teacher input on situations that may or may not occur in their classroom.
10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?	On a scale of 1-10, I'd say a 7.
11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?	I believe they do.
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?	It's dependent on what you mean by decisions on students. I believe that teachers do have autonomy for schoolwide programs.

Name: Justin Wilson

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.	Phone calls as well as emails.
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?	Teachers do have to be on their toes for changes made by administration, however, adapting to these schoolwide changes are encouraged by those same administrators.
15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.	Highly. If morale is low, then autonomy will dwindle and administration will feel they need to step in more.

Name: Lisa Ward

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.	I sporadically taught after I graduated. I taught a year of high school social studies to junior and seniors at; left teaching when I moved; went in retail management; center where I taught GED English to 16-24 year old high risk students and then became the Academic Manager; left teaching again moving to HR with JP Morgan Chase; returned to teaching again at 38; taught 15 years of Junior High School some social studies but mainly English and this year I moved to the high school. I am the English Content Leader for UPHS.
2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?	I see autonomy as my opportunity to take the curriculum and adjust and mold it to the needs of my students.
3. Why is autonomy important to educators?	Teachers are in the class room and we see the immediate needs of students and we need to have the freedom to adjust as needed.
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?	I actually do not have a problem with a school selected curriculum that provides consistency across grades....I just think it should still allow for the creativity of the teacher as the lesson is presented.
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?	I often think it is the amount of trust school leaders have in that teacher and sometimes the lack of awareness of how some teachers totally go their own way.
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?	Because of the relationships I have had with my school leaders and my preference to be very upfront with what I do in my classroom I have not really experience a big difference in perspectives.
7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?	This question really goes to my answer above.....my discussions with my school leaders allow for us to reach a mutually satisfactory decision on my autonomy.

Name: Lisa Ward

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.	When the organizational structure is directed downward to teacher's autonomy is impacted negatively. Our organizational structure allows for much give and take among all of the staff top to bottom.
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?	Our school wants curriculum consistency, but yet allow us to be unique individuals in our classroom.
10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?	We are often included in discussions related to our curriculum and its implementation, so to me that is the ultimate form of autonomy.
11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?	Probably not- just based on experience or the fact that some teachers are less vocal with their wants (I am not).
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?	Yes
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.	When teachers come with the data it often greatly impacts decision makers in our school.
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?	I can only speak for myself but I believe my school leaders trust me so I view my self-efficacy in the classroom as strong and supported.
15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.	It will raise the morale of teachers when they know that school leaders trust and believe in them enough to allow them to make the best decisions for their classroom.

Name: Ken Albritton

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.	I taught for a decade and transferred in 2010. I have been the social studies PLC facilitator since 2014. I have served as president of the school leadership team (i.e., Senate). I am also a Louisiana certified mentor teacher.
2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?	Administrators must allow educators to decide how to teach state standards.
3. Why is autonomy important to educators?	Educators must retain power to make critical decisions in their respective classrooms.
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?	Educator autonomy should depend on their classroom management and pedagogical skills.

Name: Ken Albritton

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?	Veteran teachers who demonstrate highly effective classroom management abilities should have more autonomy than novice teachers with lower classroom management competence.
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?	To raise school performance scores (SPS), administrators feel compelled to control their teachers. Conversely, educators want administrators to set professional expectations and allow them to meet those requirements on their own.
7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?	Administrators believe they need to control teachers more.
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.	Teachers are more likely to implement policy enacted by their representative body, the Senate.
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?	Administrators grant more autonomy to highly effective teachers.
10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?	Highly effective teachers exercise more autonomy.
11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?	No. Highly effective teachers exercise more autonomy.
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?	Our teachers provide feedback and suggestions to their respective senators, who in turn propose solutions at regular Senate meetings.
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.	Our teachers provide feedback and suggestions to their respective senators, who in turn propose solutions at regular Senate meetings.
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?	If teachers view themselves as effective, they will have the confidence to make critical decisions for their students and for the school.
15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.	The higher a teacher's morale, the higher the autonomy.

Name: Chad Long

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.	I am and I am a 10th year teacher. I have taught in two different schools teaching subjects from middle school math and science, to high school biology and biology 2, Dual Enrollment Anatomy and Physiology, Physical Science, and Physical Education.

Name: Chad Long

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?	The teachers right and ability to make the best instructional decisions based on the teacher's specific group of students.
3. Why is autonomy important to educators?	All schools, classrooms, and individuals learn differently. Educators must be able to accomodate these varying needs within the classroom to give the students the best possible education.
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?	Enough to make individualized education possible in each classroom while still having accountability for the instructional decisions made.
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?	Experience, professional ability, grade level, subject matter, etc.
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?	Yes. Teachers are usually focused in their own classroom. While school leaders must think about the school at large.
7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?	I believe school leaders see teacher autonomy as a hard thing to grant in today's educational world of standardized testing, therefore they usually see themselves as limiting or blocking teacher autonomy.
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.	Guided and scripted curriculum have largely dismantled teacher autonomy.
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?	Many times, they do not!
10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?	Very limited teacher autonomy in MOST subject areas.
11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?	No. Teachers in the core subjects are often given scripted or very guided curriculums and pacing guides they must follow heavily. While elective subjects usually get more autonomy.
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?	Yes, in some cases.
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.	At my school, there is a teacher leader group known as the "Senate" with teacher representatives nominated from every subject as well as at large members. This group is able to meet with school leaders to and make decisions that impact students and the everyday operations of the school.
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?	As very minimal and often as a non-factor.

Name: Chad Long

Question

15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.

Response

I would say this would be reversed in many cases. With a motivated teaching staff, teacher autonomy can lead to higher morale.

Name: Amy Tanner

Question

1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.

Response

I have a BS in Computer Science and a Master's in Education from. I spent 25 years in the private sector business world in various management positions in the telecommunication and healthcare industries. I taught Computer Lit, Accounting, and Business Math at OCS for ten years. Because we did not have a faculty member credentialed to supervise teachers, I have to go through the PREP program at Northwestern to complete my certification. I am in the process of passing my PRAXIS exams and completing one more semester of the internship. I currently teach Algebra 2 and Geometry at Union Parish High School.

2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?

Professional autonomy allows a teacher to adjust his/her curriculum to accommodate differences in their audiences. I make adjustments for the same subject across different classes because of the varying learning differences and deficiencies in prior knowledge. The pandemic caused gaps in our students' prior knowledge many curriculums assume is there. Much more frontloading is required this year than I have experienced in the past.

3. Why is autonomy important to educators?

It allows teachers the flexibility needed to reach all of their students.

4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?

Set a feasible goal based on our student data and let us determine the best method to use to reach it.

5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?

An educator's level of self-discipline and organizational skills are important for autonomy to be successful. We must be self-motivated and willing to take the initiative to make the necessary changes to help our students succeed.

6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?

Not necessarily school leaders. I feel the Louisiana Department of Education wants to dictate what happens in my classroom without having any knowledge of the different audiences I face each day. They try to treat all students the same which is ridiculous.

Some of our school district offices have become retirement homes for former classroom teachers. We need people willing to make changes and incorporate technology into our schools.

7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?

As stated previously, I feel the problems are at the state level. They are mandating time-consuming, unproductive activities that distracts us from preparing for our lessons which are more important.

Name: Amy Tanner

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.	“Too many chiefs and not enough Indians” always results in poor outcomes. When you have too many central office personnel pulling the faculty in different directions, it causes burnout and frustration.
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?	Provide professional development on the newest tools available to them. The less time a teacher has to research something, the more time they have available to implement it.
10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?	We are required to accommodate all the state mandates no matter how ridiculous and frivolous they are.
11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?	As far as I am aware.
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?	It would depend on what decision you are referring to.
13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.	Be willing to openly discuss your ideas with anyone who will listen. The frontline teachers are the experts on what is happening in our classrooms today.
14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?	I’ve always been self-confident and willing to make the hard decisions. Lately, I don’t always feel someone will back me up if a decision is unpopular.
15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.	Employee morale is critical to the success of any company/school district. Teaching is one of the toughest careers I have had. But, it is also the most rewarding. The lack of discipline in today’s classrooms has a major negative effect on the morale of the faculty.

Name: Andrea Denny

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.	I have taught Kindergarten, 3rd, 4th, 5th Math/Sci/SS and 7th grade Social Studies
2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?	I believe that autonomy for an educator means that the educator makes decisions in their classroom on how they present the curriculum.

Name: Andrea Denny

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response</u>
3. Why is autonomy important to educators?	Autonomy is important to educators because it gives you freedom in your classroom to present material in the most effective way to your students. I teach multiple sections of American History each day and I vary my lessons accordingly to meet the needs of the different learning styles of students.
4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom?	Teachers should have almost complete autonomy in their classroom. I believe the curriculum must be set and some teachers need guidance to ensure that the required materials are presented. However, as to the presenting of the information, I believe the teachers should be able to make their lessons to best meet their classroom. Scripted lessons do not work for some students and are often times BORING.
5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has?	Classroom observations, lesson plan reviews, ability level of teacher and I believe the test scores can prove the effectiveness of a teacher in the context of autonomy.
6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy?	Most definitely; In my experience school leaders want to see state mandated curriculums followed by the book. I have seen many new teachers reprimanded for not following the curriculum word for word.
7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom?	I feel that school leaders at my school do perceive that they have an influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom. We have consultants who come in and work with teachers to ensure that they are following the curriculum with fidelity.
8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy.	Organizational structure makes a huge difference in teacher autonomy. I have worked for many administrators with various levels of organizational structure. In my own personal experience, I have found that the more leaders the less autonomy that teachers have in classroom.
9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom?	School leaders can promote autonomy by simply allowing teachers to make decisions for their classroom and stepping in only as needed. I feel like teachers are concerned that they will get in trouble if they make decisions that they feel school leaders would be upset about.
10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school?	It depends on the subject taught. I feel like English and Math have a smaller amount of autonomy in the classroom.
11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why?	See above lol; I have found that ELA and math teachers have the greatest amount of pressure and therefore school leaders often times give them less autonomy. In my school, ELA and Math teachers have consultants/admin in weekly if not daily to critique all parts of the classroom. I feel like elective teachers have the greatest autonomy.
12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school?	In some instances, our input is considered.

Name: Andrea Denny

Question

13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school.

14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?

15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.

Response

At this point, I think that teachers have a greater influence that ever simply because the teacher turnover rate has increased so dramatically. As now one of the most tenured teachers in the Junior High, I see decision-makers asking for my input more than ever. I hate to say teachers can threaten to leave but this has proved effective for needed changes in my school.

In my school, I believe self-efficacy is low regarding teaching and making educational decisions. Our teachers have struggled with confidence and we have such a large number of first year teachers and/or new to the teaching profession teachers that they are uncertain if what they are doing is effective.

GREATLY. When teacher morale is low for whatever reason and teachers also do not have autonomy you will see teacher burn out/quitting. I believe the profession in general is on a downward spiral if things do not change.

Name: Josh Russell

Question

1. Introduce yourself and include your professional experience in the realm of education.

2. What does it mean for an educator to have professional autonomy?

3. Why is autonomy important to educators?

Response

I had a couple of careers before I completed college at 35 years of age. I was in the Navy and worked in emergency medicine mainly. When I graduated, primary schools were just reopening from Covid and substitutes were in high demand so I subbed all grades and all sorts of subjects. After that I worked summer school for a month as a paraprofessional with junior high students in an English classroom and then another month in a math classroom. Both teachers let me have a lot of freedom to execute their lesson plans in small groups etc. which increased my confidence greatly. I had only worked around kids their age at RPAR helping manage the soccer league previous to that. After summer school concluded, Mr. Spradling hired me to teach 6th grade science and I was able to pass the Praxis content area during those 3 weeks that our school remained closed in September as a safety measure against rising Covid case counts.

I think the IQWEST curriculum that I use is pretty awesome. Although it is almost scripted, there is still plenty of room for me to introduce additional information to students. The curriculum even gives frequent suggestions for doing so.

If for no other reason, I think that autonomy keeps me more engaged. I have a lot of academic knowledge to share with students. I made it to calculus IV (7th math class at Tech) despite not being a strong student in math. I challenged myself greatly in college by taking a wide range of the most difficult science courses, and even picked up an English minor along the way. I'm giving my resumé to make the point that I myself, not yet having been to many education seminars etc., have a very good understanding of what it will take for a student to succeed

Name: Josh Russell

Question

Response

in 2021 or 2030. Most schools are full of people who are as educated and more educated than me who have decades of classroom management experience to boot. I think that they and I have the brain power and credentials to be trusted to know when and how to supplement our classes.

Despite all of that, I still don't stray much from my curriculum. I only modify a demonstration/experiment to fit the size of the class or add a few vocabulary words usually. This is because I think the curriculum that I've been given is a VAST improvement on the science education that I received when I was in the 6th grade. I trust that it works and is backed up by data that proves its effectiveness.

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|---|---|
| 4. How much autonomy should a teacher have in his or her classroom? | I think it should be dependent upon their access to a quality curriculum. |
| 5. What factors determine the level of autonomy a teacher has? | Their own academic ability/content knowledge as well as whether or not the school has provided them with access to a quality curriculum. |
| 6. Do school leaders and teachers have different perspectives about autonomy? | In my limited experience no. The keyword is limited, I've only worked at one school full-time. |
| 7. How do you feel school leaders perceive their influence on teacher autonomy in the classroom? | Appropriately, in the one school I've ever worked for. |
| 8. Describe how the organizational structure at the school affects teacher autonomy. | Well even as a new teacher it is clear to me that teachers will have more or less autonomy based on how focused administrators are on curriculum vs. discipline or managing other school functions. |
| 9. How do school leaders promote teacher autonomy in the classroom? | By promoting an open forum environment in meetings. |
| 10. How much autonomy do the teachers at this school? | I don't know for sure, but I suspect slightly more than average. |
| 11. Do all teachers have the same level of autonomy? If not, why? | Social studies teacher for example do not have access to a nationally recognized curriculum like I do in science right now |
| 12. Do teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about students and school-wide programs at the school? | Yes |
| 13. Describe how teachers can influence or persuade decision makers at the school on decisions that impact students and the school. | Open forum discussion is promoted frequently at our school. |

Name: Josh Russell

Question

14. How do you think teachers view their self-efficacy regarding teaching and making educational decisions for students and the school?

Response

I think some find it necessary, but I wonder if it is because they have not given their curriculums a real chance.

15. Describe how morale affects teacher autonomy.

The more sleep I get, the more energy and extra ideas I can bring to class.
