An Exploration of Subject Curriculum and Policy Implementation in Ontario Schools:
What Factors Support and Impede Effective Implementation?

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Abstract

Ontario teachers experience updates to curriculum and policies at least every five years. The assessment document, *Growing Success* (2010), is expected to be in effect as of 2010. However, literature has shown that the concepts of *Growing Success* (2010) are not fully understood by teachers, and utilization of assessment methods vary. In addition, there are inconsistencies in the implementation of policy and subject curriculum across subjects and schools. In this study, I attempted to answer the following questions: What actions have been taken to ensure that teachers are practicing the new policies and curriculum? What factors have influenced or impeded change in policy and curriculum implementation? And to what extent are teachers practicing new policies and curriculum in the classroom? These questions were explored through three semi-structured interviews with experienced Ontario teachers. The data revealed issues in the quality of formal professional development (PD), a lack of support from administrators, a gap between interpretations of documents among teachers and administrators, and a disregard for assessment practices by students, parents and guardians. These findings raise important issues that need to be addressed before successful implementation of new policies and curriculum can take place.

*Key Words: Subject Curriculum, Growing Success, Curriculum and Policy Implementation, Professional Development, Ontario Education*
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

The Ontario Ministry of Education periodically updates the Ontario school curriculum, updating different curriculum areas and grades at different times. There are at least 20 curriculum documents covering a range of disciplines and grade levels that take part in the curriculum review cycle in Ontario, with at least five expected implementations each year (OME, 2011). With ever changing theories, course content, goals, technology, and perspectives in teaching, it is important for teachers to remain up to date, informed, and effective in their teaching practices, whilst integrating the prescribed methods in practice. Since September 2010, Ontario curricula, assessment, evaluation, and reporting for Kindergarten to grade 12 follow the policies and practices of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Growing Success (2010) document. The new policies encompass 7 fundamental principles, which place emphasis on fairness, transparency, and equity. In addition, the document expects consistency in the way grades are assigned across school boards and the province. Moreover, ongoing assessments are to be provided to students so that optimal opportunities are given for support, improvement, and to build self-assessment skills. According to Growing Success, teachers have a leading role to play in the implementation of the seven fundamental principles. On a daily and hourly basis, teachers make professional judgments that ensure effective implementation of these principles, making decisions with respect to individual students and groups of students that have profound implications for them. How students feel about themselves as learners and whether they enjoy learning and strive for excellence are closely related to their teachers’ professional skills both in
differentiating instruction and assessment. (Ministry of Education, 2010, p.8)

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) stress the importance that, “Teachers and teaching will need to keep improving for everyone, all the time. Constant inquiry and continuous individual collective development are essential to professional success” (p. 91).

In addition, curriculum documents for subject areas (The Arts, Sciences, Social Sciences and Humanities, Health and Physical Education, etc.) undergo changes and revisions every few years. Updates to curriculum documents outline topics such as the nature of the subject area in current focus, course expectations, skills (inquiry, research, etc.), assessment and evaluation, overview of the program, and instructional approaches for program planning (OME, 2016). Teachers are expected to follow new curriculum expectations once the new document is put into effect.

1.1 Research Problem

Growing Success (2010) includes new ideas and processes for teaching and learning. One of the principles in Growing Success is ongoing assessment (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). Volante (2011), found that though the concept of ongoing assessment was understood among mathematics teachers, they had difficulty balancing assessment with evaluation, therefore emphasizing assessment more than evaluation. In addition, teachers struggled to find ways to help their students incorporate their feedback into math tasks. Earl et al. (2011) observed that although teachers say they apply assessment for learning (AfL) in their teaching, very few of the teaching reflected AfL principles and intentions. Problems stemmed from misunderstanding how AfL works, superficial professional development surrounding AfL, and competing policy expectations. Volante (2011) also found that mathematics teachers were finding trouble
organizing evaluation into the strict categories from the *Growing Success* (2010) Achievement Chart: knowledge and understanding, thinking, communication, and application. Bates (2015) found that within the revised Visual Arts curriculum, little appreciation was given for the revised document, and implementation ranged from limited to considerable. Teachers found the new curriculum to be “dumbed down”, with a lack of value in art history, causing mixed emotions of anger to disappointment. Also, these teachers found professional development (PD) sessions for the new curriculum to be fragmented and ineffective. The presence and quality of other principles within the new curriculum documents can be explored further. Existing research for implementing the new curriculum in Ontario has shown implementation as weak (Bates, 2015; Volante, 2010 & Volante 2011). However, research lacks in the implementation of other key principles within the new curriculum, as well as across different curriculums and school boards.

### 1.2 Research Purpose

In consideration of this problem, the goal of my research is to explore the current state of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s (OME) new curriculum and policy, with a focus on *Growing Success* (2010), and curriculum documents among varied subjects (ie. Social Sciences, Science, English, etc.) and school boards (Peel, TDSB, etc.). In addition, I would like to learn how OME has attempted to introduce, implement, and maintain these principles in schools. Areas of exploration will also include factors that cause resistance to change among teachers, and the most effective methods of implementing new policy and curriculum. Findings for this study will help inform curriculum implementation efforts, such as PD sessions and initiatives, and improve overall levels of implementation.
1.3 Research Questions

The primary question guiding this study is: How is a sample of teachers from varied school boards interacting with the new subject curriculum and the *Growing Success* (2010) document? Subsidiary Questions include:

- What actions have been taken to ensure that teachers are practicing the new policies and curriculum? What is the extent and quality of these efforts?
- What factors have influenced or impeded change in policy and curriculum implementation?
- To what extent are teachers practicing new policies and curriculum in the classroom?

1.4 Reflexive Positioning Statement

I am a teacher candidate graduating in 2017 who is taught pedagogical methods surrounding the new curriculum and policy. However, my subject teachable professor warned the class that many teachers (and possibly our Associate Teachers) are still using outdated pedagogical practices and teach outdated curricula, resources, and pedagogical practices. These circumstances mean that students may not be exposed to new practices, such as assessment for learning. I found this concerning and interesting, as many new curriculum documents have been administered for several years, and the *Growing Success* document has been administered for over 6 years. Through this research, I hope to gain insight on how teachers take up prescribed curriculum and policies, in order to better my practice and success for my future students. Also, it is important to be aware of factors that impede and promote change, and effective means of implementation to aid my future teacher colleagues in their teaching practice. Moreover, future
revisions and reforms will be made to the curricula and policies. Therefore, attention to effective implementation means, and awareness of impeding factors will inform my practice for the future.

1.5 Overview

To respond to the research questions, I will be conducting a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview 2-3 teachers about their instructional methods in relation to the 2010 curriculum. In chapter 2, I review the literature in the areas of curriculum implementation theories and practice, and factors that cause resistance to change. Next, in chapter 3, I elaborate on the research design. In chapter 4, I report my research findings and discuss their significance in relation to the existing research literature. In chapter 5, I identify the implications and significance of the research findings for my own teacher identity and practice, the educational research community, and those involved with implementing and supporting curriculum. Lastly, I raise questions pertaining to the research findings, and identify areas for future research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I review the literature in the areas pertaining to knowledge and utilization of new policy and curriculum, implementation support, and teachers’ experiences and perspectives during implementation. More specifically, I review the extent to which schools have implemented new curricula and policy, but I question the effectiveness of this implementation by analyzing understanding of new practices. Next, I consider support systems used to facilitate change, including different types of professional development (PD), leadership systems, and upper level support, such as the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME). I review examples of each, and draw conclusions on what characterizes effective support. Finally, I review subjective and external factors that influence change, including years of experience in teaching, teacher’s subjective opinions on change, and school culture—thereby highlighting factors that promote and impede change.

2.1 Knowledge and Utilization of New Policy and Curriculum

The OME established a schedule for ongoing curriculum review, ensuring subjects remain current, relevant, and appropriate (OME, 2011). The ministry publishes revised documents for grades and subjects every seven or so years to reflect pedagogical theory, field of knowledge, and political ideology. Ontario’s Growing Success (2010) explicitly highlights its assessment method importance and encourages teachers to “provide students with descriptive feedback and coaching for improvement”. I question whether these new ideas are understood and utilized in practice. Earl, Volante, and Katz (2011) assert that many teachers claim to use AfL, but their practice do not reflect the intentions and principals that make AfL powerful. In addition,
there is misunderstanding of the meaning and requirements of AfL. Reviewing literature about the utilization and understanding of new curriculum and policy provides information on the current state of Ontario schools, and the implementation methods within them.

2.1.1 Utilization of policy and curriculum. When studying the use of formative assessment by mathematics teachers, Suurtam and Koch (2014) found that teachers in the study were using a “variety of assessment strategies to get a sense of students’ understanding and to provide feedback” (p. 266). In addition, the teachers were “working on ways of designing new assessment strategies and tools such as creating ways to record their observations or developing rubrics where students were involved in determining the criteria so that the rubric is more useful to students” (p. 272). Evidently, the teachers within this study were utilizing AfL, and ensuring transparency and understanding of course expectations—following prescriptions from the Growing Success (2010) document. However, these teachers reported difficulty in allocating time for ongoing assessment, so utilization was not to its full potential in the teachers’ perspectives. Teachers interviewed in Volante and Beckett’s (2011) study “struggled with finding creative ways to make their students fully use their formative feedback” (p. 267). However, they admitted that self-assessment was lacking and should be promoted more in their classrooms. In addition, they found peer assessment to be difficult to implement because students cannot “achieve the level of objectivity that [they] would like” (Volante & Beckett, 2011, p. 266). Volante (2010), through interviews of teachers and administrators in 2 Ontario districts, found an overemphasis on assessment of learning (AoL) techniques (tests, quizzes, exams), while a minority of teachers utilized assessment as learning (AaL) and AfL. An administrator says that a “third of the teachers here are progressing in assessment for learning, are proficient in assessment for learning, and moving along the scale to assessment as learning” (Volante, 2010,
p. 70). Overall, the results suggest that assessment practices in accordance with *Growing Success* (2010) can be improved; teachers are having difficulty finding time to allocate formative assessment, peer assessment is difficult to implement with students, there is an overemphasis on AoL, and the least utilization of AaL. These studies were conducted in the *Growing Success* (2010) document’s early distribution. Thus, assessment practices may differ in the year 2016, where educators have had time to understand AfL and AaL, and how to implement these in the classroom in adequate amounts. It is important to note that the presence of assessment techniques may not necessarily indicate that it is done effectively, and according to intentions and principles that make AfL powerful and effective, which will be discussed in further detail.

2.1.2 Knowledge and understanding of policy and curriculum. Understanding *Growing Success* (2010), specifically assessment methods, vary according to studies. While observing the community of praxis’ discussions on dilemmas with the new math curriculum, Surrtam and Koch (2014) found that teachers were having difficulty with assessing students using the Achievement Chart (*Growing Success*, 2010). They struggled with how to assess by levels, and how to create questions and assignments that allowed them to assess the levels.

Volante (2010), through interviews of Ontario teachers and administrators in 2 Ontario school districts, found that all educators understood the distinction between AfL and AoL, and were able to give examples of each. Many were unfamiliar with AaL, and could not discuss its possible application in the classroom, even after the concept was explained to them by the interviewer. Thus, these teachers had an understanding of AfL, AoL, but not AaL. Through ongoing conversation and research, Earl, Volante, and Katz (2011) identified misunderstanding of assessment practices as an issue in effective implementation in the classrooms. Issues with interpretation of documents occurred: “For example, “deciding where the learners are in their
learning, where they need to go and how best to get there”, had sometimes been misinterpreted as an exhortation to test students frequently, using prescribed national/state scales, in order to fix their failings and target the next level” (Earl, Volante, & Katz, 2011, p. 4). Similarly, Volante and Beckett (2011) found that the teachers in their study used summative assessments and state province administered tests, such as the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) as an indicator of student learning, and adjusted instruction accordingly. The original ideals promoted in the Growing Success (2010) document are distorted because “performance on a test does not necessarily mean that learning has occurred. Learners can be taught how to score well on tests without much underlying learning” (p. 244). According to the researchers, “becoming more proficient means developing a deep understanding of the underlying theory,” (Earl, Volante, & Katz, 2011, p. 250) which many teachers do not display. Rather, lack of true proficiency in AfL is seen. Therefore, there are issues in understanding the document, even when assessment practices appear to be present in classrooms.

Bates’ (2015) conducted interviews with Ontario art teachers from schools within 1 Ontario district in the fall of 2010 after the revised visual arts curriculum was mandated (September 2010). Some teachers were not able to participate in the survey because they had yet to look at the new curriculum. Those who had seen the curriculum were asked how familiar they felt with the new document. Some expressed that they were somewhat familiar with the document, some were not sure because they had not had enough time with the document, some had only read the draft, and some had read it several times and were familiar with it. For most, their first time seeing the new document was at a PD session in June of 2010, 2 months before the document was expected to be mandated. Therefore, there was an inconsistency among the teachers in terms of the degree of familiarity with the document. Being familiar with the
document does not necessarily equate to understanding. However, lack of knowledge and understanding in the new curriculum can be strongly correlated with those who expressed not having seen it or had hardly read it. This particular document was distributed officially in September, when the changes were expected in the new school year. Doing so does not allow teachers time to plan or adjust lessons to meet the new curriculum. The time of introduction and distribution of other curriculum documents before they are expected to be implemented can be questioned, and investigated in terms of other new curriculum documents.

2.2 Implementation Support

When new curriculum or other policy documents are introduced and expected to be put into practice, various means are allocated to support implementation in schools. Support such as professional development (PD), leadership systems, and upper level (school board, district, Ontario Ministry of Education) support are means of aiding implementation. Large scale surveys have shown that PD is of great value because it can influence teachers’ knowledge and practice (Penuel, Fisherman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007). Leadership is also crucial, as Fullan (2002) points out, “The more that large scale, sustainable educational reform becomes the agenda, the more that leadership becomes the key” (p. 18). In addition, Hollingworth’s (2010) study on leadership and formative assessment asserts that, “the implementation of a new formative assessment system in this school has required the expertise and support of people in positions of administrative leadership in the building, in particular, the school principal” (p. 366). Clearly, implementing policy requires the role of school leaders, especially principals, and when appropriate, department heads. Lastly, upper levels, such as the board are crucial to providing support through administering PD, and providing funding and resources. However, according to Surttamm and Koch (2014), recent studies demonstrate that Ontario teachers have varying
degrees of support in moving towards new practices, and that many struggle with the implementation of new ideas in their practice. Reviewing methods of support for curriculum and policy integration will inform the current research on contemporary means used to support schools in promoting new methods. In addition, interview questions in this study will delve into support mechanisms that were provided to teachers during implementation processes.

2.2.1 Professional development. Many researchers have found that teachers acquire deep conceptual understanding of assessment that supports student learning through ongoing PD (Suurtamm & Koch, 2014). Suurtamm and Koch’s (2014) studied mathematics teachers’ experiences in implementing the new mathematics curriculum, and new assessment and evaluation ideas; specifically, assessment as, for, and of learning. The study took place by creating communities of practice (CoP) in two Ontario school districts. These were groups of at least 10 teachers that who met each week during or after school for 2 years. During the meetings, the teachers shared assessment practices, ideas, examples, and challenges. Thus, teachers engaged in inquiry by exploring issues in their own practice, and by discussing with others. The CoP provided a sustained collaboration that allowed participants to share assessment practices. Through discussions, they learned new ways of assessing students and challenged their thinking of what assessment meant. In addition, participants were able to try ideas in the classroom and bring their experiences back to the CoP where they collaboratively worked to refine their tools and strategies. Thus, the researchers believe that the CoP allowed teachers to develop deep conceptual ideas about assessment, where ideas about assessment were surface level prior to the study. In addition, the CoPs were practice-based and teacher directed. Topics discussed were related to immediate learning priorities of the teachers, and decided on by the participants. Therefore, the researchers came to the conclusion that the CoP is an ideal forum for teachers and
“can be very effective in moving teachers beyond a surface level of change in their assessment practice” (Suurtamm & Koch, 2014, p. 284). This study highlights the importance of PD when implementing new curricula or policy; specifically, PD based on discussions and collaboration among teachers.

Another example of an effective PD can be seen through Deluca, Klinger, Pyper and Woods’ (2014) study on instructional rounds (IR), a professional learning model to implement AfL in two Ontario districts for 1 year. The study was conducted in partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME). The schools were selected based on the principals’ willingness and interest in AfL development within their schools. Teachers that participated were chosen based off their explicit interest in AfL as well. The IR model allowed educators cycles of learning: collaborative co-learning relationship where they discussed learning goals and areas to focus on, discussing problems of practice, observing each other in practice, and debriefing with each other and identifying next levels of work and learning goals. Teachers were given opportunity to give each other non-evaluative feedback, thus practicing AfL while learning about AfL. These methods enable a process for analytically understanding AfL, and putting it into practice. A majority of teachers and principals described positive changes in their integration of AfL as the project progressed. Also, the researchers’ observed increased use of AfL strategies in the classrooms. In one of the schools, report card comments became more individually focused. In addition, fundamental shifts in teachers’ and principals’ conceptions of assessment took place, such as noticing nuanced challenges of AfL across curricula, and different student groups. Teachers found the IR model to be helpful because it was a “hands-on” approach, and teachers were able to practice and see AfL. This study also confirms the importance of PD that fosters discussions, peer feedback, hands-on learning and modelling when implementing new curricula
and material. Also, practicing the concept being learned leads to deeper understanding of new concepts. The success seen may be partly attributed to participants’ and principals’ interests in learning AfL. This interest may increase incentive to learn and to put more effort into the project activities. Results may differ if implemented in schools that are not interested in AfL.

Although PD may be seen as beneficial and effective, that is not always the case. Volante (2010) interviewed teachers in two Ontario school districts about assessment practices in their classrooms, and constraining factors affecting assessment. These teachers saw lack of training and targeted professional development for assessment. There was PD for classroom assessment, but it was “scattered” (scant and spread apart throughout the years) and “unlikely to bring about a sustained change in best practice” (Volante, 2010, p. 67). They found the PD ineffective—such as merely being given articles to read about assessment which they would not think about after the sessions. As a result, assessment was not fully understood, and was utilized unevenly in the classrooms. Bates (2015) interviewed Ontario visual arts teachers on the implementation of the new visual arts curriculum. Participants emphasized that there was only one day of PD for training in the new curriculum, which was “inadequate, limited, or disappointing…[and a] waste of time and resources” (Bates, 2015, p. 81) These factors led to some teachers disregarding the new curriculum. Similarly, Bowins and Beaudoin (2011) found that physical education teachers learning the new curriculum saw the PD as insufficient in meeting their needs during the change, and inhibited adaption. Common themes emerge from these studies, the first being that insufficient (or what teachers view as insufficient) PD results in lack of implementation and adaption to prescribed curriculum or policy. Also, these PD sessions were scarce or administered once. In connection with the successful PDs discussed, it can be concluded that effective PD for
implementation should be ongoing for at least 1 year. In addition, effective PD should be interactive and involve collaborative learning.

2.2.2 Leadership systems. School leaders can include administrators, as well as teacher leaders. Hollingworth (2011) investigated the roles of district, building, and teacher leadership in an American high school that were given a new state-wide policy initiative for curriculum improvement. A teacher requested for more training in assessment, resulting in the principal applying for funding from the school board to train a team of teachers, called the Building Leadership team (BLT) for 2 days in the new policy. They were responsible for driving PD throughout the school. The principal viewed his position as: “making administrative changes to support the professional learning communities and also instructional, promoting changes in the way teachers work in their classrooms” (Hollingworth, 2011, p. 373). Thus, he viewed his principal role as an active facilitator in the school’s implementation project. Evidence stems from his implementation of weekly hourly meetings before school for department meetings, planning sessions, and workshops, led by a BLT leader. Therefore, he provided time for reflection, PD, and collected funding to support the new curriculum. Evidently, the principal holds power in facilitating policy implementation. In addition, the principal’s willingness to implement change plays a large role. This is also seen in Deluca et al.’s IR study where schools were chosen based on principals’ indication of interest in AfL. Lastly, the teachers play a role in leadership, including requesting for extra training, and select teachers (BLT) who become knowledgeable in the new policy, who then pass knowledge to other staff members. Of course, not all schools will take such initiatives when implementing new policies and curriculum. Thus, knowledgeable teacher leaders may not exist, and effective PD may not take place. These presumptions should be further explored by studying implementation processes within schools that are disinterested or
indifferent towards learning assessment practices. Principal support does not necessarily stem from offering support at all times, but can be “inactive” (Bowins & Beaudoin, 2011, p. 11). In Bowins and Beaudoin’s (2011) study, teachers noted that as long as principals were open to help the teachers, this was perceived to facilitate adaption. Whether this passive support is facilitative is questionable, as not all teachers in the study adapted to the new curriculum.

2.2.3 Upper level support. School board districts offer resources, workshops, and provide PD programs to facilitate adaption (Bowins & Beaudoin, 2011). This is seen in Hollingworth’s (2011) study, where the principal was able to contact the school district to request funding and training for the school’s implementation project. Bowins and Beaudoin (2011) found that experienced (at least 5 years) PE teachers from 10 Ottawa school boards reported inadequate support from the district, acting as an inhibitor to the adaption process to the new curriculum. They viewed the district as lacking in providing conferences, workshops, or inserviceing. The Ministry of Education in Ontario issues the curriculum for the province, and provides funding to school boards for resources. According to PE teachers in Bowins and Beaudoin’s (2011) study, the ministry had a lack of resources and lack of direction. PE teachers felt short-changed as they were never given a textbook, where other “more important” (p. 12) subjects were. Also, participants believed that the new curriculum was given to them without any guidance and unclear classroom expectations, resulting in difficulties implementing the program. This brings differences of subject area support into light, and whether some subjects are more supported than others by the OME. In addition, whether certain subject curriculum documents or all documents are unclear are of concern. Also, only schools within Ottawa were used for the study; perhaps schools in other regions may differ.
2.3 Experiences and Perspectives

When educational change occurs, teachers respond differently depending on gender, subject specialty, experience in teaching, and personal orientation to change (Hargreaves, 2005). According to Volante (2010), changes in teachers’ attitudes are associated with changes in classroom assessment. Research states that different stages of a teacher’s career can present different opportunities for resistance, depending on “personal, social, and organizational (classroom/school/district/ministry) factors” (Bates 2015). In addition, Bates (2015) highlights the importance of considering teachers’ sense of affect or efficacy on the desire or perceived ability to adopt curricular change in the classroom. Past research has shown that when a teacher’s beliefs are congruent with incoming change, it facilitates their adaption process (Bowins & Beaudoin, 2011). Reviewing literature in areas of teachers’ experience in teaching, how teachers view newly mandated ideas, methods, and concepts, and school conditions and culture, informs the current study in how teachers’ experiences during implementation can be dependent on factors subjective or external (environmental) to the teacher. Interview questions will include questions that inquire about teacher opinions on new topics and ideas within the curriculum, as well as the effect of school climate and culture. Also, teachers ranging in years of experience will be interviewed.

2.3.1 Years of experience. The number of years a teacher has spent in the profession can influence how they interact with change. Hargreaves (2005) interviewed 50 teachers across Ontario, and found differences between new teachers, mid-career teachers, and late-career teachers in how each group reacted to educational change. The study found that young people are generally very enthusiastic and energetic, linking to habits and orientations of adaptability and flexibility. The new generation of teachers grew up “in a world that is increasingly uncertain and
insecure…[they are] actively socialized into working with change” (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 971).

In addition to generational factors, the teacher education they receive plays a role. The new teachers have learned the new curriculum, and are therefore prepared to teach it. Limitations to these findings is that not all new teachers belong to the younger generation. There is no age limit to when an individual can enroll in teacher education, so some may be enrolled who belong to the “older generation”. However, being taught the new curriculum is relevant to the ease of implementing change. In addition, these new teachers’ may be less competent and confident in implementing and understanding change due to lack of experience.

Mid-career teachers consist of those with 6-20 years of experience. These teachers were typically more relaxed, experienced and comfortable about their job but still enthusiastic and flexible to respond to change in a positive way. Their experiences lead them to be confident in coping with change; they are able to reflect back on past experiences and also anticipate years ahead. Late-career teachers are those with 2 or more decades of experience and change. Very few older teachers experienced continuing renewal and want for challenge. The majority had “committed themselves wholeheartedly in two or three large scale reform or whole school change efforts, only to be let down and see their efforts wasted” (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 975). Older teachers in the study generally found themselves physically and emotionally losing energy and transferring some of what remains to elsewhere in their lives, and not being as positive about teaching as they had been. These teachers were also more likely to resist change and to question it more. A teacher reflected that “the longer you’ve been in the profession, the longer you have been doing something a certain way, the more reluctant you are to change” (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 976). These findings towards older teachers are rather pessimistic. Volante (2011) found similar accounts in terms of assessment and evaluation implementation. New teachers are “taught to use
the assessment and evaluation and they know the different types (AfL, AaL, and AoL). It’s the older teachers who need that shift in philosophy” (p. 72). It seems that new teachers are adaptable or more knowledgeable in change, while older teachers are stagnant and resistant due to pessimism towards teaching and educational change.

Contrastingly, Bowins and Beaudoin (2011) interviewed experienced PE teachers for their study, and found that “PE teachers may not find it as difficult to adapt to curriculum change because the process is facilitated by their confidence in their teaching”. These findings are similar to Hargreave’s (2005) “mid-career” group. Bowins and Beaudoin (2011) considered “experienced teachers” as those with at least 5 years of experience, so Hargreave’s (2005) “mid-career” and “late-career” teachers reflect Bowins and Beaudoin’s (2011) findings. They also note, “knowledge that beginning teachers recently acquired in their degrees…is so fresh, they are able to implement any change”. Thus, “both have facilitative factors when adapting to change”. It seems that both new and experienced teachers have factors that benefit change. Overall, the study found that personality of teachers was seen as “more of a factor than their experience in determining adaptability to a curriculum change” (Bowins & Beaudoin, 2011, p. 8). This is important, as one’s underlying character or personality can determine how one decides to interact with educational change, regardless of general years of experience differences. A teacher who is a new teacher may disregard new implementations, merely on the basis of not wanting to adapt, or an experienced teacher may be proactive and seek PD and information that will assist them in implementation.

2.3.2 Subjective factors. The effect of teachers’ beliefs on curriculum was measured in Bowins and Beaudoin’s (2011) study. Beliefs were defined by having positive or negative views on the curriculum and whether it would instill appropriate knowledge in their students. A
majority of the participants had positive beliefs towards the new curriculum, and “indicated that these beliefs facilitated them to adapt to the new curriculum. However, some participants had negative beliefs. For example, one PE teacher believed that the grade 10 health curriculum was satisfactory. When asked how this affected adapting change, he said “…I still do it…but if you don’t believe in something…then, you’re not going to, certainly do it as well as it could be done” (Bowins & Beaudoin, 2011, p.9). So, PE teachers whose beliefs were not as strong adapted less successfully to change. When examining the perspectives towards assessment practices, the common theme in the literature is that teachers see the value and agree that new assessment practices are useful and beneficial. For example, Volante and Beckett (2011) found that teachers “suggest that a high value is placed on providing feedback without grades to students” (p. 245), and that teachers “tended to note the importance of [AaL] when discussing self-assessment” (p. 247). Although teachers viewed AfL and AaL as important, there was an imbalance of assessment, with an overemphasis on AfL and lack of AaL. Thus, beliefs towards assessment may not necessarily lead to successful implementation, and other factors may impede implementation. When asking visual arts teachers about their thoughts on the new curriculum, many were unsatisfied. A common opinion was that the new curriculum was “dumbed-down” (Bates, 2015, p. 87). Comments included that the curriculum expectations were too vague and of not much use, there was lack of basic skills development over time, art history was removed or “watered-down” (p. 86), and there were no prerequisites for grade 11 visual arts classes. Participants believed that the changes shortchanged students, and does not recognize the value of art in education. This dissatisfaction resulted in a range of feelings, from outrage to disappointment. Participants in this study appeared committed to teach according to how they had taught in the past. According to a teacher, the disagreement with the new
curriculum, “strengthens my resolve to make art history a meaningful part of the 1-4 years that students spend in my classroom” (Bates, 2015, p. 80). Thus, belief of what is most important for students to learn and what is effective, and whether the curriculum aligns with these beliefs can strongly affect implementation or resistance.

2.3.3 School culture. Implementation of curriculum and policies result in shifts for students and teachers. Suurtamm and Koch (2014) uncovered classroom culture as a dilemma in implementing assessment methods. For example, teachers faced issues with consistency; departments tend to use similar practices in classes, so teachers who use more traditional forms of assessment are “challenged by the colleagues about what they are doing and why” (Suurtamm & Koch, 2014, p. 276). For the sake of remaining consistent across classes, teachers may be discouraged from using new approaches in assessment. In addition, new assessment methods were found to juxtapose provincial, district, and school assessment policies. Such was seen in the ministry giving generically prescribed comments for report cards, rather than the ability for teachers to write their own comments. Teachers felt constrained by feeling that they had to use language consistent with the Ministry of Education (Suurtamm & Koch, 2014). Interestingly, in Deluca, Klinger, Pyper and Woods’ (2014) study, teachers started writing more individually focused report card comments during the assessment implementation project. This raises questions about tensions between what must be done, versus what is highly recommended according to the OME, and its affect across different schools and school boards.

One of the most prominent dilemmas for changing practices in Volante’s (2010) study was the resistance from students, parents, and some teachers to move away from being “mark oriented” (p. 73). Students are “not interested in what they learned; they are interested in getting a mark to get the credit” (Volante, 2010, p. 73). Many teachers expressed that the fixation with
grades made practices such as self-assessment and peer assessment difficult to utilize. More
ingimportance is attached to summative assessments, or AoL. This obsession with achieving grades
has to do with western ideals of education that favours marks as determinants of career and
additional schooling. Volante (2010) observes that “Ontario’s favouritism of large-scale
assessment data for driving school improvement appears to be a deeply rooted practice” (p. 74).
The Ontario school board does not seem to model new assessment practices, when external
testing data such as the EQAO serve as measures for school success.

2.4 Conclusion

In this literature review I examined research related to knowledge and utilization of new
policy and curriculum, implementation support, and educators’ experiences and perspectives
during implementation. This review elucidates issues pertaining to curriculum implementation
and identifies areas of success and areas that need improvement. The review raises several
questions: the timing of curriculum document distribution, and whether it is often administered
late, how different subject teachers perceive change to the curriculum, how the passive role of
administrators influences curriculum change, the effect of implementation projects on schools
that are disinterested or resistant to new assessment practices, the role of teacher personality and
agency on reactions to change, tensions between new ideas, while school and ministry cultures
remain stagnant, and whether these are changing today, and the role of OME’s support overall.
This points to the need for further research amongst varied disciplines, schools, teachers, and
school boards. The purpose of my research is to learn about the state of curriculum and policy
implementation, how it has been introduced, integrated, and maintained in schools, and the
factors that impede or induce change. I hope to contribute further into educational
implementation research, to aid and inform future implementation efforts, with the focus of
consistency across boards and on *Growing Success* (2010). This research study approaches the issues of curriculum and assessment method implementation using semi structured interviews with intermediate-senior educators in Ontario. By considering how educators are utilizing new practices, the aid they receive during implementation, and their subjective and external opinions about new method, and what influences change, I hope to provide a better understanding of effective and ineffective factors, which will inform teacher training, as well as curriculum and policy development and implementation.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter consists of my explanation for the research methodology. I identify the methodological decisions made, and the rationale for these choices, taking into account my research purpose and questions. Firstly, I discuss the significance and relevance of qualitative research for my study, and then explain the main instrument of data collection, which is the semi-structured interview. Then, I list the sampling criteria, describing the sampling procedures. Next, I provide brief biographies of the participants. I then describe how I analyzed the data, and identify ethical issues that were considered and addressed. Lastly, I discuss the limitations of the study, whilst highlighting the strengths.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

This research study was conducted with a qualitative research approach. A literature review of existing literature and semi-structured interviews with educators were utilized. Qualitative research is a naturalistic approach that seeks information from real world settings, where the phenomena of interest is not manipulated (Golafshani, 2003). According to Krefting (1991), "Subjective meaning and perceptions of the subject are critical in qualitative research, and it is the researcher’s responsibility to access these" (p. 215). Atieno (2009) states that, Human behavior is significantly influenced by the setting in which it occurs; thus one must study that behavior in situations. The physical setting e.g., schedules, space, pay, and reward and the internalized notions of norms, traditions, roles, and values are crucial contextual variables. (p. 14)
Qualitative research addresses the subjective perceptions, behaviours, and contexts of the subjects, which the researcher analyzes in order to create hypothesis and connections. The experiences of teachers drove the focus of the study, making qualitative research an appropriate method to address the research questions and purposes. According to Atieno (2009),

If the purpose is to learn from the participants in a setting or a process the way they experience it, the meanings they put on it, and how they interpret what they experience, the researcher needs methods that will allow for discovery and do justice to their perceptions and the complexity of their interpretations. (p. 16)

In this study, it was important to gain knowledge about teachers’ beliefs on new curriculum documents, the state of implementation, and the types of support that are given to them. One of the themes I explored were teacher responses to curriculum and policy. In addition, I inquired into the factors that impacted effective change and adaption of policy and curriculum, according to teachers. Quantitative research relies on numerical data and fixed questions to produce less naturalistic responses (Jackson II et. al., 2007); Contrastingly, qualitative research allows for more in-depth, personal, and detailed responses because it is to do with one’s experiences.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The instrument of data collection used in this study was the semi-structured interview protocol. A semi-structured interview consists of an interviewer and a respondent or respondents engaging in a formal interview. The interviewer provides an interview schedule with open ended questions which allows the interviewee to elaborate, and possibly for new ideas to be brought up (Cohen & Crabtree, 2008). The benefits of semi-structured interviews include the possibility of exploring attitudes, values, beliefs and motives. In addition, semi-structured interviews provide opportunity for the observation of non-verbal indicators, which are useful when discussing
sensitive issues. Moreover, semi-structured interviews allow for the interviewer to probe and return to questions, thus allowing for clarification and elaboration on relevant responses (Louise Barriball & While, 1994). Again, because inquiring into the teachers’ personal experiences, attitudes, and opinions toward curriculum implementation and policy were crucial to this study, semi-structured interviews were an appropriate tool as it allowed participants to elaborate on these areas. In addition, it allowed detailed responses and minimized confusion for the interviewer. I organized my protocol into 5 sections: background information, teacher perspectives/beliefs, teacher practices, supports and challenges, and next steps. During the interview, I allocated time after all questions have been answered to revisit questions and responses, and for further elaboration or clarification on responses.

3.3 Participants

In this section, I review the sampling criteria for participant recruitment, and discuss how I recruited the participants. Then, I provide brief descriptions of each participant.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria. The following criteria were applied to participants:

1. Teachers will have at least 8 years of teaching experience in Ontario public schooling
2. There will be at least 2 different school boards that teachers belong to
3. There will be both male and female participants
4. There will be at least 2 different teachable subjects among participants

I required participants to have at least 8 years of experience in order to ensure that the teacher has experienced at least one curriculum or policy change in the education system, as well as experienced the introduction and implementation of Growing Success (2010), which began in 2010. It was important that teachers had some familiarity with the documents because I inquired about assessment practices used in their classrooms. Teachers were chosen from different school
boards in order to further the study’s goal of exploring board differences in curriculum implementation efforts. Both male and female teachers were interviewed to account for possible gender differences in experience and opinions. Lastly, I was interested in whether the extent of curriculum implementation differed among different subject areas, which was why teachers with different subject specialties were chosen.

3.3.2 Sampling procedures. There are 3 main sampling methods common within qualitative research: convenience sampling, purposeful sampling, and theoretical sampling. Convenience sampling involves selecting the most accessible subjects. It is the least rigorous technique of the three, and least costly in terms of effort and money (Marshall, 1996). Purposeful sampling is when the researcher selects the most productive sample to answer the research question, and is considered the more “intellectual” (Marshall, 1996, p. 523) strategy. The last method is theoretical, where it “necessitates building interpretive theories from the emerging data and selecting a new sample to examine and elaborate on” (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). In this study, I utilized a mixture of purposeful and convenience sampling. Purposeful sampling is most fitting as I chose participants based on whether they met the criteria mentioned in the previous section. Convenience sampling is intertwined because I utilized my connections and resources from my community of teacher colleagues, mentor teachers, and teacher candidates to recruit participants.

3.3.3 Participant biographies. Lily is a History, Social Science, and English Second Language (ESL) teacher at a Peel District School Board (PDSB) high school. She has been teaching for 9 years and has been in her current school for seven years. Lily has experienced an emergence of new subject curriculum: once for History and once for Social Science. She has been following the ideas of Growing Success (2010) since she began teaching.
James teaches in a Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) high school. He has been teaching at the school for 39 years, and is the Science department head. He teaches Biology at the university and college level. Throughout his teaching career, James recalls experiencing four or five changes to the Science curriculum, and numerous policy changes and initiatives.

Katy teaches at the same school as James, and is also a Science teacher. She is teaching two Biology classes—one university level, one college level, as well as one locally developed Environmental Science class. Katy has been teaching at the school for 15 years. Throughout her teaching career, she has experienced approximately three or four curriculum changes and numerous policy changes and initiatives.

3.4 Data Analysis

After the interviews were conducted, I transcribed the audio-recordings. Then, I coded each transcript by looking for patterns and key words. After, I abstracted these codes into three themes. Finally, I interpreted participant responses within these themes, and made connections to existing literature.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

The awareness of ethical principles was important in order to minimize the occurrence of ethical issues in the research (Orb et. al., 2000). The anonymity of the interviewee was maintained because he/she/they may have shared information that may jeopardize their position in a system (DiCicco-Bloom, & Crabtree, 2006). Thus, in this study, all participants were assigned a pseudonym and will be referred to as such throughout the research discussions. In addition, the upmost confidentiality of each participant was supported by excluding any identifying markers, such as their school or students. According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree
ensuring adequate communication of intent is crucial, and asking for consent several times provides opportunity for interviewees to reconsider participation. Participants had the right to disengage from a research study at any time. In this study, I explained the purpose of the study to the participant, and they signed with written consent, as well as verbal consent. The consent letter (Appendix A) gave their consent to be interviewed as well as audio-recorded. They were made aware that they could refrain from answering any question, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time during the interview. In addition, during the interview, I monitored their comfort level, and asked for consent throughout the interview. Participants were given the opportunity to review the transcript and to clarify or retract statements before I conducted data analysis. All data is stored on my password protected computer and will be destroyed in 5 years.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

The main disadvantage of qualitative research methods compared to quantitative research was that the findings cannot be generalized for a wider population with any certainty (Atieno, 2009). This was due to the small sample size and because the findings were not tested to uncover the statistical significance. Strengths of this study, as stated previously, were that the qualitative approach allowed for elaboration and in-depth descriptions (Louise Barriball & While, 1994) that otherwise would not have been achieved with a quantitative study. In addition, the qualitative approach allowed subjects to raise issues that the researcher may not have included in the initial design, adding to the quality of the data (Carr, 1994). The interview validated the teacher’s voice and lived experiences, and allowed an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their practice and to articulate their perceptions on topics. Another advantage of utilizing qualitative data was that there were less threats to external validity, because subjects were in a natural setting and did not encounter control factors, compared to quantitative studies
(Carr, 1994). In addition, the immersion of myself, the researcher, in the context and subjective states of the research subject allowed assurance that the data was representative of the subject being studied (Carr, 1994). It could be argued that the closeness of the researcher could threaten the validity if I were unable to remain subjective and describe or interpret experiences in a meaningful way. However, this is worth the risk because of the high level of validity that could be achieved in qualitative methodologies (Carr, 1994).

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained the research methodology. Firstly, I discussed the research approach and procedure, discussing the significance of qualitative research, including its ability to allow for in-depth and detailed responses. Then, I described and explained the significance of the primary instrument of data collection in this study, which was the semi-structured protocol (Appendix B). I then identified the criteria used to recruit participants, and explained why these were important. Next, I discussed the three common sampling procedures, and identified my sampling procedure as a mix of convenience and purposeful sampling. I also identified the participants of the study by providing brief biographies. I proceeded by describing how I analyzed the data, and how I came to the common themes and patterns identified. Ethical issues including consent, risk of participation, right to withdraw, and data storage were considered and discussed. Lastly, I discussed the strengths and limitations of the study, including the inability to generalize to the larger population, and the validity of qualitative data when the researcher remains subjective. In chapter 4, I report the research findings.
Chapter 4: Thematic Analysis

4.0 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the handling of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s (OME) new curriculums and policies, and how they have been adapted into schools. This study focuses on Growing Success (2010), and various subject curriculum documents. Data was attained through two semi-structured interviews, with three Ontario high school teachers. Participants were selected through convenience and purposeful sampling. I used my network of teaching colleagues to contact potential interviewees, which resulted in this sample. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and underwent the necessary steps for thematic analysis: coding, categorizing, analytic memo writing, and finally, organizing these into themes, with the research questions in mind. Thus, these themes align with the three subsidiary questions, as listed in Chapter 1. Each participant was given a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. The participant from Peel District School Board was assigned the name “Lily”, while the two teachers from the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB), who were interviewed at the same time, were named “James” and “Katy”.

This chapter will be organized into three themes that directly relate to the subsidiary questions of the research topic. The first theme, “Support for Implementation”, aligns with the two-part question: What actions have been taken, and what modes of support have been offered to ensure that teachers are practicing the new policies and curriculum? And what is the extent and quality of these efforts? This will be organized into three sub-themes that will explore formal professional development, informal professional development, and upper level support. The second theme, Teacher Response to Curriculum and Policy, relates to the question: How are teachers responding to the new curriculum and polices? This theme will be explored by sub-
themes examining teacher knowledge and understanding, the utilization of curriculum and policy in the classroom, and teacher feelings and perspectives. The third theme answers the question: What factors impact effective change and adaption of policy and curriculum? This question will be explored by examining the affect of students’ academic levels, the attitudes of students, parents or guardians, and the issue of time. All data discussed will be analyzed and interpreted, and compared and contrasted to existing literature. The findings for this study will inform curriculum and policy implementation efforts, such as professional development (PD), and workshops.

4.1 Support for Implementation

When subject curriculum documents are revised every few years, and policies are constantly reviewed and implemented (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011), various supports are crucial in supporting teachers in understanding, learning, and integrating new practices. Supports examined in the study included PD, and upper level support, including administrators (principals and vice principals), and school boards. This research attempted to examine the supports present in two different schools in the Greater Toronto Area.

4.1.1 Formal professional development. Lily explained that she participated in school-wide PD once a month, about two early release days (students are dismissed after half a day, and teachers engage in PD), and two full PD days a year. The monthly PD and early release days took place within the school, and the full PD days were board wide and took place outside of school. Lily described how, “rarely is PD that’s allotted by the school effective in anything”. During these sessions, they would give the teachers articles to read, which would not resonate with them. To her, no real professional development occurred. She said, “the problem with a lot of PD, especially when it's school driven, is the disconnect between what's happening in the
classroom, and what you need, versus what someone wants to check off”. Lily was expected to attend an out of school PD in the following week of the interview, and she scorned about how “it’s probably going to be the exact same as last year, and the year before. So for me, it’s very redundant”.

Similarly, James’ and Katy’s school sent them to board wide sessions once or twice a year. They also found formal PD to be ineffective and irrelevant to the classroom. James described how:

It’s all about student success…but translating it and actually putting it in action, I don’t know where to start…and I don’t understand what they’re taking about. After the fifth hour, I drop out because it’s all educational mumble jumbo. And I think that people [who] do this have no concept of kids that are actually in the classroom today in the 21st century”.

Katy added that there was a lot of information at these sessions, usually on PowerPoint slides, and how overwhelming it was.

The ineffectiveness of PD that these teachers felt seemed to do with the lack of effort put into helping teachers understand the terminology and ideas, and keeping the sessions engaging. In addition, the concepts were not relevant to today’s learners, or were theoretical and vague, leading to uncertainty of how to translate these into practice, and resulting in disappointment towards school and board wide PD. In addition, teachers were not benefiting from these sessions, and viewed these PDs as ineffective. To Lily, PD was a means for administrators to “check off” their list of things having done for upper authority (board, OME) to see, rather than helping teachers improve their practice. These findings relate to Bates’ (2015) study, where participants found PD to be inadequate and disappointing, and Bowins and Beaudoin’s (2011) finding that
teachers saw PD as insufficient in meeting their needs during the change. The amount of PD was also quite scarce—once a month, and then a few times a year, which may be why the PD was not effective for the teachers. There are forms of PD that have shown great success and effectiveness in helping teachers implement new curriculum and policies, including Suurtamm and Koch’s (2014) study, where mathematics teachers used self-directed communities of practices (CoP) to understand assessment practices. Groups of teachers would meet after school, once a week for 2 years, to share and discuss assessment practices. The participants were able to practice what they discussed during PD, in their classrooms, which resulted in deeper understanding and practice of assessment forms. Thus, their success was most likely attributed to the ample PD, and its relevancy to teacher practice.

**4.1.2 Informal professional development.** Informal PD can be considered any type of PD that is not regulated, or facilitated directly by administrators, the board, or the Ontario Ministry of Education. All participants spoke about the effectiveness of conversations with colleagues. Lily described conversations “in the hallway, or at lunch time…[as] the most meaningful and productive…it’s just having those five to ten minute conversations”. James similarly stated that the “best professional development” was when colleagues found time to exchange ideas. When asked if they scheduled time to have these conversations, he stated that it was difficult due to different schedules. Evidently, these teachers were benefitting from discussing, learning, and sharing amongst each other. However, these opportunities were sparse, as there were no organized times where teachers could have these conversations, and instead, must have these passingly.

The effectiveness of these interactions was unsurprising, where the CoPs in Suurtamm and Koch’s (2014) study were premised on self-directedness, and on sharing of ideas, examples,
and challenges. Another similarly effective PD in the literature was seen in Deluca, Klinger, Pyper and Woods’ (2014) study on instructional rounds (IR). The IR model allowed teachers to discuss learning goals, areas to focus on, and discussions of problems in practice.

### 4.1.3 Upper level support.
I wanted to examine whether the teachers in this study were feeling supported by administrators and the school board, and whether these supports were effective. Both schools where the teachers taught offered “release time”, which were distributed by administrators. These release times were days where teachers could take time off from teaching to work on professional development amongst themselves. Lily said that even if they were granted release time, it was often “very regulated and policed” by administrators. This lead teachers feeling discouraged because they wanted to be “left alone [to] work and talk”. Even so, being allocated release time was “very unlikely’, unless it was geared towards “literacy” or “data” scores. Lily explained how the History and Social Sciences department at her school had been requesting release time so that they could create a new culminating task that aligned with the new curriculum, but they still have not gotten any. According to Lily, administrators had not given the department release time because they expected teachers to use their preparation periods and their own time. James’ and Katy’s school has a similar practice, but like Lily’s school, “there’s no release time”. When asked about any additional support from the administrators, James and Katy said that administrators merely sent them to PD sessions (the formal PD, as discussed previously). Lily added to the support of administrators and said, “you only talk to admin if you have to talk to them…which is unfortunate”.

As evidenced from these reports, teachers were not feeling supported by the administration at the school. The History and Social Sciences department at Lily’s school had not wholly incorporated new practices because they were unable to create a culminating task that
reflected new curricula. The interest and priority of the administrators seemed to lie in the success of students reflected in provincial scoring, rather than through ensuring current policies and curriculum were being practiced. In addition, by expecting teachers to use their own time, it seemed as though the administration did not understand, or was unable to empathize with the lack of time that teachers have. This analysis opposed observations of principal support in the literature. In Hollingworth’s (2010) study, the principal viewed his role as an active facilitator in the school’s implementation projects. This principal implemented meetings, planning sessions, and workshops to integrate the new curriculum. In Bowins and Beaudoin’s (2011) study, as long as principals were open to helping teachers, teachers perceived this as supportive in facilitating adaption. Unfortunately, in this study, administration staff were not seen as supportive and open. This observation highlights the importance of administrative support during implementation.

When asked about support from the board, Lily described the “great” and “accessible” resource team offered by the board, where each department was assigned a resource teacher that could provide resources, or help teachers during their preparation periods. Contrastingly, when the same question was asked towards James and Katy, they could only recall support through PD hosted by their board.

Support seemed to be uneven across different boards; PDSB offered support in resources that teachers were happy with, whereas there seemed to be nothing significant in TCDSB. The participants that worked in TCDSB were similar to Bowins and Beaudoin’s (2011) participants, who viewed their boards as lacking in providing conferences, workshops, or in-servicing. The overall discrepancy between support within the boards aligned with Suurtamm and Koch’s (2014) study that demonstrated Ontario teachers having varying degrees of support in moving towards new practices.
4.2 Teacher Response to Curriculum and Policy

The literature shows Ontario teachers having varied forms and levels of response to new curriculum and policy during introduction, implementation and adaption. Various studies in previous years have depicted limited understanding towards the *Growing Success* (2010) document, and disconnect or discontent towards curriculum (Bates, 2015; Earl, Volante, & Katz, 2011; Suurtam & Koch, 2014; Volante, 2010; Volante & Beckett, 2011; Volante & Katz, 2011). These included varied depths of knowledge and understanding, utilization of concepts and ideas, and teachers’ personal feelings and perspectives regarding the new material. This section attempts to gage a perspective on the current status of implementation and adaption of new curriculum and policies.

4.2.1 Teacher knowledge and understanding. In order for effective and successful implementation of policies, it is crucial that teachers understand what is expected of them. This study focused on the understanding of *Growing Success* (2010), particularly the assessment for learning (AfL), assessment as learning (AaL), assessment of learning (AoL), as well as subject curriculum specific to the participants. Firstly, the participants were asked to explain their main “takeaway” understanding from *Growing Success* (2010). According to Lily, she started working with the document in her early years of teaching, and had some PD that focused in understanding assessment practices. To her, the document emphasized the importance of assessment for, as and of learning, and the need for variety in the classroom. When asked about her understanding for each assessment method, she was able to provide an accurate definition, as well as examples.

James and Katy struggled with the same questions asked of Lily. James went to find the PDF document online, while Katy said, “Let me think…I really don’t know”. When James found the PDF, he remarked that he “didn’t know anything about it until I saw it as a PDF online”, and
did not remember any “big thing” on it. He mused about how they may have received scattered parts of the document in PD sessions throughout the past few years. In addition, James mentioned how he did not fully understand how to mark students based on Growing Success’s (2010) categories of knowledge and skill: knowledge, communication, thinking, and application. He asked, “If you answer a question, aren't you communicating with me? And I hope you're thinking! Your brain's going, and isn’t it based on knowledge? Like, where does one end and the other begin?”.

From these initial comments, it seemed as though Lily was well acquainted and knowledgeable about the document, and understood its concepts, whereas James and Katy were not. Lily demonstrated knowledge of Growing Success’s push to “introducing a range of options that allow students to learn in ways that suit them best” (OME, 2010, p.1). In addition, she displayed understanding of each assessment practice by defining the nature of each, and then providing correct examples. James and Katy seemed to not have had as much exposure with the document. In addition, they were unfamiliar with assessment terminology. James also expressed his confusion with the categories of knowledge and skill, and what constituted each category because he saw these skills as overlapping. The lack of knowledge and understanding was most likely due to the absence of an official introduction and explanation of the document in their school, which also spoke to the lack of support that the school and board were providing to ensure effective implementation. There seemed to be a discrepancy between different schools and school boards when implementations were supposed to be taking place. Or, implementation may have been similar, but newer teachers, such as Lily, understood new ideas better because they started their careers with these new ideas. The opposite spectrums of understanding and knowledge were contrary to Volante’s (2010) interview findings, where all educators defined the
distinction between AfL, and AoL, but were unfamiliar with AaL. In this study, the participants either defined all three, or none.

Next, teachers reflected on the overall clarity of the Growing Success (2010) document, and curriculum documents. Lily stated that initially, Growing Success (2010) was very clear, and she knew what “[she] was doing”, but this clashed with administrators, who interpreted it differently, and set polices that were not aligned with what Lily understood the document as. This caused her to question the document, and reconsider her understanding of the document. James and Katy considered Growing Success (2010) as “vague” and “up to interpretation”. On the other hand, all participants considered curriculum documents to be understandable, and easy to follow. In addition, knowledge of the curriculum was assessed through the conversations about participants’ feelings towards the new curriculum, where all participants referenced specific examples of content within the document, displaying their knowledge and understanding of the expectations.

There seemed to be varying understandings of the document. Lily believed that she understood Growing Success (2010), but questioned her understanding after administrators had a different interpretation. James and Katy blatantly highlighted how open to interpretation the language was, suggesting that the document was unclear for them. This reflected Earl, Volante, and Katz’s (2011), and Volante and Beckett’s (2011) findings, where areas of Growing Success (2010) were misinterpreted, or ideals promoted by the document were misunderstood. On the other hand, the knowledge of curriculum contrasted Bates’ (2015) findings where some Visual Arts teachers had barely read the document, or had not seen it.

4.2.2 Utilization in the classroom. As demonstrated in the literature review, understanding or knowledge of new practices does not necessarily equate to utilization in the
classroom (Earl, Volante, & Katz, 2011). I evaluated the level of implementation of the three assessment practices, and whether these were used equally, as suggested in Growing Success (2010). In addition, I assessed the utilization of the current curriculum. For Lily, AfL happened unconsciously a lot of times, unless there was something she was looking to change or modify. AaL occurred often as well, during co-construction of rubrics, and peer assessments. Assessment of learning happened the least for Lily, only occurring as the end result of the learning process. Despite not knowing the terminology for assessment, James and Katy were both using different assessment practices. James spoke about taking up homework in class, where he would gain a sense of where the students were at in their learning. Both James and Katy talked about walking around the classroom during labs to assess whether students were understanding the procedures, and giving verbal feedback whenever possible. When each definition of assessment was explained to them, they both remarked that AfL was difficult to quantify, because it happened unconsciously and “on a daily basis”. AaL, on the other hand, occurred rarely, and AoL occurred frequently through quizzes, lab reports, and tests. Based off of discussions about the new subject curriculum and their feelings towards it, all participants were using the new document to plan lessons that reflected the revised documents.

There seemed to be varied levels of implementation for assessment practices between teachers. Lily used AfL and AaL frequently, and AoL the least, while James and Katy used AfL frequently, AoL a lot, and AaL rarely. There were similarities and differences when comparing these results to the literature. The frequent use of AfL contrasted to Suurtam and Koch’s (2014) findings that teachers were struggling to allocate time for ongoing assessment, or AfL. Also unparalleled to these findings was Volante’s (2010) finding an overemphasis on AoL, and lack of AfL and AaL. Volante and Beckett (2011) found a lack of AoL, similarly to James and Katy,
but contrary to Lily. It seemed as though teachers had increased their use of formative assessment in their classrooms, while there were still varied uses of AaL and AoL. Lastly, all teachers were following the guidelines in the current curriculum, contrary to Bates’ (2015) findings that some teachers chose to teach dated curricula.

4.2.3 Teacher feelings and perspectives. Whether teachers view change as beneficial and logical can influence implementation efforts, as seen in the literature (Bates, 2015). Participants in this study were asked whether they viewed new curriculum and policies as beneficial for student learning, and about their thoughts, opinions, and feelings towards new curriculum documents. Lily was satisfied with the changes made to the Social Sciences and History curriculum. Before the change, teachers were expected to teach the Social Sciences thematically, with a mixture of the disciplines. Now, it is taught by discipline, which Lily considered logical. In fact, she had been teaching the Social Sciences by discipline before it was implemented, because it made more sense to her. Lily said that the History changes also made sense. Even though they took out material, it still flowed logically from previous years and to upper years, and the material was “still manageable” and “relevant and interesting” to teach. James and Katy both agreed that they did not enjoy the new Science curriculum. Changes were made with the grade eleven and twelve biology courses that did not make sense, such as taking out material that they considered foundational for student learning, and adding more material into the grade 11 college biology course, when there was already too much to cover within a course.

The contentment towards curriculum change seemed to differ from subjects. The Social Science and History changes were applauded, while the changes to the Science curriculum frustrated the participants. A common factor seemed to determine if teachers agreed with the
changes: firstly, whether the changes were logical for student learning and knowledge, such as the flow of knowledge moving smoothly to and from other grades, and the ability to teach the material within the timeframe. Secondly, having content crucial for further learning was also a factor. This was similar to the reasons that lead to Visual Arts teachers in Bates’ (2015) study to dislike the changes, where they believed that the lack of art history in the new curriculum short changed the students.

All participants showed a distaste for policy. Lily described “friction” between policy and teachers. According to Lily, teachers wanted to use their interpretations and professional judgement to incorporate policy, but then the board or administrators would favour different ways of dealing with it. She described policy as “a scary word”, and the teachers were “[not] standing open arms ready to accept, because it always [felt] like there [was] some sort of hidden agenda”. James and Katy were very explicit about their dislike for policy. James scorned at the “nonsense [where] they repeated the thing until [they got a good mark]” because this does not happen in post secondary, or in the work place. It was merely “training people through a route”, which was why “scores [went] up”. Katy added that the “standards have been lowered”, and James agreed, and said that the kids that were graduating today were at a much lower level than 20 years ago. He said, “when you’re with the kids, you care about the kids, and […] you realize it’s not about them. And that's where the frustration [came] from.”

I made sense of Lily’s vague statement about a “hidden agenda” in terms of James’ and Katy’s reasons for their dislike of policy. Teachers perceived that, how teachers wanted to understand the policy was overshadowed by plans of administrators, boards, and the ministry. The goal of the hidden agenda was to increase the marks of students. However, this was not done through increasing actual knowledge, understanding, and efficiency of the students, but by
lowering expectations and introducing policies, such as allowing students to repeat work until they had higher grades. Evidently, the teachers cared for the learning of their students, and wanted them to succeed when they left high school. However, the teachers believed that the current school systems are not allowing for this success. This was similar to Bates’ (2015) finding, where satisfaction to curriculum depended on whether teachers considered it as beneficial and important for student learning.

4.3 Obstacles to Effective Implementation

All themes and subthemes discussed thus far can be related to impeding change in schools. In this section, I identify the obstacles that were predominant, or referred to repeatedly during the interview. These include: students’ academic level, attitudes of student and parents/guardians, and time.

4.3.1 Students’ academic levels. Whether a specific form of assessment was used, and how often it occurred depended on types and level of learners in the participants’ classes. For Lily, using different forms of assessment was particularly important for her English as a Second Language (ESL) students, whereas her senior Social Science students were more independent, so “in terms of observing or having conversations with them to assess for, as, of, and for, it [was not as] enriched and direct”. It also depended on the overall group of students; some cohorts were strong, where others were not, such as the previous year’s “grade twelves [who] were probably one of the weakest we’ve ever taught”. James described the students at his school as “very needy”, with a lot of applied and college level students. To the point where the school was in a School Support Initiative (SSI) (low achieving schools are enrolled in a ministry program as support). Some students had elementary level numeracy and literacy skills, so James and Katy were struggling to help them understand grade seven or eight science principles. Thus, “trying to
implement [new policy methods was difficult] when you [were] trying to face those obstacles”.

In addition, James did not believe that his students had skills for self assessment.

Lily used more assessment practices for her ESL students, whom she believed required more attention, and concentrated, rich assessment practices, compared to her senior level Social Science classes. But in general, it depended on the group of students, which could vary from class, grade, and year. For James’ and Katy’s school, they were experiencing a large group of weaker students, as evidenced by their enrolment in the SSI program. James and Katy struggled to have students understand the bare minimum, so implementing varied assessments were not the top priority, or were not possible with the students. Again, we saw how teachers’ opinions for what is important for student learning, and ultimately, what is best for their students, can impact what they choose to implement, or not implement in their classrooms (Bates, 2015).

4.3.2 Student and parent/guardian attitudes. Attitude towards school and learning, as well as what is important to students and parents or guardians can impede or discourage the beneficial effects of certain practices that teachers attempt to implement, or are expected by the school to implement. This was apparent for Katy, whose students were unable to effectively peer evaluate because they were “afraid” of being negative or critical to their friends and peers. In addition, she would offer her support to weaker students, such as offering to look at their work, which they would avoid. James found formative assessment to be difficult at times, especially when he wanted to take up homework so that he could gain an understanding of the level of understanding in the class (AfL), and for students to determine if they were on the right track (AaL). This difficulty was caused by students not completing their homework, and overall refusal of completing work outside of the classrooms. James and Katy attributed this to the non evaluative nature of homework, and students being “marks centered”. This “marks centered”
attitude also lead to the disregard for “additional” practices or activities that the teachers tried to implement, if the direct connection to how it could affect marks was not seen by students. Lily also described how some students were “not concerned about the feedback or the comments or the process, it’s just, “where’s my mark?”.

The attitudes of parents were similar, where they were only concerned about the marks their children were receiving, rather than how students scored on their learning goals. All participants commented on how parents were unaware or did not care for what assessment practices were used, or specificities of whether curriculum was being followed. James commented that this was not always the case, where schools such as “[prestigious private high school in the Greater Toronto Area]”, would have a different group of parents. James believed that teachers “take enough of the blame” and that “there’s got to be more of a shift…[teachers] have responsibilities, absolutely…but the kids also have responsibilities, and I think the families also have responsibilities”.

James’ and Katy’s students had weak work ethics, which disrupted certain forms of assessment. The marks centered attitudes of students and parents, as well as the lack of care for achieving excellent learning skills indicated a lack of importance placed on the process of learning, improving, and acquiring skills, or AfL, and AaL. There seems to be a need for a shift in school philosophy for students and their parents. Teachers can be implementing assessment practices, but the efforts will not reach its full effect if students do not care for it. The attitudes of students and parents seen in this study showed similarities to Volante’s (2010) findings where students, parents, and some teachers were grades oriented, causing difficulty in utilizing assessment practices. However, the difference in this study was that all participant teachers recognized the importance of the learning process, rather than a fixation with marks. Thus, these
participants had the students’ best interest in mind, but could not bring about complete and effective use of assessment practices without a shift in perspectives by students and parents.

4.3.3 Time. Time is essential for reading, understanding, learning new curriculum and policy, and preparing necessary materials that reflect new practices. In addition, adequate time must be present for teachers to carry out practices in the classroom. The issue of time was repeated throughout the interview conversations. As seen in previous results, the Social Science and History departments in Lily’s school wanted release time to create a new culminating task that reflected the new curriculum, but were not granted the time. James and Katy similarly noted that there was no release time offered, and limited time to meet with colleagues for PD. When asked whether curriculum or policies were distributed in a timely manner so that they could review and understand the new ideas, and how to put it into practice, all participants, without hesitation, said “no”. James responded the strongest, saying, “no, no, emphatically no”. Lily described the process: they had to wait for the board to interpret Growing Success (2010), then wait for administrators to outline their expected practices and interpretations, which would finally reach teachers, who were the “last…to be fully informed”. So even if a document was available online, no action would take place because the teachers must wait for board and administrators’ interpretations and instructions. Or, if action had taken place using teacher interpretations, often times, these would be discarded and would not align with administrator instructions. She used the French department in her school as an example for the late curriculum distribution; expected implementation of the document was September 2015, but the department only got the document and instructions from the school in the fall of 2016.

As discussed, teachers required time to develop and plan material that reflects the new curriculum, but were not given time to do so. In addition, as shown earlier, gaining time to
discuss, share, and converse with colleagues was valuable and useful for teachers in the implementation process. However, teachers rarely had time to meet. The participants also stressed the untimely manner that policies and curriculum were released to teachers. Teachers appeared uninformed until the board and administrators gave teachers instructions, well past the time where policies and curriculum should already be in place. Even if teachers were to go ahead and plan and teach according to how they interpreted the document, they may have needed to change it after the administrators provided their interpretations and instructions (note the frequency of clashing document interpretations discussed earlier). This issue aligned with the literature, where Visual Arts teachers were interviewed during the first few months of curriculum implementation, and some had not seen the document, or had merely two months to read and prepare for implementation.

4.4 Conclusion

Through the thematic analysis in this chapter, it is evident that the current state of curriculum and policy in Ontario schools is varied, and can improve. The first theme explored the support provided to teachers for implementation. The data indicates that formal PD is very ineffective for teachers in understanding new curriculum and policies. This was due to the PD’s failure to relate ideas to practical and relevant use in the classroom. In addition, these sessions occurred only a few times a year—not enough to be impactful. In contrast, informal PD, such as passing conversations where teachers shared and discussed practices, were considered the most beneficial for teachers. This relates to the effectiveness of teacher directed learning. Unfortunately, teachers were rarely allocated time to work with other teachers, as administrators expected them to work on their own time. This lead teachers feeling unsupported by administrative staff.
The second theme explored teachers’ responses to curriculum and policy, which was where discrepancies were seen between teachers in different boards. One teacher was well equipped with the knowledge of Growing Success (2010), and assessment terminology, whereas the other two teachers struggled to discuss the policy document, and were unaware of the terminology. However, it was apparent that unawareness of the terminology did not equate to lack of assessment practices in the classrooms. In fact, all teachers practiced formative assessment, contrary to what literature showed. In addition, all teachers were creating lessons based off of the new curriculum, despite their content, or discontent of the material. The discontent was seen for the science curriculum, where the teachers did not believe that the changes were beneficial to student learning and success. Similar perspectives were viewed towards the policy, where the participants viewed ulterior motives present that did not favour the students.

The last theme attempted to identify factors that impeded effective implementation and change. The first factor was the type of students in the class, which caused teachers to adjust assessment practices according to student needs, such as whether they were weak students, in the ESL program, or were independent learners. The next factor was student and parent/guardian attitudes, namely their marks oriented attitudes, which discouraged the benefits of assessment practices. It was concluded that implementing change requires a joint effort among teachers, students, and parents/guardians. Lastly, time was a large factor in impeding successful change, where teachers needed time to read, learn, and understand the policies and curriculum. However, teachers were not given time, and were given documents and instructions well after implementation was to take place.
In conclusion, the state of implementation and adaptation to new practices has not been smooth. In fact, there are many areas of improvement, including improved PD, improved relationships with administrative staff, quicker turn-out and communication about policies and documents, and the overall allocation of time. In the final chapter, I will discuss in further depth, the implications of these results, my recommendations for improvement, and areas for further research.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of key findings from chapter 4, and their significance. These findings stemmed from the research questions: What actions have been taken, and what modes of support have been offered to ensure that teachers are practicing the new policies and curriculum? And what is the extent and quality of these efforts? Next, I identify implications for the educational community, and for my professional identity and practice. Then, I provide recommendations for the implications presented. Finally, I identify limitations of this study, and areas for further research.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and Their Significance

This research found three key findings and discussion points. When examining the theme of support provided to teachers during implementation efforts, participants described formal PD as insufficient and ineffective. Contrastingly, informal PD, namely quick conversations and sharing that occurred during school days, was the most valuable and helpful for teachers. This aligned with the literature, where PD that was premised on self-directedness, sharing, and occurred frequently, was the most effective in producing change (Surttamm & Koch, 2014; Deluca, Klinger, Pyper & Woods, 2014). In addition, teachers were feeling unsupported by administrators, who rarely allocated release time unless it was related to improving provincial scoring, and did not seem to empathize with teachers’ busy schedules. These findings display the lack of support received by teachers, which is not conducive to implementation efforts.

When examining teacher responses to curriculum and policy, Lily, a teacher of nine years in PDSB, was more familiar with terminology in the Growing Success (2010) document,
compared to TCDSB teachers James and Katy who had been teaching for 39 years and 15 years, respectively. This may be attributed to discrepancies of implementation efforts in different boards, or because newer teachers had entered the system having knowledge of these ideas from their teacher education. Contrary to past literature, and despite an inability to define assessment terminology, AfL was frequently used by all participants. However, AoL was used more frequently in science classes, less in social science or history classes, and vice versa for AaL practices. Contentment towards subject curriculum change varied between subjects and depended on whether the change was logical for student learning and knowledge. All teachers disliked policy, and described how their interpretations of policy would be overshadowed by administrator’s interpretations, which, according to the participants, were centered on improving provincial scoring, rather than student learning and knowledge. These findings show varied levels of knowledge towards Growing Success (2010), varied satisfaction towards new curriculum documents, and disagreement towards interpretations of policy, all of which are not conducive to effective implementation.

Predominant factors that affected incorporation of Growing Success (2010) practices and new curriculum were attributed to the realities of the classroom and schools: the types of learners and skill levels among students, the marks-centered attitudes of students and parents, and the lack of organized distribution time for documents. The identification of barriers to policy implementation are crucial in identifying underlying issues that need to be improved before successful implementation can occur.

5.2 Implications

5.2.1 The educational community. The educational community encompasses many facets. The findings of this research are especially important for teachers, students, their
parents/guardians, administrators, and boards. Successful change requires the cooperation and efforts of all members of the educational community. In the following sections, I identify implications for these stakeholders, and explain why these are important.

5.2.1.1 In-service teachers. These findings raise issues for the efficacy of PD efforts in supporting teachers. Teachers did not find formal PD helpful. As seen in the results, participants saw PD as a waste of ministry and board funding, as well as teachers’ time. Formal PD was unengaging, irrelevant to teachers’ classrooms, and too theoretical and vague. As James stated, “translating [ideas in formal PD] and actually putting it in action, I don’t know where to start”. Thus, teachers were uncertain of how to put theory to practice. This highlights a need to reevaluate formal PD efforts for implementing new policies. The current structure of formal PD is not conducive for helping teachers; PD is intended to improve and support teacher practice, and the results show that such is not occurring.

Another issue seen is the gap between teacher interpretations of policy documents and what is expected of them, versus the interpretations and expectations of the board or administrators. Due to this gap, the participants viewed administrators’ and board interpretations as part of a “hidden agenda” to improve provincial scores, rather than for the best interest of students. Thus, there seems to be a mistrust of board and administrators caused by the difference in interpretation of the documents. Evidently, the participants had negative feelings towards their administrators and respective boards because they did not believe that the students were being prioritized. These negative feelings are not conducive to teacher satisfaction, or to the effective functioning of the educational community. In addition, teachers will be questioning their actions as they follow instructions from administrators.
5.2.1.2 Students and parents/guardians. A common barrier to effective implementation of assessment practices was the tendency of students and parents or guardians to focus and only care for AoL, or marks. This marks-focused attitude of students lead to the disregard of assessment practices or activities, such as peer evaluations and taking up homework that teachers tried to implement. In addition, parents were either unaware of new school or board initiatives, or were not concerned about how well their children scored on their learning skills, as long as they achieved good marks. This exposes a gap between policy goals and efforts, and the goals and priorities of students and their parents. In addition, there is a gap in the understanding of the interrelationships between learning goals and grades. Specifically, new policies are aimed at improving student learning and acquisition of skills in students through the learning process (Growing Success, 2010), whereas parents and students are concerned with the end result (grades), rather than the process. As James remarked, “kids also have responsibilities [for their learning], and I think the families also have responsibilities [to encourage this learning]”. Effective implementation of practice requires the efforts and acceptance of all members involved, rather than merely relying on the efforts of teachers.

5.2.1.3 Administrators and school boards. The results indicated that teachers were feeling unsupported and uninformed by their administrators and the board. None of the participants were allocated release times by administrators to work on developing new material that reflected new curriculum because according to participants, teachers were expected to use their own time. As a result, teachers were unable to implement new curricula, and students were still learning dated material. In addition, teachers indicated that they were the last to be informed of how to implement policy, as they had to wait until administrators outlined their expectations of the teachers. This is not to say that teachers are passive agents, rather, many start
implementing new ideas based off their understanding of policy, but have to make adjustments after administrator interpretations. Moreover, teachers were not given ample time to learn, understand, and practice new documents during work hours, as new documents would be introduced and expected to be implemented without notice. These results expose a need for better communication between upper levels and teachers.

5.2.2 My professional identity and practice. Conducting this study has raised new perspectives and ideas, especially ideas related to teaching and learning relationships. In teacher education, the focus is predominantly on introducing theories for effective learning, and prescribing actions that educators should take. For example, I took a course dedicated to assessment practices, which was premised on the *Growing Success* (2010) document, and how teachers should utilize the ideas. In addition, teacher candidates are taught ideas for optimal learning, such as encouraging critical thinking and inquiry. I can see that there is a gap in which educators are taught to understand the importance of these theories and practices, while no explicit effort is made to push for a change in student perspectives, attitudes, and understanding of these ideas.

It seems nonsensical to implement these ideas without making an effort to show students why these new practices are important. Thus, I feel a new obligation to include this in my practice—teaching students why practices such as AaL and AfL are invaluable. Doing so will benefit overall student learning, and allow for assessment practices and activities to occur effectively. I hope to push students to the realization that skills developed through these practices, such as self-reflection and critical thinking, contribute to their abilities as learners, and to their success.
5.3 Recommendations

It is apparent that PD which allows teachers to learn through sharing ideas, examples, and discussions are the most effective. This is evidenced through Suurtamm and Koch (2014), and Deluca, Klinger, Pyper, and Woods’ (2014) studies, as well as through the participants’ praise for the effectiveness of conversations among colleagues. In addition, this sharing must occur frequently, at least once a week, as demonstrated by the successful PD in the literature (Deluca, Klinger, Pyper & Woods, 2014; Suurtamm & Koch, 2014). Thus, schools and boards are encouraged to organize PD for teachers that is teacher and practice focused, such as peer learning groups. This can mean allocating time for teachers to work together once a week during school. In addition, formal PD needs to be reformatted to a similar model (discussions, sharing, etc.) because the current format is ineffective for teachers.

To decrease the gap between teacher and administrator/board interpretations of policy documents, and to improve teacher perspectives of administrators, better communication between parties must take place. This may comprise of including teachers during the interpretation/decision making processes, or sending a representative from the subject department during these meetings to inform, update and represent the concerns and wants of the department. Doing so may promote transparency and understanding among teachers, administrators, and boards. In addition, there should be an established schedule given to teachers that lists when new curriculum and policy are scheduled to be released in order to mitigate the shock of documents that seemingly appear without notice. These schedules can be posted on board and the Ministry of Education website. In addition, copies of the schedule can be given to teachers at schools, and posted in staff and department rooms.
As discussed, shifting the educational philosophies of students and parents is important in order for effective implementation of new practices. I suggest a focus on explaining the importance and reasoning for AaL and AfL practices. Students and parents should understand how it affects learning, and its benefits. For students, this should be incorporated into lessons before AaL or AfL activities take place. For parents, schools should hold information sessions at the beginning of the year that explain the initiatives of *Growing Success* (2010) (or future versions of the document), along with handouts that explain the importance and benefits of AaL and AfL. These handouts can be included along with report cards, and part of school newsletters. To account for equitable access, these handouts can be translated into various languages, according to the languages in the school community. In addition, these ideas can be explained during parent-teacher interviews. Teachers can provide a brief overview on what assessment practices are, and why these are important. If necessary, teachers can point the parents to additional resources and readings, such as *Growing Success* (2010). A push towards this shift in perspectives should be incorporated into new versions of *Growing Success* (2010), in teacher education, and in PD efforts.

### 5.4 Areas for Further Research

Given the nature and limitations of this study, there are areas for possible academic extensions. In this study, I examined the supports provided by two boards—PDSB and TCDSB. This study can be extended to include other boards in Ontario, such as the Toronto District School Board, Halton District School Board, and York Region School Board, etc. A mixture of a quantitative and qualitative survey that focuses on the types and qualities of support offered to teachers may be the most effective. Questions should focus on the effectiveness of PDs in supporting curriculum implementation, and the relationship between teachers and upper level
supports. Likert scales can be utilized in these surveys, and short answer sections can be available for elaboration and additional comments. These surveys can be distributed online, and completed through survey software, such as Google Forms. This extension will inform researchers on the state of implementation efforts across different boards, and identify or reaffirm areas for improvement or in need of stronger focus.

This study focused on the perspectives of high school teachers. Given the different classroom dynamics and curriculum documents in the primary and junior streams, teachers working in these areas may have different opinions and experiences when implementing new policies or curriculum. For example, primary students may be more willing to partake in activities, and will not question the choices of their teachers, leading to ample use of different assessment practices. Thus, conducting a similar qualitative study with primary and junior teachers will provide further insights into the complexities of successful curriculum and policy implementation in Ontario schools.

5.5 Concluding Comments

In this chapter, I provided a brief overview of key findings and discussions. This included participants’ disappointment with formal PD, and the lack of support provided by administrators. In addition, participants were suspicious of administrator and board interpretations of policy, and believed that the students’ best interests were not being considered. In addition, the realities of the classroom and schools were a barrier to effective implementation of new initiatives.

These findings created implications for areas of the educational community, namely for in-service teachers, students and parents/guardians, and administrators and school boards. There seemed to be a lot of responsibility on teachers to implement change, when all members of the educational community are responsible and play a role. This lead to implications for my
professional identity and practice, where I identified my new perspectives for the teaching-learning relationship. After conducting this study, I see the importance of educating my students on the importance of developing and building learning skills.

Next, I made recommendations for improving the issues presented in this study. This included reevaluating PD efforts, and restructuring PD so that it occurred frequently and was teacher directed. In addition, I suggested that teachers take part and have a voice in interpreting policy to increase communication and transparency between teachers, administrators, and boards. In addition, I suggested that schools should implement a focus towards shifting the marks-centered attitudes of students and parents/guardians through explaining the importance of new practices, and its benefits. Lastly, I identified areas for further research, given the limitations of this study. This included expanding the study to include more Ontario boards, and including teachers from primary and junior streams.

In conclusion, this study raised important issues that need to be addressed before successful implementation of new policies and curriculum can take place. When these issues are improved, the overall experiences of members in the educational community will become more positive, and pave the way for smoother transitions in implementing new policies and curriculum in the future. When successful implementation occurs, the inherent goals of these documents, including fostering student learning and invaluable skills, will be enabled and enacted.
References


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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interviews

Date:

Dear ____________________,

My Name is Hilary Cheung and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on curriculum and policy implementation and factors that may affect its success. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have experienced curriculum or policy changes in their career. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be audio-recorded and transcribed. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor, Arlo Kempf. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.
Sincerely,
Hilary Cheung
hilary.cheung@mail.utoronto.ca

Course Instructor’s Name: Arlo Kempf
Contact Info: arlo.kempf@utoronto.ca

Consent Form
I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.
I have read the letter provided to me by Hilary Cheung and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________

Name: (printed) ________________________________

Date: ________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn about the state of curriculum and policy implementation with the purpose of informing future implementation initiatives. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on various themes to do with Ontario’s education curriculums and policies. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section A: Background Information

1. How many years have you been teaching in an Ontario publicly funded school?

2. What school board and school are you currently teaching in? And how many years have you been in this school?

3. What grades and subjects do you teach?

4. In addition to your role as a teacher, do you have any other roles in the school? (ie. Curriculum leader, coach, advisor, etc.)

5. Describe the environment of the school you work in. (diverse, socioeconomic status, welcoming, helping environment, etc.)

6. In your teaching career, approximately how many changes in curriculum documents have you experienced for your subject?

Section B: Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs

1. What are your perspectives, thoughts, opinions and feelings towards new policies and curriculum documents that have been implemented?
a. What are your perspectives, thoughts, opinions and feelings towards the Growing Success document? It is conducive to student learning? Is it reasonable and practical for teachers?

b. What are your perspectives, thoughts, opinions and feelings towards new subject curriculum documents that have been implemented? Is it effective for authentic learning of the material? How does it compare to past curriculum documents?

2. In your opinion, do you receive support when new curriculum or policy documents are implemented? What is the quality of this support? Has it been effective?

   a. Support from Administration: Principals, Vice Principals
   
   b. Support from the School board

   c. Support from the OME

   d. Other support?

3. In your opinion, how important for student learning, growth, and achievement is assessment for learning? Assessment as learning? Assessment of learning?

4. Have you received any sort of profession development (PD) to aid with implementation efforts? Elaborate on the quality and effectiveness of the PD.

   a. What was the nature of the PD (workshop, conference, meeting, ongoing COP, etc.)

   b. How often did this PD occur? (Once, weekly, monthly, etc.)

5. In your opinion, do ministry policies and general expectations align with assessment practices and new ideas being implemented? (eg. report card comments are prewritten, and teachers choose from a bank)

6. In your opinion, how do
a. Students
b. Parents
c. Teacher

attitudes towards schooling and education impact the integration of new policies and practices? (eg. parents and students are marks centered, and therefore do not care for AaL or AfL, other teachers in the department/teaching the same course are not doing peer or self assessments, so you are expected to not either, etc.)

7. In your opinion, are new subject curriculum and policies generally distributed in a timely manner so that you are able to review, understand, and think about the new ideas, and how to put it into your practice?

8. What are your main takeaway understandings from the Growing Success document?

9. In your opinion, is the language in curriculum documents and Growing Success clear and easy to understand? Does it provide clear ideas for what you should be doing in your classrooms?

10. How do you feel when you become aware that new curriculum or major policies will be taking place? (ie. Apprehensive, excited, neutral, other)

Section C: Teacher Practices

1. What is your understanding of:
   a. Assessment for learning
   b. Assessment of learning
   c. Assessment as learning
   d. What is the extent that you use these assessment practices in the classroom?
      i. What are examples of assessment practices you used?
1. Is each assessment practice equally used in the classroom?
   
   ii. OR why is it difficult to implement these into the classroom?

2. How often do you provide descriptive feedback to students that is clear, specific, meaningful and support improved learning and achievement?

3. To what extent do your students practice and are skilled in self-assessment? To what extent are they able to set specific goals and plan next steps for learning?

4. How do you seek out resources, support and learning opportunities when new curriculum or policy documents are distributed? Are these resources, support and opportunities easily accessible?

5. To what extent does sharing take place between other teachers teaching the same course/in the department (material, content, assignments, etc.)? Is it expected that you have similar practices?

Section D: Supports and Challenges

1. What challenges affect successful implementation and transition into new policies and curriculum? To what extent have you responded to these challenges?

2. What are some ways, strategies, or tools that will benefit you and your practice during policy and curriculum implementation?

Section E: Next Steps

1. What are areas of improvement that you see in your personal interactions with new curriculum and policy, if any? How do you plan to go about improving these areas?

Thank you for your participation in this research study.