An Interpretative Phenomenological Study: How Secondary Teachers (Grades 11–12) are Impacted by Triage Within a Career and Technical Education Program

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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An Interpretative Phenomenological Study: How Secondary Teachers (Grades 11–12) are Impacted by Triage Within a Career and Technical Education Program

Cassandra Stroud Conover
Concordia University–Portland
College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in
Transformational Leadership

Christopher Maddox, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee
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Concordia University–Portland

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Abstract

Academic reform has been the impetus for failing districts to use triage as a tool to improve the scores of students close to the benchmark scores needed for proficiency. The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of 10 career and technical education (CTE) secondary teachers for the existence of triage as an effect of accountability threats on teachers who are moving students from failing to passing. The theoretical conceptual framework of the scientific management of Taylor and other organizational theories of Perrow, March, and Senge, provided guidance for understanding teachers’ behaviors from responses given during semistructured interviews. Through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, data was axle coded, and four superordinate themes emerged (a) the Administrator is accountable for the passing /failing status of the CTE school, and the teachers focus on their individualized programs (b) triage is utilized in CTE throughout the school year (c) different relationships are vital to the triage of students, and (d) the aftereffects of triage on the CTE teachers ranged from a sense of accomplishment to a concern about the present education system. The findings indicate triage is a natural tool used by teachers in CTE throughout the school year to improve student performance and the teachers have the capability to have input in the instructional choices of curriculum development.

Keywords: educational triage, career and technical education, instructional triage, deficit thinking, academic reform, high stakes testing
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my late parents, James and Jeanette Stroud, who instilled in me the love for education and lifelong learning. I also dedicate this work to every student, teacher, and principal in CTE schools with dreams and aspirations of making a difference in this world, as they push forward to success.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and deeply thank my loving husband John and my children for their love and support as I labored through many days and nights during my doctoral journey. I also want to acknowledge my double sister Dr. Nieta Scott-Dunmore for her immeasurable words of advice and encouragement to push through those days and weeks when I would question myself and the process. I especially want to acknowledge my colleague, Dr. Rachel Hoffert, who stuck with me even after she graduated and walked the stage without me beside her as we had promised and continued to give me constant words of encouragement and empathy. I want to acknowledge the staff at Petersburg Public Library, in particular, Audrey, Janet, and Miriah, who provided me with a study room and countless hours of solitude for many days and weeks. I want to thank my dissertation committee for their support and feedback. I especially want to acknowledge my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Christopher Maddox for his guidance and words of encouragement that provided the breath of life to my dissertation and for having a belief in me.

Finally, I want to especially acknowledge and thank the principal and the teachers who were the participants in this study. Without them, none of this would have been possible for they opened up their hearts, their minds, and their worlds and willingly shared their heartfelt experiences with me. Because of you, educators and policy makers will have new knowledge of the world of career and technical education.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Education reform evolved to include the demand to hold schools accountable for developing metacognitive skills of students mandated for a competitive global workforce (Bouquillion, 2015). Students must have both career skills and academics, yet the high-stakes testing does not reveal the total student. As the world of technology continued to expand, vocational education on the secondary level was reclassified as Career and Technical Education (CTE) to acknowledge the mission for students to be competent in technology-related fields. Congress began funding CTE in 1984 with the first version of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Manley, 2012). States that decide not to implement plans for CTE are precluded from receiving any federal funds from the United States Department of Education (Freidel, 2011).

Those proficiency-based accountability measures in career and technical education were industry licensing and credentialing assessments which reflected student achievement in technical education coupled with academic achievement (Freidel, 2011). Those assessments are both growth and status-based accountability measures and have been classified as high stakes testing (Geno, 2014). The question has yet to be addressed whether CTE instructors utilize triage to address the concerns raised by low or failing scores with the licensing and credentialing results. According to Gilborn and Youdell (2000), triage describes the utilization of available resources to address the most critical areas. Educational triage describes when those resources are allocated to certain students whose needs were determined by scores on high stakes testing (Levine & Levine, 2013). The concept of instructional triage is defined by the process of making curriculum decisions for all students based on the content of tests and assessments (Jennings & Sohn, 2014). Educational reform has now evolved to emphasizing both academic achievement
and CTE as national focus points for producing a workforce equipped with technical and life skills for the real world mandated for college and career readiness (Asunda, 2012).

Following additional background and historical information is the conceptual framework which explains the actual ideas and beliefs about a phenomenon to be studied, what is going on with the phenomenon and why things are happening (Maxwell, 2013). The conceptual framework can be constructed using one of four modules; experiential, existing theory and research, pilot and exploratory research, and thought experiments. I chose to use the existing theory and research module for this study. The theory I explored was that school administrators respond to the failing of their schools with educational triage (O’Mara, 2014). This study expands upon that theory to explore the lived experiences of CTE secondary teachers for the existence of educational or instructional triage as an effect of accountability threats on teachers who are moving students from failing to passing, and how teacher input, or the lack thereof, in CTE curriculum development effects students’ academic status. Concept mapping was used to denote the relationships of failed schools and triage to the teachers, administrators and students in the organization (Maxwell, 2013).

The conceptual framework is discussed further in Chapter 2 along with a literature review of theorists whose ideologies influenced the framework. Beginning with the theory of scientific management of Taylor (1911) and organizational theory furthered by Perrow (2007), I discuss organizational changes and the learning organization with the works of March (1981) and Senge (1990). The literature review was done based on the conceptual framework with research on academic reform and triage in connection with organizational changes within schools that are learning organizations. The interpretative phenomenological research design in Chapter 3 is governed by the same conceptual framework.
Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem

In 1983, the National Commission of Excellence in Education released a report equating the state of illiteracy of the youth to poor performance of the schools which receive federal funds and the subsequent workforce being unprepared to meet global economic demands. As a result, there was a resurgence of the need for educational reform that eventually resulted in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; Hollingworth, 2008). This report caused policy makers to establish regulations to focus on education and the accountability of the elementary and secondary school districts in preparing educated persons for the workforce. The regulations required educators in all states to test students in elementary and secondary schools in certain grades in math, English, and writing. On the state level, assessments of school districts were made based on student performance on tests and graduation rates. The test scores were compiled, and decisions were made based on the performance and achievement levels demonstrated by the ranges of the scores (Hollingworth, 2008). The minimum benchmarks for a school to be labeled as a passing school would be described as the Average Yearly Progress indicator. Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 continued the requirements for status-based accountability with high-stakes testing while also allowing the states flexibility to utilize performance or growth-based standards that addressed the needs of the students (Martin, 2016).

With the federal government now demanding 100% proficiency of all students in core subjects, local school district achievements were connected to state and federal funding decisions (Philipp, 2014)). Monies needed for localities to meet federal and state benchmarks became increasingly uncertain and competitive as districts struggled with limited resources to obtain levels of proficiency (Jennings & Sohn, 2014). The goal of federal funding to the states was to effectuate educational reform on the state level with funding that was irreplaceable because the
monies could not be obtained from other sources. Federal intervention was necessary due to states having a history of denying constitutional protections to all students for equal opportunities to education based on race or socioeconomic disadvantages (Butt, 2011). The states’ responses to this federal pressure was the reliance upon standardized high-stake testing as evidence of their compliance with the federal standards. The scores would demonstrate the mastery by the students of the curriculum needed to produce the competitive workforce desired globally by the federal government. Those schools successful with their students would be rewarded with funding from federal and state agencies, while those teachers directly responsible could receive recognition such as merit pay in some local areas.

Congress recognized the need to combine classroom instruction with vocational skills by passing the Smith Hughes Act in 1917. The Federal Board of Vocational Education provided federal funding to states for vocational education essential to the development of workplace and skill competencies in students (Friedel, 2011). As the world of technology continued to expand, vocational education on the secondary level was reclassified as Career and Technical Education (CTE) to acknowledge the mission for students to be competent in technology-related fields. Congress began funding CTE in 1984 with the first version of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Manley, 2012).

Legislators recognized for the United States to continue to compete internationally in the workforce, states needed federal funding to produce college and career ready persons headed to colleges and technical occupations (Reed et al., 2011). Governors embraced this pool of funds as they sought to meet the needs of their residents in ways not identified through the Standards of Learnings or other assessments, only to discover the pool of funds was inadequate but still maintained accountability measures. Although federal funding for vocational education began
with the Smith Hughes Act in 1917, the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 linked federal funding to those states with CTE and NCLB-inspired accountability measures of industry licensing and credentialing assessments of technical skills and knowledge (Freidel, 2011). The industry licensing and credentialing assessments combined both growth and status-based accountability since the students are required to pass the assessments to be validated for graduation.

The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act has given $4 billion in federal funds to the states. A small percentage of the funds may cover discretionary expenditures, but the remaining monies have enabled states to move students through the pipeline from secondary to post-secondary education and careers (Manley, 2012). The U.S. Department of Education (n.d.) has provided federal guidelines with eight indicators of performance on the secondary level consisting of academic and technical skill assessments. The federal guidelines connected to these monies require the combining of academic instruction with technology, data gathering, and formal programs of study as accountability measures for school administrators. Distribution of the limited amount of funds is for the purpose of meeting the need to fill the workplace with persons skilled in trades and who are proficient in technology (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). States have added additional indicators of performance of programs of study developed around 16 clusters representing various career and technical areas such as agriculture, business management, manufacturing, and more. The federal indicators coupled with the state indicators reflect the emphasis NCLB and subsequent legislation have placed on the importance of assessments for accountability of student academic achievement as well as college and career readiness (Manley, 2012).
The Perkins Act has funding consequences the states must be aware of when debating whether to apply for these monies. States can choose not to apply for the monies, but if this decision is made, the state is barred from applying for any other federal funding from the U.S. Department of Education (Manley, 2012). Given the unavailability of any other resources for funding of this magnitude, states decide to apply for the funding. The required federal and state indicator levels of performance are now deemed to be high stakes because of the correlation to the receipt of the federal funds (Geno, 2014). Should states fail to meet the 90% benchmarks for the core indicators, the failures cause a withholding of the federal monies and the requirement of a state plan for improvement. The funding from the Department of Education reimburses the school districts for the cost of all exams and full funding for the training of the CTE instructors to maintain their credentials. Failures happen due to the decline in the level of students who take the assessments, as well as a decline in student enrollment in CTE. High stakes testing demands has caused students to enroll in more math and language courses versus in CTE (Manley, 2012). The by-products of decreased federal funding are the inability of the CTE programs to maintain technical software updates, equipment, and current training for the instructors in the industries, thereby rendering the CTE programs ineffective and subject to elimination.

Congress maintained federal funding for CTE because of the increasing need to remain competitive in the global workforce. In 2014, Congress passed the Common Core Standards Initiative with an additional $4.35 billion available to states who opt in to use these standards as the foundation for the CTE programs of study. The Common Core Standards developed by the National Governor’s Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers in 2010 combined literacy skills assessments with work skills for the purpose of moving students toward community and 4-year colleges. Some states opted to apply for the funding and used the
Common Core Standards to enhance the connection between STEM (Science, technology, engineering and math) and their CTE programs. One study of those states who opted-in found the CTE students were better prepared for technical careers because of their enhanced academic knowledge gained through STEM-influenced curriculum (Bray, 2011).

There are states which have adopted the Common Core Standards Initiative, and some states in the mid-Atlantic region chose to be different. Some states had already implemented a set of standards in 1995 known as the Standards of Learning (SOL) to meet the federal accountability measures. After the revision of the SOLs in 2009–2010, there were policy makers in districts in the mid-Atlantic region who implemented their version of the Common Core Standards and labeled the standards the College and Career Readiness Initiative. The goal for this initiative was to determine the connection between the industry and credentialing assessments to post-secondary enrollment and completion (Hyslop, 2011). The secondary level performance indicators integrate 13 workplace readiness skills among 16 clusters of occupations and incorporated in the programs of studies.

Students in secondary schools can earn two types of credits, standard and verified. The standard credit is received when a student has received instruction and has completed the course. The verified credit is a credit required for graduation. Verified credits are earned either with the obtaining of a standard credit plus passage of the high-stakes testing called the Standards of Learning or by obtaining credentialing through CTE (Dortch, 2014). There are over 50 credentialing tests divided in five categories: industry certification; pathway industry certification-stacked credentials; occupational competency skills assessments; state licenses; and workplace readiness skills. Industry credentialing is awarded when a student passes third-party examinations and earns a license or a certificate. The credential is then counted as a verified
credit and the student is labeled for assessment purposes as a CTE completer when all other academic requirements have been met (Dortch, 2014). The credentialing has also been regarded by educators as high stakes testing because the credentialing is required for graduation and used to determine funding (Geno, 2014).

Passage of the licensing and credentialing assessments are not requisites for receiving the federal funding since the monies reimburse the districts for the expenditures of the testing and funds training to ensure there are competent CTE instructors who produce successful CTE completers. However, educators have expressed that the funding levels were inadequate to equip the instructors with new hardware and software needed to stay current with the latest changes in technology (Manley, 2012). Those same educators also expressed the inability to incorporate time to improve their professional development because of having to include more academic instructional time. CTE administrators had to allocate their limited resources to continue the mission of equipping the students with the necessary workplace proficiencies (Asunda, 2012). Inadequate resources and staff may lead to student disenchantment, decreased enrollment, possible elimination of the CTE program and federal funding (Manley, 2012).

The recent reauthorization has strengthened the accountability measures on the secondary level by aligning the federal performance measures with each state’s indicators in recognition of the difference in the standards (Brown, 2017). For instance, the federal indicator for technical proficiency will be measured by the states’ indicators and provide a better picture of the college and career readiness of the students in the district. The question has yet to be addressed whether the instructors utilize triage to answer the concerns raised by inadequate funding, training and enrollment in career and technical education. Educational reform has now evolved to emphasizing both academic achievement and CTE as national focus points for producing a
workforce equipped with technical and life skills for the real world mandated for college and career readiness (Asunda, 2012).

**Statement of the Problem**

Teachers are uncertain how to move students from failing to passing status, and the role triage plays in the process is not clear. The existence of triage in those circumstances, whether educational or instructional triage, has been assumed in traditional educational settings with the expectation that teachers in failing schools have incentives to triage. Those students must meet the desired benchmark levels of testing in critical areas such as math and English for accreditation and federal funding of their respective schools. Administrators in CTE are under pressure to have their teachers succeed in the areas of teacher performance and student achievement when their students fail on industry licensing and credentialing assessments. These teachers face the same dilemma of moving students from failing to passing, and the role of triage on teachers in failing CTE schools is not clearly defined nor understood by policy makers. The teachers are vital participants in the process of moving the failing students to successful status on the assessments, and interpretative phenomenological research would capture the voices and experiences of those teachers. The problem is the teachers are expected to address the issues with poor student performance. There are no assumptions of the existence of educational or instructional triage as an effect of accountability threats on the CTE teachers moving students from failing to passing. There are no assumptions or indications of teacher input in the CTE curriculum development to address the poor student performance.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this interpretative, phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of CTE secondary teachers (Grades 10–12) for the existence of educational or
instructional triage as an effect of accountability threats on teachers moving students from failing to passing. CTE schools serve as the learning institutions for obtaining knowledge for vocational and industrial careers. The measures of student proficiencies are licensing and credentialing examinations, and the failing of those examinations by the students indicate the need for action to move those students from failing to passing for successful completion and graduation.

The teachers have a responsibility to the students and to the school to ensure success and will make whatever changes are needed. In the traditional academic setting, the administrator is expected to institute curriculum changes and the teachers are expected to implement the changes that would bring about the increase in the overall passing rates for the school. Triage may be used to facilitate the changes and could be done either in the form of educational or instructional triage. A study of the lived experiences of teachers in a CTE school for the existence of triage as an effect of accountability threats and how teacher input effects student’s academic status is helpful for policy makers to understand the circumstances teachers face that are particular to CTE students and testing.

**Research Questions**

The research questions for this study are:

1. How does educational or instructional triage impact secondary teachers (Grades 10–12) in CTE schools?
2. What input do the teachers have in the development of CTE curriculum?

**Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

The rationale for this qualitative research is the philosophy of science interpretative/constructivist paradigm that knowledge or meanings resulting from interactions among persons cannot be observed but interpreted (Haverkamp & Young, 2007).
Phenomenological research design reveals knowledge through the consciousness of those who have experienced a phenomenon and then give interpretations to those experiences (Husserl, 1913). A case study design was not appropriate for this study because that design would require the phenomenon to be explored from different data sources and confined to a particular context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Case studies focus on answering “how” and “why” questions with data collections including, not limited to, observations and reports. A phenomenological study uses first-hand accounts from interviews of the participants as the sole source of data collection.

The relevance of this qualitative study to education is that the topics of academic reform and educational triage are timely topics (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Phenomenology will capture the essences of lived experiences of teachers in schools facing accountability threats of loss of accreditation based on low test scores. The accountability measures are on-going and the need to improve test scores in a rapid fashion has created the incentive to use educational or instructional triage as a solution (Lauen & Gladdis, 2012).

The significance of the study of a particular problem can be shown if the investigation of the problem will contribute to policy, practice or theory (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In education, the study’s significance may be connected to institutional or state policies and should be studied systematically (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). There are formal policies in place which mandate 100% passing of benchmarks for testing and subsequent need for academic reform to ensure improvements in student proficiencies (Polikoff, McEachin, Wrabel & Duque, 2014). The utilization of educational triage has become a policy used by teachers to improve the scores of their students (Hardy & Lewis, 2017).

However, this study would contribute to the knowledge of policymakers of how teachers address the accountability measures in a career and technical education school. The lived
experiences would provide insight to the input the teachers have in curriculum development and the impact of educational or instructional triage for improving student proficiencies. This study should be conducted to allow those teachers to have their voices heard.

**Definition of Terms**

This list of terms is designed to help the reader understand and interpret important concepts. These terms are used throughout this dissertation.

**Credentialing.** The receipt upon successfully passing an examination and earning a license or certification that gives the holder the right to practice the chosen occupation or profession is credentialing (Zirkle & Jeffery, 2017).

**Educational triage.** The allocation of resources of instruction to students according to the students’ needs as determined by scores on high stakes testing is educational triage. This action is taken because schools not meeting the proficiency benchmarks in tests or other assessments are labeled as failing schools in the district and are penalized (Gonzalez et al., 2016; Levine & Levine, 2013). Educational triage can target a group of students such as those who need the most assistance or can be used systematically (Diamond, 2006).

**Deficit thinking.** A type of thinking, educators use this train of thought to base the failure of a student in school on deficiencies or deficits particular to the student, and not due to external factors such as education or the schools (Valencia, 1997).

**High stakes testing.** The label of high stakes testing is given to standardized tests or any test whose results are critical for decision-making about the student and are the basis for the accountability of the school (Hall & Ryan, 2011).

**Individualized Education Program (IEP).** The programs developed by the Individuals with Disabilities Act that outline special education and relevant services necessary to assist
students developmentally and academically of students under the age of 18 years are
Individualized Education Programs (IEP). IEPs contain data monitoring the progress of the child
regarding function with other students and nonacademic activities (Talmadge, 1975).

**Instructional triage.** The process of making decisions on curriculum based on the
content and format of the tests or assessments is classified as instructional triage (Jennings &
Sohn, 2014).

**Standards of Learning.** One set of standardized test questions in areas such as math and
English are the Standards of Learning which are mandatory for all students in the state (Certo et
al., 2008).

**Triage.** Available resources are allocated to address the most critical areas, similar to the
decision-making process of triaging the most critical injuries in a hospital by a nurse (Gilborn &
Youdell, 2000).

**Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

Assumptions are acknowledgments or beliefs the researcher has internally regarding the
study (Newman, Ridenour, Weis, & McNeil, 1997). The first assumption underlying this study is
the teachers investigated will answer the interview questions honestly and completely. Secondly,
given the success of the school, the teachers will be willing to share the positive and negative
aspects of their experiences. The last assumption is that the experiences of the participants
investigated will be delineative of experiences of other CTE faculty.

Limitations are those factors the researcher cannot control which may impact
significantly on the study (Baron, 2009). These factors could be the basis for explanations of
errors or interpretation of results. The first limitation underlying this study is the time available
for interviews have date and time constraints because of faculty contracts. Secondly, given the
size of the staff is exactly 10 teachers, the data collection is limited to that number of participants and there is the possibility of interviewing new teachers. The third limitation is the study is limited by use of the single site which is a regional center for three specific jurisdictions.

Delimitations are those factors which the researcher can constrain for purposes of the study (Newman et al., 1997). These factors are external and could be the result of the investigation and the data needed. The first delimitation underlying this study is given that there are CTE centers in different jurisdictions, the investigation was completed at this one particular site that serves as a regional CTE and whose principal provided permission for the research to be conducted at the site. Secondly, the research is delimited to the question of triage although there are other areas that could be the subject of study.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the dilemma faced by teachers in a CTE school of students failing necessary assessments, the topic of triage, and the level of input the teachers have in the curriculum development to address the students’ academic status. The background for this study is the call for educational reform which established regulations mandating high stakes testing to determine student proficiencies. Results of the test scores would determine which school districts would be rewarded with accreditation and federal funding. Student performance in the tested areas of math, English, History, and Reading would not only indicate capability of success in the workplace but would also serve as validation of teacher performance. The high stakes testing results could trigger the use of triage, whether educational or instructional, as a means of developing curriculum in such a way as to expeditiously move the failing scores to passing.

Educational reform led to additional accountability measures of schools for the improvement of metacognitive skills of students found lacking in the workforce. CTE school
administrators receive federal funding and are held accountable for the passage rates of their students in various competencies. Low passage rates could result in a decrease in funding or enrollment in these schools. The problem is that the teachers in CTE schools face the same issues as teachers in the traditional education system with failing students and missing the required benchmarks, and it is not understood what input the teachers have in developing the curriculum to address the failures, or what impact triage has on the teachers’ instructional choices in these situations.

This chapter has presented that the purpose of this interpretative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of the secondary teachers in the CTE school for the existence of educational or instructional triage as an effect of accountability threats on teachers who are moving students from failing to passing. The research questions targeted the lived experiences of the teachers for how educational or instructional triage impacts secondary teachers in a CTE school, and what input the teachers have in the development of CTE curriculum. In this chapter I have explained the rationale for this interpretative phenomenological study was the need to obtain first-hand accounts from interviews of the teachers of their reflections as they experienced moving students from failing to passing. I further explained that the relevance of this study is the subjects of academic reform and educational triage are timely topics in education. The significance of this study is that it will contribute to the knowledge of policy makers of the use of triage to meet accountability measures in a CTE school and the input teachers have in curriculum development to move students from failing to passing. The chapter also had definitions of terms used throughout the dissertation for clarity and better understanding. The chapter provided an explanation of the
assumptions made during the research, delimitations and limitations which had or could have had an impact on the study were given.

In the following chapters of this study are the literature review, the research methodology, the data analysis and results, and a discussion of the conclusion of the research. In Chapter 2, I discuss in more depth the conceptual framework in terms of exploring the existing theory of academic reform and triage with the guidance of the theories for organization, learning organizations, and organizational changes. I provide historical background on educational reform and the evolution of educational and instructional triage as tools used to address low passage rates identified by the accountability measures of high stakes testing. I also provide historical background on the roles of teachers and their connection to the accountability measures of student performance.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review of prior research provides background and justification for the new research (Kucan, 2011). Review of prior research can provide studies where certain questions were not answer; can furnish data such as other methods or theories previously relied on; and can help the researcher create new theories (Maxwell, 2013). In this study, I have put forward a review of academic reform that addressed failing scores, the impact of triage, and the input obtained from the teachers regarding curriculum development which are the foci of this study. The need to meet passing benchmarks to preserve funding, enrollment, or jobs have been incentives for administrators and teachers to triage by making changes within the curriculum and other areas (O’Mara, 2014). This dissertation utilized research which explored academic reform, accountability measures of high stakes testing, educational and instructional triage, and the role of the teachers in meeting the accountability measures.

I began the literature review with an account of the literature strategy used in this study. The conceptual framework detailed the theory of scientific management and the subsequent organizational theory of Taylor (1911) and Perrow (1967). The works of March (1981) and Senge (1990) on organizational changes and learning organizations are examined. Although there are different frameworks for organizational changes, the systems thinking with learning organizations were the primary focus for this study. After the literature review, I discussed the conceptual framework with scholarship on the ideas of academic reform, triage, roles of teachers, and deficit thinking. The themes in the literature included accountability; high stakes testing as accountability measures; educational and instructional triage; the roles of teachers in meeting accountability measures; and deficit thinking in curriculum development.
Literature Search Strategy

The literature search strategy is the practice used to break down the research question to elements the databases and search engines can understand (Kable, Pich, & Maslin-Prothero, 2012). In this section, I have provided a detailed outline of the process I used for obtaining scholarly articles for my research. I began my search with the following keywords: triage, educational triage, accountability, No Child Left Behind, high stakes testing, secondary education, secondary education teachers, academic reform, accountability measures, failing schools, failing students, low passage rates, benchmarks, career and technical education. I used the Concordia University Library for access to the following databases: ERIC, EBSCO, Google Scholar, and SAGE. I limited the searches for primary resources to the years 2014–2019.

I obtained the articles manually and looked at the reference lists of the retrieved articles for additional resources. Using those lists, I was able to expand my search to include instructional triage, deficit thinking, student disengagement, teacher disengagement, educational attainment. I conducted the research using Boolean logic to form combinations of the search terms for a more relevant and in-depth search. I excluded articles that referred to higher education and medical topics in reference to the topic of triage. The search process was done methodically, and each article was examined for relevance to the topics at hand by reading the abstract first and then the rest of the paper. Each article was summarized to include pertinent keywords, and subsequently was placed with other articles having similar keywords and related to the same concept or topic. I prepared a summary graph with the topic and keywords as headers, and the grouped articles were listed accordingly.

My review of the reference lists of the retrieved articles provided me with references for the theorists mentioned earlier in the conceptual framework. I used those references to retrieve
works and further information on the theorists referenced by the authors of the articles. Among the many theorists mentioned, Taylor, March, and Senge were relied upon the most for scholarship. I used the literature search to explore additional areas as articles referenced related topics and new keywords emerged. I analyzed and synthesized historical documents, seminal books, dissertations, governmental reports, and institutional reports.

**Conceptual Framework**

Researchers use the conceptual framework to provide the structure for the process of collecting and analyzing data relevant to the topic that one wants to study (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016). The framework builds with the exploration of themes during the course of the studies. Existing theories and research comprise one module that can be used to construct a framework and is the module used for this study (Maxwell, 2013). I relied upon the theories of organizations, organizational changes, and learning organizations for the groundwork for the study of impact on secondary teachers in career and technical education. Taylor (1911) and his theory of scientific management was the foundation for subsequent organizational theorists such as Perrow (1967), who expanded organizational theory to formal organizations. The contributions of March (1981) to organizational changes are reviewed for guidance on how organizations evolve. Lastly, Senge (1990) provided the concept of learning organizations and the use of systems thinking for organizations to use for optimal decision-making processes as organizations make changes. Organizational theories provide the structure for understanding the behaviors of the teachers in the school and the processes involved in addressing changes mandated when students fail on high stakes tests.
Frederick Winslow Taylor’s Scientific Management

Taylor has been described as the father of scientific management and is credited for laying the foundation for organizational theory. Taylor (1911) championed the need for management and workers to work together scientifically and systematically in order to produce the greatest amount of work in the fastest amount of time. His work in the machinery industry was subsequently applied to other areas in society.

Taylor began his studies at Harvard but was forced to leave formal schooling because of issues with his eyesight and begin work as a machinist at Midvale Steel. Taylor (1911) recounted how he discovered during his progression from machinist to chief engineer that there was a connection between the amount of time workers were taking to do their work and the amount of output. To his consternation, Taylor observed workers soldiering, deliberately working slowly to avoid doing a full day’s work. Taylor also noted management was being deceived and should work together with the workers in order to get maximum output from both the workers and the machinery (Taylor, 1895). In fact, he began taking doing time studies in 1880 using a stopwatch in experiments to determine the best times for doing specified tasks in the machine shop. Taylor (1911) wrote that he brought in mathematician Carl Barth who developed a slide rule to perfect the calculations for the best method and the quickest time for the work to get done on a daily basis. Taylor (1895) explained his pig iron handling experiment where he used time studies and algebra to determine the best way to move more weight with the hardest workers. The experiment decreased the number of workers to those best capable of moving the desired amount of work while rewarding them with higher pay. Additionally, management had the responsibility of giving the workers specific instructions for the best ways to do the work.
By 1903, Taylor was becoming known as the efficiency expert who determined that management should provide guidance to the workers with detailed methods scientifically measured to produce the greatest output of work (Taylor, 1911). Scientific management was designed to eliminate work or tasks from being completed based on rule of thumb directions, and instead should be based on the following criteria (Taylor, 1911):

- Science developed for each component of tasks to be done through time studies
- Workers scientifically selected and trained
- Managers to provide detailed instructions to workers based on science
- Work and responsibility to do work to be equally divided between management and workers

Taylor’s scientific management theory is referred to by scholars as *Taylorism*. Although he died in 1915, he had intentionally taught Morris Llewellyn Cook scientific management with instructions to use his work in areas other than the industrial environment. Cook chose the environment of colleges to introduce scientific management to education. According to Cook (1910), the organization of a college with a president, a board, and a staff with deans and teachers was like a business organization. Within this educational organization, the departments could be managed more efficiently once the tasks done by the departments are scientifically studied. The work in colleges like with businesses is best done when the workers are doing the tasks that they are best suited to do (Cook, 1910).

*Taylorism* emphasized the necessary cooperation between management and workers to ensure that any changes made in the methods for producing the work are made scientifically with standardization for the sake of efficiency and optimal output (Taylor, 1911). The concept of *Taylorism* provided clarity of the foundation supporting the organizational structure and
relationships of the focus of this study, which is the existence of educational or instructional triage on CTE teacher as an effect of accountability threats on teachers who are moving students from failing to passing.

**Charles Perrow and Formal Organizational Theory**

Perrow (1961) considered organizations critical to society and found through research that there were three types of organizations: voluntary service, non-voluntary service, and profit making. The optimal analysis of organizations should include an understanding of the goals of the organization, with preference for studying the operative goals versus official goals. Perrow opined that official goals such as the mission or vision were too general and not specific enough for behavioral studies. Operative goals provide more insights to the actions of the members because those goals tell what the organizations are in fact working to achieve (Perrow, 1961). Management has the responsibility of meeting the goals and should use task management to accomplish the following: (a) obtain sufficient capital for operations; (b) obtain legitimization through acceptance of others of the organization; (c) ensure the members have the necessary skills to do their work; and (d) plan and foster interactions among the members of the organization, as well as with organization and other outside organizations (Perrow, 1961). Task management of goals was viewed as the key to successful complex organizations.

Organizations are critical systems responsible for getting work done in society (Perrow, 1967). The work of organizations is referred to as technology necessary to make changes to raw materials, which could be people, symbols, or things. Technology describes direct actions by members done to raw materials and structure describes the relationships between the members of the organization that facilitates the actions to get the work or technology done (Perrow, 1967). The characteristics associated with the raw materials can impact the determination of the
technology needed to effectuate changes. If the raw materials are uniform in characteristics, the technology needed to carry out tasks such as design and planning could be standardized. On the other hand, if the raw materials are unstable, the members would need to do additional inquiries about modifications of tasks to address possible outcomes from variations in the raw materials.

Perrow believed the social structure within organizations also influences how work is done and tasks are carried out. Members who are able to establish their own social identities; their instrumental identities (such as job security); and their technical task identities will successfully interact with other members to do the work of the organization (Perrow, 1967). Management should be concerned with interactions that are organizationally relevant, and not allow themselves to be distracted otherwise. Perrow concluded organizations may share similar technology but differ in social structure because relationships vary even within the same type of organization. When comparing organizations, there is the reality that organizations may differ in goals because of the environments surrounding the organizations. Some entities may be able to use standardized methods of technology where the functions of the organizations are routine (Perrow, 1967). Other organizations may not have relationships in common with similar type organizations because the characteristics of the raw materials are not routine and require different methods of work (Perrow, 1967).

Organizational theory is important to America since more than one-half of its citizens work for large organizations (Perrow, 2009). As early as 1910, organizational structures were put in place in both the public and private sectors as a means of centralizing power. Management at the top could impact the destiny not only of its workers but also of the communities where the workers reside (Perrow, 2009). Organizations grew to meet the demands of social movements and became complex as the larger organizations would include smaller organizations within their
infrastructure. For example, a church would have within its infrastructure a store and a credit union to meet the needs of its congregation while having an impact on the citizens in the surrounding community (Perrow, 2009).

Perrow used the scientific management principles of Taylor (1911) as foundation for his theories of interactions between management and members of an organization. The structure of organizations would depend upon the tasks being performed by members with management empowering the members to get the work done through interactions with raw materials and with each other. These theories allow for greater understanding of the existence of relationships with the focus study between the teachers and the principal in the CTE school and the impact of triage on these teachers as they do work to effectuate changes in the students.

**James March and Organizational Changes**

March (1981) was known for his theories on organizational changes occurring in response to changes in the environments of the organizations. The larger the change in the environment, the greater the changes to be made in the organization as evidenced by simultaneous responses to the environmental changes by different parts of the organization. There are five characteristics demonstrated by organizations regarding making changes: (a) understanding organizational change to be continuous; (b) the need for stable processes to effect change; (c) recognition of change theories actually describing change actions responsive to influences such as demographics and economic factors; (d) realization of routine changes with unanticipated outcomes; and (e) possibility of adaptation to changing environment based on rational or irrational reasons (March, 1981).

Organizations change because of some process connected to their environment. March (1981) commented that organizations may approach the idea of changing differently, to include
the extreme choice of resisting change to the approach of regeneration of the organization due to
new participants with new ideas for organizational actions. There are processes in place to
implement changes; however, March opined if the organization is not changing as quickly as the
environment is changing, the organizational changes may have unexpected or unintended results
due to incompatibility with the needs of the environment. Organizations may choose to make
adaptations by way of satisficing where they choose alternatives in their actions that will reach
target goals quickly versus obtaining the maximum value of output that might take is longer to
achieve (March, 1981).

The question raised during this period of decision-making is whether the organization
will take or avoid risks when there is a particular goal to be met. As organizations go through the
processes of analyzing the risks, they use what they have learned from routines already in place
and outcomes from previous work (Levitt & March, 1991). Those routines provide guidance for
the actions and behaviors within the organizations. For example, the organizations may have
learned through trial and error what routines are successful and which ones resulted in failures.
Organizational memories and experiences with processes are instrumental in decision- making
for organizational changes (Levitt & March, 1991).

March extended his works in organizational change to include organizational actions
taken based on choice. His theory of autonomous consequential choice was that organizations
choose their actions based on either guess about the expected consequences of the action or
guesses about the value of the consequences of the preferred course of action (March, 1996).
Organizational action remained connected to the environment and the chosen action would be
the reaction to others who are interacting with the organization in the environment. Given the
dynamic characteristic of the environment, organizational changes are continuous, and choices
are made on a continuous basis to respond and adapt to the changes in the environment. The
theory of organizational change and its connection to the environment espoused by March (1981,
1991, 1996) continue to provide guidance for understanding how organizations do the work that
effects changes in raw materials such as people, symbols, and things described by Perrow
(1962). The work that is done requires cooperation between management and the members of the
organization in accordance with the theory of scientific management of Taylor (1911).

**Peter Senge and The Learning Organization**

Senge championed the theory of learning organizations where the organization as a whole
has the capacity to develop productive learners who continuously improve the organization. The
leader of the learning organization has the responsibility to put the structure in place for learning
(Senge, 1990). As organizations make changes to adapt to the changes in their environments, the
decision-making process may involve *adaptive learning* or *generative learning*. Leadership
could use adaptive learning and make changes to enable the organization to cope with the
environmental changes. Leadership could use generative learning and decide on changes that
would enlarge the capability for growth for the organization by learning more about the systems
causing the changes in the environment (Senge, 1990). With both types of learning, leaders must
be aware of potential tension between the current reality and the future vision of the relationship
between the organization and the environment. The tension and motivation to change are
necessary for learning organizations to produce successful learners equipped to implement
organizational changes (Senge, 1990).

Senge took his discussion of building learning organizations to create within the same
year a model for the actual framework for a learning organization. There are five disciplines
needed for a successful learning organization: (a) personal mastery, (b) mental models, (c)
shared vision, (d) team learning, and (e) systems thinking (Senge, 1990). Personal mastery requires individuals to be committed to their own personal learning and growth given the current reality of their personal development. Individuals must want to be the best they can be while achieving the mission of the organization. Mental models refer to the sharing of different worldviews held by individuals formed from their assumptions and perceptions. A shared vision requires collaboration and cooperation of everyone in the organization resulting in the individuals becoming vested in the organization’s growth. Team learning is a necessary discipline because most of the choices made in organizations are made by teams comprised of the members.

The primary discipline for learning organizations is the fifth discipline of systems thinking which allows the other four disciplines to work together. Senge believed that systems thinking is the foundation for the learning organization with focus on how the individual parts of the organization impact and effect each other in the whole system. Systems thinking requires examination of relationships, culture, and the quality of products in the decision-making process (Senge, 1990). An organization will experience optimal performance when members come together to make decisions based on the current reality of conditions in the environment with a holistic perspective of how their decisions can change their organizations for the better.

Management is crucial to learning organizations because they have the obligation to continually motivate workers to improve their work through growth (Senge, 1992). Organizations need to explore changes when times are good and bad with the mission of perpetual improvement. Leaders are also designers, teachers, and stewards to the members as evidenced by their relationships with the members during the operations of the organization. The more the management is engaged with the members, the more the members are invested and able
to contribute strategically to decision-making and collaborations (Senge, 1992). During the interactions with the members, management must ensure there is clear communication between all parties. Senge created an exercise for leaders called *The Left-Hand Column* to use to develop their skills in systems thinking. When deciding how to handle situations, leadership will obtain input from different members about problems. The left-hand column will have the assumptions the leader has already made concerning the problem, and the leader will list on the right-hand column statements made by individuals about the problem. After all input has been obtained, the leader will compare the assumptions with realities provided by actual statements of the reality of the problem. Senge (1992) used this exercise for leaders to learn how assumptions that influence behavior could be wrong because leaders did not take the time to learn the mental models of the workers who are impacted by managerial decisions.

According to Senge (1990), education was one field where schools are considered learning organizations. The principal as the leader collaborates with the teachers to effectuate the best organizational changes as dictated by changes in the educational environment as recommended by March (1981). Organizational behaviors and the different levels within the school learning organization are understood with the theories espoused by Perrow (1962). Management and members of the school learning organization will operate more efficiently once the tasks of the teachers and the best methods to use to get the work done are determined using scientific management principles espoused by Taylor (1911). Together, the theories espoused are the basis for understanding the study of the existence of educational or instructional triage as an effect of accountability threats on the CTE teachers who are moving students from failing to passing. Triage is a tool administrators and teachers may use to effectuate organizational change
of academic reform in response to changes in the environment caused by poor student performance.

**Conceptual Framework Summary**

Taylor (1911) theorized the use of scientific management in the industrial context as the most efficient method for optimal production of work. Managers should gauge scientifically the best suited workers for particular tasks and the most efficient methods for those workers to do their tasks. Using science, managers would be responsible for planning and designing the methods, then would have to provide detailed instructions to the employees with training for implementation of the methods. This train of thought regarding managers interacting with employees differed from the traditional role of top-down managers and their actions with employees limited to handing down orders for action. Taylor (1911) and the scientific management theory laid the groundwork for organizational theory in all fields, not just industrial.

Perrow (1967) used the organization structure espoused by Taylor (1911) to explain the behaviors of formal and complex organizations and determined the majority of work done in the United States are now done by complex organizations. Perrow (1967) explained the work done by organizations is technology needed to effect changes on raw materials in the different forms of people, symbols, or things with the aid of scientific management principles. The relationship between the administrators and members of the organization is the structure necessary to get work done. Additionally, managers have task-related functions such as designing and supervising the work coupled with the non-task related function of creating a social structure meaningful to motivate the members to become engaged and interact with each other (Perrow, 1967).
March (1981) expanded organizational theory to include the study of how organizations make changes. Relationships between managers and members (Taylor, 1911) and formal organizations (Perrow, 1967) set the tone for organizational changes made in response to changes in the environment (March, 1981). The processes of changes must be able to keep pace with the environmental changes. Leaders may choose the method of satisficing when deciding the methods for change and decide on actions that will achieve target goals but not necessarily achieve long term value. Determinations of the processes within the organizations will require a scientific analysis of the technology needed to reach target goals and the best persons to do that needed work (March, 1981; Perrow, 1967; Taylor, 1911). The other theorists laid the groundwork for the optimal structure of an organization with the need for management and members to interact to get work done the most efficient manner possible. Senge (1990) added to this framework the theory that the most successful organization is one where members are engaged collectively in continuous learning to expand the capabilities of the organization. The focus should be on viewing the organization holistically to see how the various levels of the organization impact the system as a whole. Systems thinking strengthens the relationships between management and members because everyone sharing knowledge and becoming invested in advancing the mission of the organization.

The organizational behaviors of the administrator and teachers to include relationships and roles are better understood using principles of scientific management of Taylor (1911) and organizational theories of Perrow (1967), March (1981), and Senge (1990). The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of CTE secondary teachers for the existence of educational or instructional triage as an effect of accountability threats on teachers who are moving students from failing to passing. The technology is the work done to include curriculum
development to effectuate changes with the failing students. Academic reform used to address low passage rates and failures is considered an organizational change because the school administrator and teachers must make changes to respond to the failing scores. The theories mentioned will provide clarity for understanding the behaviors of the principal and the teachers in handling the problem situation of failing students who must improve their scores for the sake of graduation and the existences of the career and technical education school.

**Review of the Literature and Methodological Issues**

The literature review in qualitative studies such as this interpretative phenomenological study can be the source used to justify exploration of a specific topic (Creswell, 2009). Research on a topic should include exploring studies of related areas for an understanding of what knowledge is known and where gaps of learning might exist for potential research. Qualitative studies enhance learning and the literature review should educate the reader on the general areas surrounding the topic to the need for research on the particular problem (Denney et al., 2013). During the literature review, studies may be discarded that where researchers explored issues irrelevant to the chosen topic at hand as well. I have identified in Chapter 2 literature related to academic reform and educational and instructional triage, and I end with the findings of those studies.

**Academic Reform**

Academic reform necessitates a shift in organizational development through organizational changes (Bonner et al., 2004). The adherence to educational policies and mandates require the districts and schools to undertake organizational changes necessary for transformation (Evans et al., 2012). Hollingworth (2008) concluded that a requirement for academic reform according to policymakers was the protection of the constitutional right of all
students to equal opportunities to education. In his research, evidence illustrated the catalyst for academic reform on the national level for some policy makers was the revelation of educational iniquities based on race and social class. Disadvantaged students, whether due to racial discrimination or low socioeconomic status, were not afforded the necessary resources to succeed academically and were headed for failure. Federal intervention came in the form of federal funding to the states with stipulations that required strict compliance to guidelines, as well as warnings that the state policies could not cause detrimental harm to disadvantaged students (Butt, 2011). The studies acknowledged the variances in state policies as reasons for the warnings for strict compliance.

**Deficit thinking.** Richard Valencia in his book *The Evolution of Deficit Thinking* explored the issue of disadvantaged students failing in schools and found evidence of deficit thinking attributing the failure of the schools due to deficiencies those students were not expected to overcome instead of failures within the schools themselves. Deficit thinking attributes low achievement to deficiencies particular to the student to include factors of class, culture, genetics and socialization (Valencia, 1997, 2010). Persons engaged in deficit thinking will describe a student as failing because of a dysfunction; will explain the dysfunction as a deficit caused by influences such as genetics or culture identity; will predict those deficits will be ongoing if left unaddressed; and will make modifications to address the deficits (Skrla & Scheuric, 2001; Valencia, 2010;). Administrators have used deficit thinking with their educational policies to justify actions towards the failing students versus systemic actions aimed at improving the school structure or curriculum which could address instructional deficiencies (Valencia, 2010).
Policymakers achieved accountability with academic reform by requiring explanations for low achievement when the academic achievements for the local districts and schools became public. Studies showed deficit thinking had primarily been used by some administrators to lay blame for school failures on low achievements of low income and minority children who were deemed not to capable of succeeding in school because of factors such as culture or socioeconomic status (Sharma, 2018; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001;). The prediction component for deficit thinking that administrators and teachers believe disadvantaged children are not able to obtain the necessary skills to succeed has resulted in instructional choices that have diverted those students from certain opportunities (Perrow, 2010; Sharma, 2018). Modifications made to address deficits found with the children such as limited cognitive thinking or socioeconomic skills may be possible with the intervention of school-based relationships providing resources to the children (Sharma, 2018).

Deficit thinking among administrators was displaced when school outcomes were connected to academic reform with mandated compliance to passage rates for all students (Sharma, 2018; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001;). The data of all districts and local schools that is displayed publicly by grade levels and other demographics allows readers to assess whether all of the students are academically successful. Skrla and Scheurich (2001) noted the displacement was a positive outcome of the accountability measures because the results of the high stakes testing proved the schools were not serving the children equitably, and administrators were forced to raise the standards for education in their districts. However, deficit thinking has not been totally displaced as evidence has been found of administrators and teachers continuing to make instructional decisions based on perceived deficiencies of individual students even without testing results (Perrow, 2010).
High stakes testing. Local school district achievements became connected to state and federal funding by way of standardized testing results (Hunt, 2009; Polikoff et al, 2014). Congressional acts resulted in the use of standardized testing in language and math among other core subjects for determination of nationwide student achievement. The goal for the assessments was to hold educators responsible for 100% proficiency and performance by the students, which in turn would raise the levels of proficiency of the global workforce and decrease the achievement gaps among the students. Because the test results are used for major decision-making, researchers noticed the tests were labeled as high stakes testing by those in education (Levine & Levine, 2013). Studies revealed evidence of how high-stakes tests were used for decision-making to include use of outcomes of passage or failure to prohibit graduation or grade promotion of the students, and the use of outcomes to impact funding and staffing decisions within the school districts as administrators allocate limited resources to those students whose assessments revealed needed the most assistance (Levine & Levine, 2013; Gonzales, Peters, Orange & Grigsby, 2016). Geno (2014) found the licensing and credentialing assessments in CTE schools meet the criteria for high stakes testing because federal funding and staffing decisions are impacted by the passage rates of the students as they strive to enter the work world.

Some authors indicated that educators determined that high stakes testing did not take into account other outcomes of student performance due to the emphasis on academic performance. O’Mara (2014) observed that the assessments failed to reveal the level of creativity or growth in students because those areas are not explored, and Wrigley (2016) concluded that high stakes testing promoted limited knowledge of subjects while failing to address the level of cognitive skills possessed by the students. Additional findings by Wrigley (2016) determined that the levels of cognitive thinking and problem-solving skills of students had been negatively
impacted by the emphasis of gaining temporary knowledge to pass the academic assessments implemented for accountability to the federal government.

Legislation in 2015 provided the states greater flexibility for elementary and secondary educators to address the needs of all the students. There were reports of negative consequences from the stringent accountability measures required (Jochim, 2016; Martin, 2016). Policy makers acknowledged how accountability measures that focused only on test assessments were creating opportunities for triage in the schools which resulted in inequalities in student learning (Martin, 2016). Jochim (2016) noted in the study the response by federal legislators to the criticism was to give states the option of choosing to implement standards based on performance assessments or evidence-based practices derived from knowledge gained from the local administrators in their educational communities. Those evidence-based practices continue to be determined, and this interpretative, phenomenological study could further enhance the research of those practices from the viewpoint of a formerly failing school.

Further research of studies on school systems confirmed that schools are not all equal in terms of levels of academic progress, instructional resources, or students’ needs. To meet accountability measures, including Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), leaders must investigate the existence of disparities and determine justifications of the practices causing those educational disparities among students (Barton & Larson, 2012). Those leaders included not only the Superintendents of the districts but also the principals and their administrations. They would make the crucial decisions regarding instruction, curriculum, and the faculty. The faculty then has the responsibility of carrying out those policies and bringing about the desired improvement.

**Impact of academic reform on teachers.** The emphasis of high stakes testing as accountability measures of student performance by policymakers created an accountability
culture for both the principals and teachers (Firestone, 2009). The impact on the two groups has not been the same and has led to various behaviors within school districts with the shared purpose of improving student achievements. Studies revealed administrators resented the public emphasis on testing results because now they were forced to make immediate changes to improve the status of their schools (Firestone, 2009; Linn, 2003; Vali & Buese, 2007). Administrators instituted policy and curriculum changes due to pressure to meet the passing benchmarks for achievement and used their leadership to obtain compliance from their teachers (Firestone, 2009; Schuler, 2017; Vali & Buese, 2007). Teachers performed under these conditions created by the responses to high stakes testing by ensuring their classroom instructional choices aligned with the given educational policies.

Although teachers shared the mission of high student achievement, studies revealed evidence of teacher frustration. Teachers have given accounts of a lack of understanding the need for different policy and curriculum changes to address low student achievement because they were not able to have input in the changes before implementation of the chosen curriculum (Firestone, 2009; Vali & Buese, 2007). Authors concluded teachers were concerned that policymaking based on external data of student assessments was limiting their instructional choices and interactions with their students. Failing assessments would result in standardized changes in the curriculum without further inquiry of the teachers about the realities of the students’ classroom needs (Firestone, 2009; Linn, 2003; Vali & Buese, 2007).

The finding by Vali and Buese (2007) that the impact of high stakes testing and other accountability measures on teachers had not been accurately assessed by policymakers was the foundation for additional studies on teachers’ behaviors with accountability measures. A common denominator found among the few studies was the importance of the teachers’
acceptance of the changed educational policies for the benefit of student achievement. Another common denominator was the belief by the teachers that all students can learn, and teachers should have the freedom to make instructional choices based actual classroom needs versus external data assessments (Firestone, 2009; Schuler, 2017).

Woodward (2011) explored the lived experiences of teachers and the pressure of meeting high stakes testing for additional knowledge of the impact on teachers. Findings were that teachers felt the standardization of the curriculum to ensure students performed well on the tests was turning them into robots. Concerns were raised by the teachers that students were being tested and assessed on subjects they did not actually know, and levels of achievement and teacher performance were not accurate. Additionally, Woodward (2011) revealed teachers felt demeaned as administrators and outside specialists pressured them to implement curriculum to address problems with failing students without seeking input. The conclusion was that policymakers should go into the classroom and get input from teachers regarding curriculum and teaching practices for successful students. Literature in this area is limited, and this focus study expanded on the findings of Woodward (2011) with additional knowledge from the lived experiences of teachers in a CTE that had failing assessments.

**Triage in Education**

The utilization of high stakes testing in educational reform for decisions regarding allocation of resources was compared to how decisions are made in a medical emergency room to triage the most critical injuries with the resources available (Gilborn & Youdell, 2000; Mathews, 2008). Authors found demarcations between educational and instructional triage when educators have made allocations of their limited resources to meet accountability demands (Hunt, 2009; Jennings & Sohn, 2014; Mathews, 2008). Authors found incidences where the
behaviors of educators resembled triage although the behaviors were not classified as triage (Gonzales, 2017; O’Mara, 2014; Rozycki, 1999; Trolian & Fouts, 2011).

**Educational triage.** Like the urgency demonstrated by nurses who run to those patients needing immediate care before treating those who can afford to be tended to later, educators demonstrate the same level of urgency as they use educational triage to make maximum use of limited resources of monies and materials. Mathews (2008) further concluded triage was intervention necessary to prevent academic failures created by the promotion of students to grade levels without achieving mastery of skills for their present levels. Scholars vary on exact definitions for educational triage; however, the common denominator evidenced is the component of the allocation of resources to better impact student performance. For example, educational triage has been described as allocation of resources by balancing the impracticability of the intervention side by side with the number of students in dire need of intervention once the comprehensiveness of the care for the student has been determined (Prinsloo & Slade, 2014). However, when teachers allocate resources during the triage, they may further distinguish students by their race or socioeconomic status (O’Mara, 2014).

The more prevalent distinctions regarding the students made by administrators are seen when there are changes in the assessment scores once the allocation of resources have been completed. Additionally, educational triage has been defined as occurring when there is a disproportionate assessment increase among the students who were borderline passing as compared to the gains of students at either the low or high end of the scores. Those students whose scores are near the passing benchmarks have been termed as “bubble kids,” and their existence have served as an incentive for educators to implement triage for the sake of moving a school from failing to passing status (Ballou & Springer, 2017).
Authors have found the notion of educational triage was described as an unintended consequence of meeting accountability measures such as high stakes testing (Marran, 2004). Educational triage has been referred indirectly by describing the behaviors of those teachers as they worked hard to improve the test scores (Hardy & Lewis, 2017). Administrators established the educational policies the teachers must either implement successfully or risk losing their jobs. As a result, some of the teachers have engaged in triage with those students close to achieving the benchmark scores (Booher-Jennings, 2005). The complaints from some educators and legislators included the concept that the use of triage created educational inequality with the failure to educate lower achieving students. Those students who were not reached out to then fell out of the educational pipeline (Hursh, 2005). On the other hand, some educators believed triage could be a positive tool if the administration would enact policies that would facilitate the ease of teacher workloads (Carr, 2017).

Deciding which students to target so that the assessment benchmarks could be met became the responsibility of the teachers. Krieg (2011) found the practices of steering limited resources to those students who need aid to meet the scores was done in one study to meet the Average Yearly Progress (AYP) benchmarks instead of using those resources on students otherwise able to pass without extra help as strategic instruction. The AYP assessments are benchmarks and are considered high stakes tests since those results are used to see which schools or district have achieved, have failed, or should be sanctioned. Jennings and Sohn (2014) concluded triage had been done intentionally when educators focused on students near passing because the educators will be rewarded professionally with promotions or recommendations upon the students’ passing or earning specific scores. In preparation for the test, the teachers
would focus on those students the curriculum and questions which might be asked on the test. This practice of teaching to the test was labeled as educational triage (Jennings & Sohn, 2014).

Scholars revealed that teachers had different experiences with educational triage. One study found teachers believed the pressures of high stakes testing was forcing them to dedicate instruction time to teaching to the test or educational triage (Gonzalez, 2016). The testing required more instruction in mathematics and language arts and less instruction on the rest of the subjects such as music or art. Furthermore, the teachers complained that the triage responses had resulted in the students learning short-term knowledge enough for passing the tests but not for future achievement (Gonzalez, 2016). In another study, educational triage was negatively impacting teachers and their daily instructional time. Teachers in a nationwide survey defined educational triage as having to make decisions every day about what things could or could not be done during their instructional time (Carr, 2017). With growing workloads, the teachers had to decrease learning time to complete administrative tasks. The teachers concluded the survey by suggesting that educational triage could be avoided if there were more staff; the elimination of ineffective policies; and, the decrease of data gathering, and the time mandated for face-to-face instruction (Carr, 2017).

**Instructional triage.** Some educators have chosen to structure their methods of instruction based on the assessments of all the students regardless of their levels of achievement versus focusing on a select group of students who were near the passing benchmark. This type of triage was defined by the authors to be instructional triage and the curriculum choices are made according to the subjects where all the students needed assistance (Jennings & Sohn, 2014). Instructional triage may require strategic thinking on the part of the administrators (Grissom, Kalogrides & Loeb, 2017). Authors found evidence of strategic placement of the effective
teachers in the grades and subjects that are tested and placed the remaining teachers in the areas that required less accountability. The administrators made a differentiation between low-stake and high-stake classrooms (Grissom et al., 2017). The results found that the triage produced a greater impact not only on student performance, but also on early childhood development of those students in the low-stakes classes.

Scholars have found evidence that educational and instructional triage may be utilized together in some locations. One school district made the intentional decision to employ both types of triage with handicapped students in a middle school to prevent those students from failing (McIntosh et al., 2011). With the shared goal of not passing those students without addressing their weaknesses, the administrators created three tiers and determined the level of support needed for each tier of children based on the individual assessments of the child’s academic skills and knowledge. This district-wide response using educational and instructional triage was labeled RTI-Response to Intervention (McIntosh et al., 2011). Focus groups in Arkansas revealed how the teachers implemented educational and instructional triage in their schools. The teachers would focus on those students who needed assistance to be successful on the tests while collaborating among themselves to use the actual testing and standards as guidance for their instruction plans for all the students (Buck, Ritter, Jensen & Rose, 2010).

**Triage and accountability.** The debates on accountability in education became complicated as local school district achievements were connected to state and federal funding decisions (Hunt, 2009). Monies needed for localities to meet federal and state benchmarks became increasingly uncertain and competitive as districts struggled with limited resources to obtain levels of proficiency. Policies implemented on the behalf of educational reform demanded accountability and had direct impact on the allocation of resources to the schools (Jennings &
Sohn, 2014). The direct impact has been the use of triage to meet the proficiency-based standards and target those students who are borderline passing.

Researchers have determined studies of educational triage used to measure student growth and learning have mixed results due to the differences in curriculum and standards among the states (Lauen & Gladdis, 2012). Educational reform includes the mandate that people will respond and adhere to the standards. Instead of creating a national set of standards for all states to adhere to, Congress allowed each state the flexibility to set the standards of measurements for all their school districts. Maleyko and Gawlik (2011) concluded comparisons of AYP statistics cannot be made due to different standards for measurements being used by the states. The standards used are critical because those standards could force some systems to perform educational triage unnecessarily on one set of students (Maleyko & Gawlik, 2011). Consistent standards could impact how much triage if any may be necessary to obtain passing marks. One study concluded the level of harm done by triage to students with low scores may be minimal if the standards for that state or those states are not high.

Lauen and Gladdis (2012) began their study expecting to find evidence of educational triage where the schools were faced with an accountability threat and the level of the accountability measures. An accountability threat would exist if the school had failed the assessments and could lose accreditation or funding. There was evidence of greater incentives to triage those students near the proficiency levels where accountability threats existed thereby creating an accountability gap between students at the low and high achievement levels. The researchers concluded that when studying for educational triage, the researcher must balance the academic standards or benchmarks and the schools’ performance overall with the likelihood of the need to triage (Lauen & Gladdis, 2012). The lower the standards of accountability, the lower
the incentives to triage. Additionally, there was evidence of more educational triage in failing schools with too many students with low assessments.

There has been research with mixed results about educational triage creating an accountability gap. Failing schools in Indiana and Minnesota were investigated for triagic responses among the students who were borderline passing and those students at both the low and high ends of achievement (Ballou & Springer, 2017). In that study, there was no indication of educational triage because there were no accountability gaps. The increases among the three groups was not disproportionate and the middle range group did not show an increase in scores to the detriment of the other groups. The researchers did find evidence of changes in the instructional policies and decisions, which benefitted all the low achievers versus those in the middle range of performance. The educators had concentrated on raising the scores of the students across the board. No evidence of educational triage was found among seniors where educational triage was expected to be found to assist low achievers in the terminal 12th grade. Although the researchers concluded there was no evidence of educational triage, one might conclude they presented evidence of instructional triage.

**Triagic behaviors.** Teachers have indicated through surveys that they fear the state would take over their school system if their students failed the tests (Hunt, 2009). Teachers have engaged in triagic behaviors not only to maintain student progress but also to do remediation in content areas reflected by high-stakes testing (Gonzales, 2017). The focus groups with those teachers indicated their stress levels were high due to the pressure to triage because the expectation of high-stakes testing was that every student had to be proficient despite their levels of achievement (Gonzales, 2017).
O’Mara (2014) conducted surveys of teachers and discovered that triage was deemed necessary to maintain the community’s positive perception of the school’s academic performance. The community was aware that the schools received federal funding, but the community was not aware of the extent to which the educators triaged to protect the funding. Funding to the schools was based on enrollment, and for some schools in the district, the enrollment increased because of the schools’ ability to have high assessments and consequentially more federal funding. To keep the scores high, the teachers triaged by guiding those students who were low achievers to attend other schools or take other pathways (O’Mara, 2014). Teachers involved in this process became disenchanted and disengaged from the system and some left the district. When teachers have been under pressure to perform, they also tend to become disengaged from those students who are not performing well. There have been revelations of teachers being unethical in their duties by helping the students cheat during testing when the incentives from the leadership require the students to improve their classroom performance. As teachers find a way to triage within their classrooms, some division and disengagement developed between the teachers, the students, and the school (Rozycki, 1999; Trolian & Fouts, 2011).

Those students not focused on may be the next ones to disengage and drop out of school. There is limited research where authors have measured the relationship of educational triage to student disengagement and school dropout rates, although the level of student disengagement has been recognized as a factor for dropout rates (Schoeneberger, 2012; Suh & Suh, 2006). Where there is little to no school engagement among adolescents, there could also be the potential for negative outcomes, to include dropping out of the educational pipeline altogether, juvenile delinquencies, and teenage pregnancies. The goal for all school districts must be academic
achievement for all (Suh & Suh, 2006). Educational engagement does not begin with high school. Schoeneberger (2012) has determined signs of poor attendance and tardiness are manifestations of a separation of that student from the school and is a process which occurs over time or longitudinally. The disinterest could manifest during early childhood years.

The research on school dropout rates has led to the importance of the role of the teacher. Schools with high dropout rates have been found to also have negative school or classroom climates. Authors have shown that where students have negative school or home environments and events such as failing tests or grades are chronic for those students, the eventual outcome will be the student alienating himself from anything and anybody associated with education (Blazer, 2007; Schoeneberger, 2012). Additional contributions to the unsuccessful school experiences of that student have been the classroom relationships of the teachers, students, and principals (Blazer, 2007). Included in the list of unsuccessful school experiences are high stakes testing and low scores which negatively impact the students’ self-confidence.

Status-based accountability measures have been shown by authors to encourage educational triage with data-driven allocation of resources to those students who are borderline in proficiencies (Lauen & Gladdis, 2012). Educators have also questioned the ability of status-based assessments to capture the level of student growth in metacognitive skills such as problem solving and critical thinking essential for the workforce of today (Lauen & Gladdis, 2011). Growth-based accountability measures have been offered by educators as a counter to academic or status-based accountability that could bring an end to the triagic mindset (O’Mara, 2014).

Researchers gathered data of evidence from teachers who were made to teach to the format of a standardized test and found the teachers preferred to take a more holistic approach of increasing student engagement and enjoyment in their learning as a long-term solution to
improving literacy skills. Physical education teachers in one study used instructional triage every day for making curriculum decisions with a framework based on TRIAGE—teaching, responsibility, intensity, activity, gain, and equity (Henkel, 2016). Every day, teachers would use the framework to prioritize their curriculum to meet the immediate needs of the students and produce positive outcomes.

A recent study did not contain a finding of triage, but the author evaluated the practice of manipulating data and its interpretations to give inaccurate pictures of success versus true pictures of failures (Hardy & Lewis, 2017). What was not admitted during the study by the teachers was that the behavior of triage was the foundation for the data manipulation. In another study, behaviors of teachers were observed to meet the collective definition of educational triage. The term triage was not used by the participants, and there was no discussion of the leadership’s role in addressing those behaviors. Instead, the author revealed how the teachers believed in their capability of making a difference in student achievement (Gonzalez et al., 2016). The study did include findings by the author that the teachers’ performances were impacted by the pressures of the test scores of both high and low stakes testing. There was no investigation of the perceptions of those teachers regarding the need to make a difference in student learning coupled with the pressure to make that difference.

**Review of Methodological Issues**

In the literature, most of the studies employed qualitative methodology for investigations of academic reform. The forms of qualitative research varied from historical to case studies (Geno, 2014; Hollingworth, 2008; Jennings & Sohn, 2014; Martin, 2016; Schuler, 2017). When researchers addressed the concepts of triage, high stakes testing and teachers’ responses, mixed methods of quantitative and qualitative approaches were employed (Gonzales, 2017; Polikoff et
al., 2014). It became apparent that qualitative methodology was the preferred methodology for this study.

The issue was which research design would be the best to use to interpret data from the CTE teachers. Although researchers who investigated the impact of phenomena on teachers used a phenomenological research design to elicit the accounts of their lived experiences (Geno, 2014; Schuler, 2017), one study specifically mentioned the use of a hermeneutical phenomenological design Woodward, 2011). This specificity is important because the author left open the possibility of a double hermeneutical approach where the interpretations by the teachers of their lived experiences could subsequently be interpreted by the researcher. Double hermeneutical phenomenological design is the foundation for the IPA which this present study employed to investigate the lived experiences of the CTE teachers. Understanding the experiences with a double hermeneutic interpretative phenomenological study of the impact of educational or instructional triage on secondary CTE teachers could enhance the knowledge within the traditional education environment and influence future policymaking for academic reform.

**Synthesis of Research**

I researched the indicators for academic reform and the measures by which administrators and teachers are held accountable. I reviewed the literature on academic reform in traditional education settings where school districts have low student achievement. Those achievements are revealed publicly with the results of high stakes testing mandated by federal and state policymakers, and low assessments are indicators of not only failing students but also poor performances of teachers (Hollingworth, 2008; Levine & Levine, 2013). Administrators and teachers are mandated to make modifications in instruction to raise the assessments to the required levels. Authors have indicated perceptions of certain students as incapable of
succeeding exists in the form of deficit thinking (Skrla & Scheuric, 2001; Valencia, 1997). Educational and instructional triage have been used as tools to obtain expedient compliance to the accountability measures (Booher-Jennings, 2005; Jennings & Sohn, 2014). The ultimate goal for academic reform was the raising of the level of achievement for all students.

I reviewed studies regarding career and technical education and found one study categorizing licensing and credentialing assessments as high stakes testing similar to those tests used as accountability measures in traditional educational settings. I reviewed literature outlining the foundation of organizational theories by Taylor (1911), Perrow (1961), March (1981) and Senge (1990). Organizational theory was used to explain management decision making processes and the relationship between the administration and the teachers in the career and technical education site for this research.

**Critique of Previous Research**

The critique of some of the previous research regarding academic reform and triage concerns the demographics of the populations or the source of the data used for the studies. For example, I observed how the sources for data were too limited in the target jurisdiction, and the applications of the findings were restricted because of the demographics (Springer, 2008). In that study, where cultural demographics such as low income and racial diversity were not factors for obtaining the sample, the results were somewhat predictable and skewed (Springer, 2008). The warrant might be logical, but the claim could have been different if the cultural variables had been different. The students and instructors being studied were of middle to high income and the scores that were low were not that far from the desired marks, so little triage if any was noted (Springer, 2008). Additionally, this researcher found of low returns of the questionnaires used to collect data. Limited discussion was provided to explain the low participation. Areas of inquiry
such as disclosure of the way questionnaires were distributed or what instructions if any were given could have provided clarification (Ibrahim, Ghavifekr, Ling, Siraj, & Azeez, 2014). One would also question how honest the participants were in their answers about their leadership and with their self-reporting (Eden, Avolio & Shamir, 2002).

There were no studies found which discussed teachers in failing CTE schools. There were no studies found of investigations of the experiences of those teachers with triage in career and technical education schools. Subsequently, there were few if any studies which gave the perspectives of the teachers as they worked to meet the mandate of improving student performance within a short period of time. Likewise, there were no studies found which gave the perspectives of teachers in career and technical education as they worked on the secondary level to meet the mandate of improving and assuring successful licensing and credentialing for graduation.

The topic of educational triage in formerly failing schools and in CTE schools has not had extensive research. The focus of this interpretative, phenomenological study included the investigation of the educational triage from the perspectives of the teachers who are responsible for instruction of those students in a formerly failing CTE school. Interviews provided the data for the study. Data collected was analyzed to obtain full understanding of the meanings behind the lived experiences of the teachers.

I found studies in the literature review that utilized either qualitative or mixed methods examining data for evidence of triage but found very few phenomenological studies of the teachers or of the teachers’ perceptions of triage. The issue within this study was to use the interpretative phenomenological analysis approach with semistructured interviews followed by phenomenological interpretation of inductive and deductive reasoning to give meanings to the
accounts. The theory behind this proposed research was that triage does influence the teachers mandated to improve the level of assessment scores in schools, and the perceptions of those teachers providing instruction could possibly influence the view of triage and the influence of teachers in the implementation of educational policies. Vital to this area was the interpretations given by the teachers of their circumstances which may have led to using triage such as external or internal accountability measures (O’Mara, 2014).

**Summary**

I began Chapter 2 with a review of the research strategy used for this focus study. Different data bases were utilized with terms that included *academic reform* and *educational triage*. With the use of Boolean logic, additional terms were included as they surfaced during the research. I used the information collected to develop a conceptual framework with organizational theory as the foundation for exploring behaviors of teachers in a career and technical education school. Using the conceptual framework, I conducted an historical review of theorists starting with the works of Peter Taylor and scientific management. Taylor (1911) opined that efficient operations require management to scientifically determine what tasks can be done by the best trained workers in the fastest amount of time. Management has the responsibility to train those workers in the methods most expedient for the operations of the company. Taylor instructed Morris Llewellyn Cook in scientific management for the purposes of applying scientific management to fields outside of the industrial context. Cook (1910) applied scientific management to education and the management structure in higher education with a president, deans and faculty.

Taylor’s works laid the foundation for further development of organizational theories by Perrow (1961), March (1981) and Senge (1990). The opportunities for decision-making may
arise as organizations make changes in response to changes in the environments where the organizations operate. Senge (1990) expanded organizational theory to include the category of learning organizations where members engage in continuous learning for the growth of themselves and their organizations. Educational institutions are considered learning organizations where the levels of the organizations are the administrators, the teachers, and the students. These theories provided the foundation for understanding the behaviors of actions taken by the teachers in this focus study. Using the conceptual framework, I focused on knowledge of topics relevant to the areas of academic reform and triage in the literature review.

Academic reform was connected by policymakers to federal funding to states to ensure quality education and equality of education to all students (Butt, 2011; Hollingworth, 2008). Deficit thinking was discovered to be influential in the making of educational policies to address the low achievement of students on the premises of student deficiencies rather than deficiencies in the schools (Valencia, 1997). The accountability measures of academic reform have resulted in administrators having to address the failures of schools to educate evidenced by high stakes testing assessments, possibly evidence of displacement of deficit thinking (Sharma, 2018; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). I reviewed the impact of the accountability of high stakes testing assessments on administrators and teachers given that testing is high stakes because of its use for funding, staffing and accreditation decisions. I offered research on the level of input teachers had with curriculum development as administrators engage in academic reform to address student failures.

I provided knowledge in the literature review on the topic of triage in education as tool to respond to academic failures. Within the knowledge were the ideas of educational triage and choices made to improve the status of low achieving students; instructional triage with
instructional choices made to benefit students overall; and triage behaviors where no formal declaration of triage is made but behaviors shown indicate the purpose of addressing student failures in an expedient manner. My review of literature provided research of indicators of incentives to triage such as the protection of jobs and the prevention of states taking over the administration of schools. There was evidence of intentional use of triage as being beneficial to entire districts. On the other hand, I found in the literature the existence of negative consequences associated with triage to include student and teacher disengagement from the process. Teachers were also found to engage in data manipulation as a means of reaching the mandated benchmarks for student passage. I explain in Chapter 3 the interpretative phenomenological methodology used to discover the lived experiences of teachers in CTE relevant to the presence of triage as they complied with the mandate of moving failed students to passing status.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Policymakers effectuate academic reform by using testing assessments to measure levels of student achievement and gauge teacher performance. The results of the assessments are public and serve as the reasons for administrators to make organizational changes in failing schools with the goal of improving the results (Evans, Thornton, & Usinger, 2012; March, 1981; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). Teachers are uncertain how to move students from failing to passing status, and the role triage plays in the process is not clear. The need to address academic failures has resulted in the use of triage by some administrators and teachers to make curriculum choices that would distribute limited resources to the students for the most impact on improving student scores (Gilborn & Youdell, 2000; Mathews, 2008). The existence of triage in those circumstances, whether educational or instructional triage, has been assumed in traditional educational settings with the expectation that teachers in failing schools have incentives to triage. Those students must meet the desired benchmark levels of testing in critical areas such as math and English for accreditation and federal funding of their respective schools. Administrators in CTE are under pressure to have their teachers succeed in the areas of teacher performance and student achievement when their students fail on industry licensing and credentialing assessments (Geno, 2014). These teachers face the same dilemma of moving students from failing to passing, and the role of triage on teachers in failing CTE schools is not clearly defined nor understood by policy makers.

Using an interpretative phenomenological methodology and identifying the organizational behaviors present in the school organization provided better understanding and guidance for this research. Within Chapter 3, I outlined the research method of an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis that I used in obtaining the accounts of the CTE teachers of their
lived experiences for the effects of the accountability threats and triage as they move students from failing to passing status.

**Research Questions**

The research questions for this study were:

1. How does educational or instructional triage impact secondary teachers (Grades 10–12) in CTE schools?
2. What input do the teachers have in the development of CTE curriculum?

**Purpose and Design of the Study**

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of CTE secondary teachers (Grades 10–12) for the existence of educational or instructional triage as an effect of accountability threats on teachers who are moving students from failing to passing. CTE schools serve as the learning institutions for obtaining knowledge for vocational and industrial careers. The measures of student proficiencies are licensing and credentialing examinations, and the failing of those examinations by the students indicate the need for action to move those students from failing to passing for successful completion and graduation.

The preferred methodology for the exploration of experiences in life, different behaviors, and different viewpoints is qualitative research (Khan, 2014). Elliott, Fischer, and Rennie (1999) defined qualitative research as the tool that enables the researcher to understand the perspectives of individuals as they encounter phenomena in life. Qualitative research is the vehicle through which participants can become empowered as their voices are heard through their stories told the researcher, and their experiences can provide insight to any quantitative data used to explain circumstances in their lives (Friend & Caruthers, 2015).
The foundation for qualitative research has a framework consisting of knowledge claims, methods strategies or approach to inquiry, and the methods for conducting the research (Creswell, 2003). Knowledge claims are derived from philosophical and ontological assumptions made by the researcher. I used ontological assumptions where the knowledge being sought are the realities and perspectives of all participants (Hoijer, 2008). The approach best suited to exploring various perspectives and natural realities is the phenomenological design championed by Husserl (1931) and developed by subsequent researchers. Husserl (1931) works in phenomenological psychology continues to be the launchpad for research in other fields. Husserl (1931) opined the psychical occurs when an experience happens that causes one to reflect on the experience. The appearance of the psychical is the phenomena (Husserl, 1931).

To understand the phenomena, the researcher should practice epoché, bracketing the phenomena away from outside perceptions or assumptions so that the phenomena (the Noema) and the experience of the Noema (Noesis) can be fully understood (Husserl, 1931). Husserl investigated the phenomena and not the individual experiences. On the other hand, Heidegger, a student of Husserl, laid the groundwork for hermeneutical phenomenology where bracketing was not necessary because researchers needed to interpret the meanings of the experiences of the participants (Dowling, 2007). The researcher must have previous knowledge to use personal reflexivity upon the experiences explored during the studies. Heidegger believed the researcher could not separate from the study like a spectator because of the concept known as Dasien where one exists as a being and as a being in the world (Horrrigan-Kelly, Miller & Dowling, 2016). The researcher must be involved in the studies to be able to give interpretation to the phenomena.

The phenomenological design has become the foundation for various approaches to inquiry, one being the phenomenological-hermeneutical method labeled interpretative...
phenomenological analysis (IPA). This approach as introduced by Smith and Osburn (2003) has been used in broad fields to include education (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013). I have determined this methodology is well suited to investigate the experiences of the secondary CTE teachers with educational or instructional triage. IPA uses double hermeneutics to explore the lived experiences of the participants and the meaning the participants gave to the phenomena (Eatough & Smith, 2017). The meanings of the experiences are being interpreted by both the participants and the researcher in this latest phenomenological approach. IPA will enable the researcher to give voice to the teacher’s personal experiences and the shared experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2017). At all times, the participant is considered the expert in the experience and the researcher has the responsibility of facilitating the studies by questioning and responding to the first-hand accounts of the experience (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

Essential to understanding the meanings of the experiences of the participant will be the ability of the researcher in IPA to connect to the Lebenswelt or the lifeworld of the participants (Eatough & Smith, 2017). The lifeworld has been well acknowledged by noted scholars such as Husserl and Heidegger, and qualitative research has been considered enhanced by the inclusion of the lifeworld of the participants in understanding the experiences (Ashworth, 2016). The central question for researchers is what was the lifeworld that influenced the meanings of the participant’s experience. Ashworth (2016) summarized the elements of a lifeworld in terms of fractions that together help give meanings of the lived experiences. The fractions are selfhood, sociality, embodiment, temporality, spatiality, project, discourse, and moodiness (Ashworth, 2016). During data analysis, I explored the lifeworld of the participants to ensure full understanding of the first-hand accounts.
Research Population and Sampling Method

The school for this interpretative phenomenological study was a CTE school in the Mid Atlantic chosen because of its previous status of a failing school for 2013. Notably, testing results have remained above the proficiency benchmarks since 2014–2015. The school has a student enrollment of students in the 10th through 12th grades from three school districts and is labeled as a regional career and technical education center. Any of the 11th and 12th-grade students from the high schools in the three school districts can choose to attend the center to pursue industry licensing and credentialing through third-party examinations. The center receives federal funding according to the numbers of students participating and passing the credentialing tests and the enrollment in the center. The instructors must remain credentialed in their respective areas and equipment and software must be current with modern day industry requirements. This research focused on the one formerly failing secondary CTE center.

The research population of teachers for this school was a total of 10 teachers in the 16 clusters of technical and industrial occupations, seven are male and three are females. All of the teachers were White and all of them teach both eleventh- and twelfth-grade students. The years of teaching experience ranged from teaching for one year to having over 25 years-experience, with the average number of years teaching being 8 years. There were six of the 10 teachers who had only taught in a CTE environment, but all 10 teachers had professional licenses in their fields, which included law enforcement, nursing, masonry, cosmetology, automotive, Horticulture, and teaching. Only one teacher had a master’s degree at this time. Although some of the teachers were not employed by the site in 2013 when the site experienced the failing scores, all 10 have had experience with moving students from failing to passing in the career and technical education and were able to contribute to this research.
The small number of teachers allowed me as researcher the ability to fully delve into the meanings the teachers gave to the phenomena and to do a comparative analysis of all the responses from the teachers. There was no sampling method needed for this study. Furthermore, the population of 10 teachers would have been too small for the use of samples. During the analysis, Smith and Osburn (2003) suggested the researcher should be empathetic to the participants to encourage full openness, while also being suspicious about the accounts to allow critical thinking of the accounts for full understanding. This research is committed to ideography and maintained the integrity of the individual teachers by keeping the research population confined to the entire staff of teachers which numbered 10 and met the criteria for using a small population (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

**Participant Selection Logic**

When choosing participants for a qualitative research design the subject matter contained within the research question is a major factor to be considered (Saunders, 2012). Access to participants who have the type of data needed for this study is not always readily available given organizational barriers. Saunders (2012) suggested using an opportunist approach where access to the gatekeepers of a particular site or participants can be brokered through the use of friends or colleagues. Critical to participant selection is the knowledge of who the researcher needs to collect data from and the number of participants needed for data collection. For this research study, the opportunist approach was used for participant selection where the colleague and gatekeeper to a particular site was the same person, the principal of the CTE school. The selection of this particular site was the result of having been approached by the principal of this school. During a discussion with her about my chosen topic, she became extremely interested and offered her school as a study site. The subject matter was relevant to her school and her staff
of 10 teachers met the requirements for using an interpretative phenomenological analysis for my research.

**Procedures for Recruitment**

The principal suggested there was the possibility all 10 teachers would volunteer to participate in the research. Smith and Osburn (2003) noted the preferred size for an IPA was a smaller group of five to eight participants to allow for detailed and significant responses from a homogenous group for whom the phenomena has more meaning (Smith & Osburn, 2003). I requested a meeting with all of the staff so that I could discuss my research topic, answer any of their questions and gain their trust. During the meeting, I explained my research topic to them and gave them background knowledge from previous case studies regarding the topic of educational triage. I further detailed the importance of giving career and technical education teachers the opportunity to have their voices heard because there had been few if any interpretative phenomenological studies involving CTE teachers.

Written consent forms were distributed, signed, and returned, with each teacher keeping one copy of their signed consent. I explained how the interviews would proceed, the use of digital recording, their ability to fact check the interviews once transcribed, and how the data would be used. They agreed to complete the electronic Qualtrics survey where they would provide electronic informed consent and answer questions about their background. One-on-one interviews were scheduled covering the following three days with 100% participation. The teachers were provided with a copy of the questions that were going to be asked of them to give them a chance to do any research and to feel more at ease with the process as a whole.
Instrumentation

Interviews

One instrumentation in this investigation was a semistructured interview guided by interview protocol recommended for use in qualitative studies by Asmussen and Creswell (1995; see Appendix C). The use of this type of interview protocol has been preferred by scholars as a preferential method of soliciting deep insightful responses from participants (Alase, 2017). Essentially, a minimum number of questions followed up with questions prompted by the responses from the participants will enable determination of the impact of educational triage from the information elicited from the teachers as they share their experiences (Cooper, Fleisher & Cotton, 2012). I conducted the one-on-one interviews within three days after the initial group meeting that I had with all of the teachers in June 2019. The interviews were conducted in the conference room at the site. Although there were some basic questions to establish the background of the participant, all questions were open-ended questions to allow the participant to tell of experiences in the classroom with the students and educational or instructional triage.

Questionnaires

Another instrumentation used was a questionnaire I developed using Qualtrics for the purpose of collecting background information on the teachers (see Appendix D). Once the teachers provided electronic consent, they proceeded to answer questions about their ethnicity; the grades they taught; teaching experience; states where they have taught; any other disciplines they have taught; professional licenses held; and the highest level of degree held.

Data Collection

The most common method used for data collection in qualitative research are interviews conducted in person (Kegler et al., 2019). Two-thirds of the interviews used a semistructured
framework for the interview questions. Semistructured interviews utilize general questions covering topics and subtopics to engage the interviewee in a conversation-form of communication (Pathak & Intratat, 2012). With semistructured interviews, there can be subsequent questions asked based on responses provided by the participants (Rabionet, 2011). This form of communication enables the interviewer to probe deeper with specific questions on issues as they emerge during the interview. Pathak and Intratat (2012) further suggested the interviewer should build a rapport by sharing common experiences and use thought-provoking interjections signaling the desire to hear more from the interviewee. The principal had allowed me to hold a group meeting with all of the 10 teachers as a form of introducing myself and my research topic. It was during this meeting that I obtained verbal and written consent for their participation and interview times and dates were established. I conducted the interviews with each of the teachers at the site in their conference room. The students had been released for the summer and these interviews were conducted during the last workdays for the school year. Each teacher had their copy of the interview questions previously distributed at the group meeting. Some brought their copies in with notes they had made during their preparation of experiences or examples they wanted to make sure they included in their responses.

Before we began with the questions, I let them pick a pseudonym to ensure their confidentiality, and they chose to use the names of states. For the purposes of this study, I have substituted other labels to facilitate the analysis. I used their experiences to collect data on their history with the site at the time of the failing assessments; their knowledge of triage; their experiences with triage and moving students from failing to passing; and their comments or advice to others regarding failing students and triage. During the interviews, I made field notes in my notebook, indicating gestures and other observations of the demeanor of the teachers during
their responses. I used two methods for electronically recording the interviews. The first method was a small hand-held digital recorder, and the second method was the Voice Recorder application on my phone which also transcribes recordings. All interviews were transcribed by me, forwarded to the teachers for member-checking, and secured in a locked container once the data analysis process was completed and then destroyed. I aggregated the data by reviewing the transcriptions, the notes taken during the interviews, and the audio recordings to ensure all data had been captured and collected.

**Identification of Attributes**

Attributes for this study evolve from the conceptual framework established with the scientific management of Taylor (1911); organizational theory of Perrow (1967); organizational change theory of March (1981); continuous learning and learning organization theory of Senge (1990). Additional attributes evolved from the works in deficit thinking espoused by Valencia (1997) and in triage by Mathews (2008). Greenhalgh and Neslin (1981) have found that although there may be many attributes only a few can actually be evaluated in a study. A suggested framework is to have a generic attribute that is further defined by levels that would either be nominal or metric in with regards to the characteristics of the attribute as a whole. The generic attributes identified in my research study were as follows: scientific management, technology, organizational changes, learning organization, deficit thinking, and triage behaviors. This exploration of lived experiences of secondary CTE teachers focused on the existence of educational or instructional triage as an effect of accountability threats on teachers moving students from failing to passing.

The first attribute of scientific management can be further defined as the existence of cooperation between the administration and the teachers to obtain the greatest amount of work in
the fastest time. This attribute is characteristic of scientific management to produce work efficiently with optimal output (Taylor, 1911). The next attribute of technology refers to the work that is produced by an organization to effect changes. Perrow (1967) opined one major function of an organization is to produce work that will effect changes on raw materials such as people. The next attribute of importance is organizational changes made as an organization seeks to be productive in its environment. Organizational changes can be further described as the actions taken by an organization in response to changes in its environment, and this attribute aligns with the theory of organizational changes espoused by March (1981). The attribute of a learning organization can be further defined by the several levels assigned to learning organizations by Senge (1990). Those additional levels of the attribute include shared visions, team learning, personal mastery, mental models, and systems thinking. All levels contribute to the goal of continuous learning by those in the organization.

Another attribute that will be focused on are those characteristics of triage behaviors as aligned with definitions provided by March (2008) which believed incentives to triage may be evidenced by certain actions taken to address failings of high stakes testing and disengagement by teachers and students. The last attribute focused on is deficit thinking where failures are attributed to internal deficiencies rather than external deficiencies (Valencia, 1997). This research study will be based on these attributes as exploration is done into the impact of triage on career and technical education teachers, and the presence or absence of teacher input in curriculum development to address the issues of the failing performances.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

The data analysis procedure followed the model for IPA as proscribed by Smith and Osburn (2003). The process detailed by Smith and Osburn (2003) was initiated with a meeting
with the teachers for a transcript review. Afterwards, I utilized open coding to analyze the reviewed transcripts. After several readings of the transcript, Smith and Osburn (2003) proscribed that I note significant statements or phrases in the left margin of the transcript. Comments can be made on any contradictions, emphasis, or make preliminary interpretations, because IPA has no restrictions placed on commentary. In the right margin, themes are noted as they emerge utilizing the process of axial coding.

The next step in the analysis was to return to the beginning of the transcript to use the commentary in the left-hand margin to come up with phrases. Those phrases facilitate the creation of themes to explain the commentary. I continued this process through the entire transcript, repeating some themes if they re-emerged. The next stage of the analysis was the placement of themes on a sheet of paper specifically in the order they were identified in the transcript. I used the chronological ordering to connect the themes to the actual words of the participants in the transcript. The order is also important if the themes contain commentary on actions or observations of the participants at the time of the interview. Using the process of selective coding, I connected those themes for deeper analysis of the interview using clustering. The themes were clustered using not only my interpretation of what was said, but by also checking the clustering against the actual words used by the teacher. The themes would be considered subordinate to the newly created superordinate label given to the clustering of the themes.

The themes were put in a table that I created with the superordinate theme, the subordinate themes and the supporting identifiers to include verbatim quotes from the transcript. During this process, I was able to determine that some of the themes were incompatible or were not evidenced in the accounts. Once the table was done for the first interview, the process was
repeated with another interview. Each interview was analyzed in this manner (Smith & Osburn, 2003; Willig, 2008). Schulz (2012) recommends the deductive-inductive approach to the analysis of the interviews should also be applied to the use of the examinations of direct quotations taken from the interview so that the researcher can have a deeper understanding of the phenomena.

A master table of superordinate themes and their respective subordinate themes was compiled. The master table served as foundation for the subsequent narrative account which will include verbatim statements from the teachers (Smith & Osburn, 2003). Data analysis will be complete with a thematic analysis of the superordinate themes prevalent in the lived experiences (see Appendix E; Smith & Osburn, 2003).

**Limitations of the Research Design**

Limitations are those boundaries within your research that are not in your control and could possibly affect the study (Simon, 2011). The first limitation was the available time for interviewing the teachers. The administration limited the availability of time for contact with the teachers to the last week of the school semester because the teachers’ contracts would end. Contracts are renewed the beginning of each school year, and if the teachers were not on contract, they were not available to me for interviews or any other contact without their permission. This limitation was handled with the scheduling of the one-on-one interviews during the last week and the individual teachers voluntarily providing their information for subsequent contact by me during the summer. The second limitation was the possibility of interviewing teachers new to the school with limited knowledge of when the school itself was failing in student assessments in 2013. This limitation could have an impact on the research that depends on the richness of lived experiences. To ensure the outcome of the research was not impacted, I broadened the study to include any lived experiences of moving failed students to passing to
include their classroom experiences within their respective programs in the CTE school. Those experiences would be separate from the experience collectively of moving a school’s status from failing to passing. The program could have students failing who need to pass while the school overall could have a passing status for student performances.

**Validation**

The research questions centered around the lived experiences of the teachers and the impact if any of educational or instructional triage. The different research questions developed from the central research of the impact of the phenomena on the formerly failing school will allow for the researcher to do the interpretative phenomenological study. To ensure validity, the participants were provided the transcripts of the interview along with the master table of the superordinate and subordinate themes for them to check for accuracy and correctness. The study was done in accordance with criteria used to validate qualitative research (Elliott et al., 1999). The criteria includes providing descriptive data of the participants, the researcher’s knowledge and perceptions, and the inclusion of the methods used for data collection and analysis to allow replication (Elliott et al., 1999). I also maintained a reflexive journal as data was analyzed and constantly reviewed the journal to make sure there were no misrepresentations of the first-hand accounts of the teachers (Elliott et al., 1999).

**Credibility**

The purpose for an IPA is to give voice to lived experiences by enabling the participants to make sense of their experiences, and credibility and trustworthiness are necessary to be established between the researcher and the participants (Peat, Rodriguez, & Smith, 2018). I began establishing a trust relationship with a group meeting between myself and the teachers and facilitated by the administrator. During this meeting, I disclosed the purpose of my research and
the desire to have them share their experiences with triage and CTE. Their enthusiasm and willingness to provide consent verified I had succeeded in establishing credibility with them.

IPA further required epoché with the bracketing of my preconceived notions of triage so that I could provide clear interpretations to the meanings shared by the teachers. Smith (2009) noted that IPA relies on double hermeneutics where the teachers give sense to the meaning of their experiences and I provide interpretations of those meanings during the data analysis. Peat, Rodriguez and Smith (2018) commented that strategies used to establish credibility include reflexivity between the teachers and myself during the interviews as we discuss commonalities among ourselves while the teachers are answering the interview questions. Additionally, the teachers engaged in participant verification when they member checked the transcriptions and audio of their interviews to ensure their voices were being heard and my interpretations of their accounts were accurate. The interview questions were aligned with several themes relevant to the research question. The data collected was triangulated with the survey and the interviews to ensure that the research included the collective experiences and perceptions of every teacher.

** Dependability**

Qualitative research should be dependable in that the study can be repeated by others because the research was done in a controlled manner (Hamberg, Johansson, Lindgren, & Westman, 1994). The research process should have steps included to ensure consistency to facilitate repetition by others in the future. The findings of this research were subjected to triangulation of the interviews and the surveys. The interviews provided details of the experiences while the surveys of all of the teachers provided justification for the depth of their experiences. The research process included member checking of both the written transcriptions and audio recordings of the interviews; cross checking the superordinate themes and subordinate
themes with the actual accounts of the teachers to validate interpretations and coding; and cross checking the interpretations with field notes made during the interviews. The goal of using the different strategies was to make sure the lived experiences were shared with the rich data supplied directly from the teachers.

**Expected Findings**

I expected findings of the teachers using educational or instructional triage to improve the passage rates for licensing within their individual programs. Because licensing and credentialing are done the senior year, I expected findings of educational triage during the senior years of students at the CTE school. I expected every teacher to be involved somewhat in educational triage with their failing senior students who needed to obtain the credential for high school graduation. I expected instructional triage to take place primarily during the junior year with the students in a group in the respective program as the students became acclimated to the respective vocation and necessary skills.

**Ethical Issues**

Ethical issues can arise at any time during data collection in qualitative research because there is the responsibility to respect the individual participant who owns the account providing the data (Creswell & Poth, 2017). To not place the teachers at any risk due to our research I had to anticipate potential issues through the use of informed consent, confidentiality, and avoidance of deception. Ethical considerations could have existed because the study of educational triage could have caused some concerns between the teachers and me as the researcher. The teachers could have felt some discomfort in disclosing the use of triage in order to meet the test assessments if the use of educational triage has not been discussed or otherwise encouraged by the administration. At the beginning of the project, full disclosure of the purpose for this research
was provided to each teacher to obtain their informed consent (Rabionet, 2011). The issues being researched required their willingness to interact by responding openly in the interviews. Therefore, the teachers were told how long the research should last, their right to take themselves out of the study at any time, and that once the analysis of their elicited responses had been done, all data from them will be archived for a brief period and destroyed afterwards (Smith & Osburn, 2003). Confidentiality and the measures that will be taken to protect their identities and participation was discussed not only at the beginning of the project but also during the research.

Interaction was mandatory between me and the teachers with the use of interviews to obtain data. To gain trust of the teachers, confidentiality was given to protect their identities. Confidentiality statements was provided with the understanding their data would be used and shared only after the data had been coded (Smith & Osburn, 2003). This was achieved by choosing a substitute identifier to be used in the study. Direct quotations from interviews used for data analysis did not contain references to the legal name, the teacher’s classroom, or specific location within a site because those identifiers could lead to the disclosure of the identity of the source. Disclaimers were provided. Any documentation gathered which contains sensitive data and/or names was shredded upon the completion of the research.

**Conflict of Interest Assessment**

The assessment of conflicts of interest is necessary to ensure no biases affect the outcome of the research. I had no personal or financial connection to the chosen schools. The chosen jurisdiction was not my home district. Furthermore, I was not aware of any bias that would lend itself to a conflict of interest.

The role of the researcher in a qualitative research study requires the researcher to assure stakeholders of his or her capability to do the study. The qualitative researcher can begin meeting
stakeholder expectations by describing whether the perspective during the study will be etic as an outsider, or emic as an insider (Simon, 2011). This research study was done using an emic perspective. Orb, Eisenhower, and Wynaden (2011) opined that a researcher wanting to have an emic perspective should have the willingness of participants to be involved and share their experiences. When the researcher listens to their experiences and gives voice to their accounts with his or her interpretations, those interpretations are described as given with an emic perspective (Orb et al., 2011). The qualitative researcher has the responsibility of describing, analyzing, and interpreting data thereby becoming the main research instrument (McCaslin & Scott, 2003).

The researcher who provides interpretation has been described as a bricoleur (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The interpretative bricoleur will use whatever tools and strategies to form interpretations using interactions with the participants and his or her own attributes. The goal of the researcher is to have interpretations so inviting that the readers can live the moments of the experiences being shared (Denzin, 2009). After obtaining approval from the committee and Concordia University–Portland Institutional Review Board, I contacted the principal of the study site. I began forming relationships with the teachers with an introductory meeting where they provided verbal and subsequently electronic consent to the study. The electronic consents were received when they individually participated in the Qualtrics survey. I conducted semistructured interviews; transcribed the interviews; and sent both the transcriptions and audio files of the interviews to the teachers for member checking. I analyzed the accounts by synthesizing and interpreting the data from the interviews. I had no conflict of interest that would compromise my role as researcher or would bias my interpretations of the data.
Researcher’s Position

Although I have not had the opportunity to teach high school students in a CTE setting, I had limited opportunities to serve as a substitute teacher in high schools in the past. I relied upon my experiences of teaching in high schools and later in schools of higher education to form some perceptions of triage and moving students from failing to passing. However, none of my experiences involved being subjected to high stakes testing or similar circumstances as those faced by the teachers in my research study.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I presented the research questions for this interpretative phenomenological study of exploring how educational or instructional triage impacts secondary CTE teachers, and what input the teachers had in the development of CTE curriculum. In pursuit of data for this study, I assumed an emic perspective as an insider to get the voices of the teachers. This perspective allowed me to establish a relationship with the teachers while serving as the main research instrument for data collection. The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of CTE secondary teachers (Grades 10–12) for the existence of educational or instructional triage as an effect of accountability threats on teachers who are moving students from failing to passing. The chosen design for this study was interpretative phenomenological as the optimal design for getting lived experiences and accounts. The semistructured interviews of teachers were the primary source of data. Data collection and data analysis was done using established protocols. The IPA framework was used to develop themes from the words of the teachers necessary for the interpretations and analysis of the study, and the results and discussion were done in a narrative format to allow full
understanding and give voice to the meanings of the experiences as the teachers contributed to the transformation of the school’s assessments.

The research population was the entire staff of 10 teachers in one regional CTE school in the mid-Atlantic region. The opportunist approach was used to select the participating school because the principal of the selected school was a friend and colleague to myself. With the assistance of the colleague, I held a general meeting of all 10 teachers to solicit their participation and willingness to share their experiences which would provide me with the rich data needed to address my research question.

I used two types of instrumentation, the first being a survey through Qualtrics which asked questions regarding teaching experience, grades taught, and requested their informed consent to participate further in the research. The second instrument was a questionnaire I developed with 17 general questions about their knowledge of the school when the school had failed to meet the passing benchmarks; knowledge about triage; and their experiences with moving students from failing to passing. This questionnaire was used for the subsequent semistructured one-on-one interviews between me and the teachers. During the interviews, I collected data using my field notes in a journal, audio, and digital recordings with an application on my phone and a digital handheld recorder.

The theorists listed in the conceptual framework provided the foundation for the attributes I looked for during the course of my research. The attributes were scientific management and the collaboration between administration and teachers to get the best work done in the fastest amount of time; technology; organizational changes; learning organization; deficit thinking; and triage behaviors. These attributes if found would guide my research towards finding answers to the question of triage and input in curriculum development by the teachers. I
identified the data analysis procedures used in my research as the procedures set forth by Smith and Osburn (2003). I followed those procedures to interpret the accounts using the transcripts for emerging subordinate themes. After grouping the emerging themes under the umbrella of a superordinate theme, I placed the superordinate themes in a master table to explain the findings of the research.

I also described in Chapter 3 the areas where this research study has received validation. First, assumptions not in my control were expressed as well as the justifications for why those assumptions were probably true. The limitations of the study that were weaknesses not in my control were also mentioned in addition to the ways I addressed those weaknesses to prevent and effect on the outcome of this study. I listed the delimitations that I controlled such as delimited this study to the one regional career and technical education center because the teachers in this center had access to students from diverse jurisdictions and were conveniently in one location. I explained the study could be considered dependable because the processes used were stable and can be repeated by others in the future.

In Chapter 3, I recognized the importance of ascertaining ethical issues and that such issues could arise during the collection of data. It is important the teachers are not placed in risk due to this research therefore measures were taken to assure informed consent, confidentiality, and avoidance of deception. I emphasized the lack of a conflict of interest and my position of not having experienced working with students to address failures based on high stakes assessments, but my past experience of teaching students did cause me to have an awareness of the concept of triage. In Chapter 4, I provide an overview of the teachers who participated in the study, and an analysis of their responses to the questions posed during the interview. I discuss the methodology used to analyze the accounts to include the tool of the IPA to develop subordinate and
superordinate themes from the accounts of the teachers. A summary of the findings followed by a presentation of the data concludes the chapter.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

The research gathered in this interpretative phenomenological study explored the existence of educational or instructional triage on CTE secondary teachers as an effect of accountability threats on teachers moving students from failing to passing. The lived experiences were explored during semistructured interviews with the teachers and later through data analysis of those interviews. The use of triage to allocate available resources to the most critical areas of need had been explored in traditional education institutions, and the knowledge gained with the findings of this research provided insight into the impact of triage on teachers CTE.

Within Chapter 4, I provided a description of the teacher participants of the study. Following this description, I have detailed the methodology and the tools utilized for this interpretative phenomenological research, followed by an analysis of the data collected. The summary of the findings was presented which addressed the research questions how educational or instructional triage impacts secondary teachers in CTE schools, and what input teachers have in the development of CTE curriculum. Following the summary of the findings are the presentation of the data, the results, and then a summary for Chapter 4.

Description of the Participants

I utilized a Qualtrics questionnaire to collect data to describe each participant. The participants were a total of 10 teachers in the 16 clusters of technical and industrial occupations, seven males and three females. All of the teachers were White and all of them taught both 11th- and 12th-grade students. The years of teaching experience ranged from teaching for 1 year to having over 25 years’ experience, with the average number of years teaching being eight years. There were six of the 10 teachers who had only taught in a CTE environment, but all 10 teachers had professional licenses in their fields, which included law enforcement, nursing, masonry,
cosmetology, automotive, Horticulture, and teaching. Only one teacher had a master’s degree at this time. Although some of the teachers were not employed by the site in 2013 when the site experienced the failing scores, all 10 have had experience with moving students from failing to passing in CTE and were able to contribute to this research. The number of teachers met the criteria for using small groups to conduct an IPA (Smith & Osburn, 2003).

Methodology and Analysis

I chose the methodology of an interpretative phenomenological design to answer the questions posed by this study. With this design, I used double hermeneutics to explore the lived experiences of all 10 of the secondary teachers in the CTE school with educational or instructional triage (Eatough & Smith, 2017). After the teachers completed the Qualtrics questionnaire, the interviews were scheduled to begin the next day and were completed by the end of the week.

Semistructured interviews of 1-hour in duration were conducted of all 10 secondary teachers. In order to protect the identities of the participants, they were each given the name of a state as their identifier for this study, but those identifiers were later changed to other pseudonyms to facilitate analysis. The interviews were recorded electronically using a handheld digital recorder and an application on my cell phone named Voice Recorder to provide the ability to refer often to both the data for transcription and review. Additionally, field notes were taken in a journal of observations made during the interview for reference during subsequent analysis. I manually transcribed all 10 interviews verbatim using both recordings and a transcription created by the application. The transcripts were then formatted for analysis by both me and the teachers. The teachers engaged in fact-checking afterwards by reviewing both the transcripts and audio of the interviews, and they gave their approval of the transcriptions.
The subsequent analysis of the interviews was done within a flexible framework of stages of the IPA as outlined by Smith and Osborn (2003). IPA is a qualitative methodology which uses double hermeneutics as a means of understanding how participants experience a phenomenon (Alase, 2017). The flexibility enabled me to deviate from the protocol only to add an additional state of clustering themes to reduce the data to four primary superordinate themes due to the richness of data contained in the accounts of the teachers. I had the teachers to describe experiences through their perspectives, and then I had to make sense of the teachers’ experiences using their own interpretations (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This methodological approach was a good fit for this study because IPA is best done with small samples or populations where the descriptive accounts of the participants provide rich data for analysis (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011). Direct quotations from the teachers were used throughout the master table of superordinate themes as supporting evidence for the analysis.

The first stage of the analysis required readings of the teacher’s transcript and making comments in the left-hand margin of significant words or phrases. There were several readings because each reading provided a different insight to what was being said in the narrative (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The second stage of the analysis utilized axial coding with inductive and deductive reasoning to identify emerging themes and writing those themes in the right-hand margin of the transcript (Eatough & Smith, 2008). I had the challenge of ensuring the identified themes were intricately connected to the words of the teacher. As Smith and Osborn (2003) has noted, I found a repetition of themes as the transcript was read from the beginning to the end.

The third stage of the analysis required the chronological listing of the emerging themes as they appeared in the transcript on a sheet of paper. I listed relevant quotations with transcript page and paragraph number (herein referred to as identifiers) beside the emerging themes. Inductive and
deductive reasoning was ongoing and additional insights emerged from the actual words of the participants throughout the process. For the fourth stage, axial coding was used to cluster the emerging themes which presented views of the teachers on certain issues using analytical ordering (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

The rich data provided many clusters and I had to do additional axial coding by connecting clusters together and giving the connections a name as the superordinate theme. The fifth stage was to create a table of themes listing the superordinate theme and the related clusters of themes, along with identifiers for the locations of supporting words from the teacher as examples of the particular theme. It is important to note that not all themes or clusters were used if their use did not add to the body of evidence needed for the research (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

The five stages of analysis were repeated for each of the remaining teachers. I found during the remaining axial coding of the transcripts repetition of themes as well as new themes upon completion of the table of themes. There were convergences and divergences revealed in the analysis of the accounts of the lived experiences. The final stage in IPA is the construction of a master table of superordinate themes which have emerged from the analysis of all of the data. This stage was more challenging because I had to find a way to interpret and reduce the data and not lose the words of the teacher. Once the data was coded and prioritized, the data had been reduced to four superordinate themes in this study. Each superordinate theme was listed with relevant themes (clusters found in the table of themes from all teachers) listed as subthemes. The table also listed beneath the subthemes issues raised within the accounts that connected the words of the participants to the subthemes, and ultimately to the superordinate themes (see Appendix E). A table was also developed listing the designated participant and all identifiers connected with the participant that would be found in the master table.
Summary of the Findings

The experiences shared by the teachers were the basis for the findings for this research study. The teachers described their views on educational and instructional triage and the impact triage has had during their years teaching at the CTE school. The results revealed data of triage as well as the amount of participation the teachers had with the curriculum development in each of their respective programs. Across-the-board, there was a general consensus that the concept of triage was not only accepted but expected as an influencer in moving students from failing to passing and with instructional choices in general. The teachers lacked awareness of the demarcation between educational and instructional triage. The findings were clear that different relationships are vital to the triage of the students to ensure passage of examinations and success in the workplace, and these teachers described the various types of relationships they have experienced. The findings further revealed aftereffects of triage on the CTE teachers ranging from a sense of accomplishment to a concern about the present education system.

Question #1: How does educational or instructional triage impact secondary teachers (10–12) in CTE schools? The teachers admitted the phenomena of triage had a great impact in that triage is continuously utilized in CTE throughout the school year to ensure student success. The teachers noted they have an expectation that there is some amount of triage needed during their daily instructions to because of the different issues CTE students have. This level of expectation is contrary to the perception in the traditional education setting that triage was to be a tool used for only those students who failed and must be assisted to move from failing to passing. The teachers made little if any differentiation between the labels of educational or instructional triage and preferred instead to refer to triage in general terms. Throughout the interviews, the teachers gave details within their accounts illustrating how the administrator utilized triage to
meet the accountability measures for the passing/failing status of the school while the teachers focused on the passing/failing status of their individual programs.

**Question #2: What input do the teachers have in the development of CTE curriculum?** Because of the different relationships that exist between the teachers, students, and the administration, the teachers were able to describe their full involvement and input in the development of curriculum to address the failures of their students. The teachers have a large influence with the curriculum development due to the relationships the teachers have established with the students. The teachers develop and modify the curriculum based on their knowledge of the students’ weaknesses.

**Presentation of the Data and Results**

I collected data, then organized, and evaluated the data to answer the research questions of how educational or instructional triage impacts secondary teachers in CTE school, and what input the teachers have in the development of CTE curriculum. In this section, I presented the semistructured questions and the teachers’ responses received during the interview.

**Interviews**

One-on-one interviews were held with the teachers with 17 semistructured questions on the impact of educational or instructional triage in CTE, and the presence or absence of input in curriculum development. Each interview was scheduled for 60 minutes; however, because the teachers had been given a copy of the interview questions at the previous introductory meeting, the teachers came to the session prepared with recollections of their experiences to expedite the process. The interviews were conducted at the school over a three-day period during the last week of their contract. All students had been released for the summer, therefore there were no
time constraints or possibilities of distractions during the interview sessions. The interviews were recorded, and the following questions were used:

**Question #1: What are your experiences with the time of moving your school from failing status because of low passage rates for licensing and credentialing to passing status?**

The teachers responded by explaining whether they had knowledge of when their school had a failing status in 2013, and their responses dictated the context for the remainder of their responses to future questions. There were six teachers who expressed having no prior knowledge that the school had a failing status at one time nor had any knowledge of whether the passage rates were low or high. Their responses indicated teachers were more in tune with the status of their individual programs rather than the overall health of the school. For the remainder of the questionnaire, these teachers were asked to share their experiences in the context of their respective programs and moving failing students to passage status instead of the context of moving a school from failing to passing. Comments included:

- Paul: “This school is kinda almost like a university where each program has its own school. So, I didn’t have a lot of experience with the other programs. . . . There’s not a lot of shared tests failed, credentialing, not credentialing, between the programs. When I walked in here, I wouldn’t have guess [sic] this school had a failing status.”

- Ursula: “I haven’t really had very much experience. I didn’t have any prior knowledge of the school until I got here.”

- Dawn: “I didn’t know we were ever failing. I knew that my program had been not so great before I got here. It’s a two-year program [with 20 students]. Eight came by initially. The ninth one came back a couple weeks in. [The other 11] didn’t come back. They weren’t learning what they needed to learn.”
• Nate: “I wasn’t told of no failing status. Didn’t know if [the scores] were low, high

The remaining four of the 10 teachers were employed at the school in 2013 when the school had the failing status due to low passage rates on licensing and credentialing examinations. Overall, the teachers attributed the failing status of the school to issues with testing. The testing given by the state was considered more appropriate for persons who had prior experience in the particular trades and vocations and not for students who had yet to enter the industry. There was additional discussion that the state had mandated tests which did not align with the required competencies teachers were required to instruct their students. The administration and the teachers chose to evaluate other tests as a means of increasing student achievement. Comments included:

• Carl: “I know no student had ever passed the testing in the State [redacted] for the first couple of years because the testing was based on industry. It took a couple of years, I think, for the state to realize that they really needed to do a student testing. That made a difference. Then all of a sudden, students across the state started passing a test that was made for them, and not for me, for somebody that had two years’ experience in the field.”

• Victor: “We started looking at various industry certification tests that can be given in each subject area. They were not giving any industry certification tests. There were different credentialing tests. Their tests did not align with the [redacted] state curriculum. We got a blueprint of what would be on the tests, you know certain percentages . . . which we don’t teach. So, we looked at the Skills USA tests. Those tests aligned with our competencies’ list. And since then we have seen our scores come way up.”
Some of these same teachers indicated a concern the difficult tests and the placement of non-interested students indicated the state and administrators placed little importance on the goal of the students obtaining their credentials. Comments included:

- Michael: “We’ve come quite a ways from when I got here. The testing is being more, more forthcoming, and trying to get more, more of our students with some kind of, some kind of credentials when they get out. It wasn’t as important or that big a deal.”

- Carl: “We got a different type of students. We had GED students here all day. They didn’t want to be here. So, if you gave them an industry test, they just, you know, click, click, click, click, right down through it, and didn’t really take it seriously. And in my opinion the difference between the testing now and the testing then, and those GED students were taken away from here.”

**Question #2: What areas in the school were you working in?** The teachers responded accordingly: masonry, welding, cosmetology, nursing and nursing assistant, collision repair and automotive, criminal justice, electricity, and carpentry.

**Question #3: In order to understand your experiences, please describe your experiences in detail.** Three teachers agreed generally to share detailed accounts of the lived experiences within their respective programs with moving failing students to passing. Mack chose to detail the meeting in 2013 when the administrator was informing the teachers about the failing status:

- Mack: “I do remember because he sat at that end of the table and I sat right beside him. There was some conversation after that between the faculty about what we were going to do. That we weren’t getting the right students in here. You know, I looked down the table and saying, “What are yall doing out there?” I don’t know how they’re
recruiting. But you know the statement about us not passing, I think it was very subtle. It wasn’t like we weren’t going to meet some standard or something. He just didn’t really know what it meant.”

Victor chose to go into detail about the fault of the state and the particular testing the state was using to measure performance of students at the career and technical education schools as being foreign to the industry:

- Victor: “We’ve had to reevaluate certain tests and find the right tests that fits our programs. The industry itself, they don’t know anything about these tests. So, there’s a disconnect there with the actual people in industry understanding what these tests are. What we get [from businesses] is “It doesn’t really matter if they pass that test, we don’t really know what that test is. Can they perform the skill?’ I’ve never had the opportunity or known about the opportunity as an instructor to sit on a panel to help develop questions for these tests. So basically, you have educators writing the tests that possibly haven’t spent time in that trade area. . . . The other testing we do is more general . . . which of course is mandatory. It is not as content specific. . . . This test is mandatory, but it is not industry-specific. . . . It does give them a certificate. But all of the tests are used to give a student a credential to graduate.”

Overall, the teachers gave details of using pretests and other exams to prepare the students for the major industry-specific tests that are taken their senior year. Dawn chose to go into more detail about obstacles students in her particular program could face that would prevent them from taking the state test:

- Dawn: “If they don’t have so many hours it doesn’t matter what your grades are. The state will not let you test. If there is no way for them to make those hours in that
second year, there is no point in going back. The state dictates that, we don’t. Now some kids at the end don’t have enough hours but they have good enough grades to get those credits because those credits still are for graduation. [T]hose credits apply toward that even if they don’t get licensed.”

There were two responses to this question where the teachers voiced in detail negative perceptions held by others about career and technical education as explanations for poor student performances in the school. The first response from Carl described issues with students’ willingness to attend the school impacting student performance:

- Carl: “Students who didn’t, and it’s still a lot of the problem, the students who didn’t want to be here. One of the other problems that we have here being a regional technical center and away from the schools, their home, is guidance. Two granddaughters, a year apart. Both of them went to [same high school]. Graduated at the top of their classes. The oldest one wants to come [to this career and technical center], was not allowed to come [here], because she was going to college. She’s too smart for [here].”

The second response from Michael told of his negative personal experience with attending this same career and technical education center as a student and now is teaching in the same building:

- Michael: “I have graduated from here. Okay? So, I knew what kind of students I was going to be dealing with. [This school] is always been considered a dumping ground, and for people ‘who aren’t academically savvy’! Oh, so we’re better with our hands than we are with our heads! I was on medication. I was epileptic! I was right here, and I was told that I wasn’t going to college, so I needed a trade. Lo and behold, I’m back here teaching. [Students then] were challenged, most of them, just not so much
as not passing . . . not being held accountable, and made to get some kind of certification, some kind of an academic qualification or something like that.”

**Question #4: What was your role in helping the students go from failing to passing the assessments?** Mack responded by describing the role given to teachers by the previous principal who had announced the school was in failing status:

- Mack: “When we come back [after summer break], this is the testing. Your job is to improve that score, you know. And, that’s what we did. We tried a couple different tests. It was too hard for my students and then we settled on one [test] for mine.”

Overall, the teachers responded with different ways they used their role to help the students to pass the tests, to include practicing with exams on a computer and with demonstrations of skills and having them demonstrate the skills back to the teacher. The teachers described how they would have the students do self-evaluation of their work before engaging in practice exercises. Ursala shared her techniques:

- Ursula: “My experiences with that was to sometimes pull them to the side and go, ‘What is it you’re not getting about this? Why are you experiencing such difficulty with it? What can I do to get you to pass these skills?’ It’s practice, practice, practice.”

Some of the teachers described their roles in terms of how they are perceived by the students to better facilitate teacher-student relationships necessary for effective teaching. All of the teachers expressed the role of mentorship was necessary for the success of the students. Comments included:

- Paul: “My role, at least the way that I’ve worked my role, is to find in them what would encourage, motivate, figure out whenever, in them, to get them to pass the
class. Although we are a selected school, students choose to come here, we don’t always get students who choose us.”

- Dawn: “My role is God. Encourager. Motivator. Authority. The Law. And in the culture that the school systems are in now, there is nonaccountability for absences.

- Carl: “I was trying to engage them and keep them excited about something. which was very difficult. These are just the bottom kids that school kind of, the court says you’re 18, you’ve got to go to school. My role is to get them to pass. Um, it helped that I have been a foster parent. And my father was abusive. So, I came from where these kids kinda come from. . . emotional support.”

- Alice: “I looked, and I saw chaos. One thing I noticed in that there were students that were not capable of passing the state [test]. So, I decided that I was going to be upfront with them at the very beginning of school. I said, ‘If you don’t think this is for you, then come to me. And we will look at if there’s another class here. Because I felt like if you’re going into it and it’s not what you want to do, then I’m setting you up for failure.’”

**Question #5: What situations influenced or affected your instructional choices during the time following the revelation of the low passage rates of the students?** The situations described by the teachers involved issues with testing and circumstances involving the needs of the students themselves. Victor shared how the principal and teachers in 2013–2014 realized the state required tests they were using did not align with the curriculum being taught in the CTE school. They made the decision to change to other general tests that were also state approved so that the competencies could be measured more using the skills more so than theory.
In CTE schools, written tests and skills are tested and not every student is strong in both areas.

Comments included:

- Ursula: “It’s more of watching, observing, counseling. Whatever chapter we’re on, we usually combine the skill with that chapter. And that goes with the written part of the test from their academic book as well. Sometimes they don’t get the theory, but they get the skill.”

- Dawn: “Most of theory, you’re going to have to be driven to do on your own. Kids, the juniors and seniors completely are not driven to do anything on their own. They’re used to the traditional academic instruction. They’re spoon-fed everything. Everything is a multiple choice. Everything is a memorization. It gets personable because you are trying to make them employable as well. Pass rates are great, but there’s also that employability factor that we are trying to instill in them.”

Other situations are presented by the students themselves. Teachers have found themselves with students who have low passage rates because of a lack of interest in being in the class. That realization was a new experience for some of the teachers, including Paul:

- Paul: “It was the experience of having students who didn’t want to be in your class. That was a new experience for me. Having that experience of trying to find a way, and it’s just, it’s just by relationship. You work on a relationship with these individuals; you try to find a motivation; you try to find a compromise. It’s exactly like being a parent: you can’t have a desert until you’ve eaten your vegetables. So academically, it might be ‘there’s a reward if’ and then you gotta [sic] find what rewards gets him to do the ‘if’.”
There are situations where the students may have special needs that affected the students’ scores and the teachers need to develop means of accommodating the special needs. Alice repeated her observations of having students with learning disabilities and not being capable of passing the tests. Two teachers described situations where the students were deficient in reading skills:

- Michael: “Challenge with reading, the challenge with writing, which I still struggle with [my challenges] versus theirs and along with theirs. I think me having that challenge before, it made me have to do visual learning. We are more hands-on in my class than we are book learning. More PowerPoints, more drawings, you know, just different ways to go around things”

- Carl: “If I have a lot of special needs students, reading is very difficult for them. So, a lot of the tests that I do, even though not all of them are, I read the test to the group so that I’m not singling out the individual student. We still have that stigma that this is for special needs kids. This is a facility, you know, that if you dump those kids that don’t fit, here, you know what I’m saying?”

- Mack: “I found I’m more a life coach than an instructor. I learn their strengths and weaknesses. I learned a kid couldn’t read. It blew me away! He was in 12th grade.

- Nate: “If I see one guy that or two guys that are constantly struggling or still below? Well the classmates maybe they can get some other classmates for me.”

Dual-enrollment classes in CTE schools have special situations unique to the structure of the program. The teachers are faced with monitoring the progress of the students with the goal of protecting their possibility of attending the college in the future. Nate explained the situation:

[The students] have to get a certain grade [for the outside college]. If not, we will usually pull them [from dual enrollment] before they fail. That’s to help them because they are
still kids and they don’t understand if they fail. They’re still in my class. I’m pretty sure they pull them so that it does not affect them getting financial aid if they want to go to [college] later. We [the teachers and the college head instructor] are on the same page. We would tell him when the material was too mature for the students and he would agree to make changes.

**Question #6: What is your understanding of the phrase “educational triage”?** There were three teachers who indicated they had no prior understanding of educational triage, with one of those teachers, Victor, commented that he “knew what triage meant, and it made perfect sense, because it is like a medical triage.” There were two teachers who defined educational triage as how they make instructional choices:

- Paul: “Within my program, what’s the most important part I need to instill in the student. I reinforce the big things and then I think of triage, the least important to the most important. I think of my program and the information in my program.”
- Alice: “It’s to me, looking at the group of people . . . looking at your material and can the student succeed in that.”

The remaining teachers shared different perceptions of educational triage, however, all of the perceptions included the concept of evaluating the individual student and their needs. Comments included:

- Mack: “How you evaluate the urgency of your kids. What’s taking priority here? Sometimes we have, we have a lesson plan and the kids come in and say there’s been a death at the high school, a car wreck. You have to reevaluate our week that day.”
• Michael: “You can only travel as fast as your slowest learner. The triage part is trying to, trying to figure out which, which child or which student needs more, not coddling but more explanation of what’s getting ready to happen.”

• Ursula: “Triage means you look at the person as a whole to determine what classification that they’re going in for treatment. With education, it’s sort of the same thing. It’s looking at the individual as a whole, where they’re at and deciding what I need to really do, what I need to focus on. I had a young lady . . . asked what time is it . . . [couldn’t] read the clock. I’m going to have to teach her how to read a clock.”

• Carl: “To evaluate the students at the beginning, find their things that they’re good at, things where they are deficient in, and then develop a plan to help them build others.”

• Nate: “My understanding is two groups. Strong group, weak group. Who needs the most. You may have a guy that is weaker and stronger, and what you do, you try to find a balance and bring them together so that you have an even keel. And it’s natural. No matter what you do, you just try to bring the ones on the bottom up. Don’t let the top ones, you know, slide.”

Question #7: What is your understanding of the phrase “instructional triage”? The majority of the teachers understood instructional triage to be a responsibility of the teachers when making their instructional choices. Only one teacher, Odell, indicated he had no understanding of either educational or instructional triage. There were three teachers, after stating they had not heard of instructional triage, who provided their initial thoughts on the concept:

• Victor: “You’re assessing the needs. We do that automatically, not knowing that that was what we were doing was called educational or instructional triage.”
• Ursula: “I guess it lets me know what I have to base my plans on for the student, sometimes as a group.”

• Mack: “I’m not really sure I understand that. I kinda, [sic] after I try to establish a relationship, I realize where I need to start. I think I do it without having the understanding. I know triage room from watching MASH growing up.”

The remaining teachers defined instructional triage as methods they use for achieving the optimal impact on their students. The methods could involve curriculum choices or manner of teaching with the goal of student success. Comments included:

• Alice: “Looking at what book is laid out the best, how can I like analyze the group of students that I have so that it’s not too simple for this side but too much for this side.”

• Paul: “It’s how I teach those things . . . the best way . . . the important parts. Or the most effective ways. Really trying to incorporate other teaching methods, other instructional methods that may not be in my comfort zone, but I knew could impact any student, any one student.”

• Dawn: “What would be my priorities . . . what is the most important thing to be taught and in what order they should be taught these things.”

**Question #8: What are your perceptions of educational and instructional triage?**

The overall expressions of the teachers were positive with respect to triage generally and the benefits of triage with the students. There were repetitions among the responses of the need for the teachers to assess the weaknesses of the students and developing plans to strengthen the students for success. The teachers emphasized the uniqueness of the students in career and technical education with their individual needs require assessments frequently throughout the year, resulting in triage being a tool of necessity used naturally by all of the teachers. A response
was given repeating the impact of the stigma on career and technical education that has made triage inevitable in their school. Comments included:

- Mack: “I really don’t think about it. I see it as a need, follow up on it, and do it.”
- Michael: “Finding out where their weakest point is, and find out where they need to be, need to be lifted, need to be encouraged, need to be taught. Period.”
- Ursula: “I think it’s beneficial.”
- Dawn: “I think that it’s a natural thing that we do as leaders and as human beings.”
- Odell: “I think we have a quite a bit of it and we have to go through to get through some of the students. Some students are placed in situations where they don’t want to be, and you try and try, and you still never get through to them.”
- Victor: “I have students who come to me on third, fourth grade reading levels and they can’t do fractions. Yes, [I have to triage no matter what]. The old stigma is still there. They’re not being successful in the classroom so let’s send them to work with their hands. What people don’t understand is that the industry has changed . . . the skills, the technologies.”

**Question #9: In what ways do you feel you utilize triage to help your students?** All of the responses indicated triage is utilized throughout the year after assessments are made of students’ needs. The assessments made by the teachers may be of physical or emotional impairments requiring accommodations and those provisions of accommodations were seen as examples of triage. Alice shared the story of a young lady in her class:

I’ve done a little educational triage, well instructional triage when I meet these students the first week. I can see deficiencies in the first two weeks. I have one girl [who] wore
hearing aids. So, we had to change, and we actually purchased [an instrument] for the hearing impaired. She wasn’t considered on an IEP.

There are some students on Individualized Education Programs (IEP) requiring accommodations and there are others who are not on IEPs yet have some type of issue impacting their learning. Teachers described the need to triage the students regardless of whether they have an IEP. The teachers expressed concerns regarding the functionality of the IEP and the lack of their input in IEP meetings about their students and their academic performance. Comments included:

- **Dawn:** “We are not given specific IEP information. We are given accommodations based on academic perception. We are not given accommodations for this student teaching a skill. You are expected to perform the skill with the same precision and knowledge that anyone else has. How do I help that person is to encourage that person . . . show them repeated steps how to do it. Correct them. Correct them. Children tend to take anything . . . it is personal to them. It kinda blows my mind. Historically we have tended to be the dumping ground. They think stupid people do this [career].”

- **Carl:** “I’ll put a kid that’s deficient in this area with a kid that’s good in that area. We get an IEP on them . . . but there are students that have special needs that we don’t have IEPs on. If they don’t pass [the industry certification for my individual program], we re-test. [A teacher] takes the group that’s struggling and works with them to help them understand.”

- **Victor:** “There are a lot of different assessments that I do. . . . When we get started, some of our students, we’re not sure whether they are on IEP or not. Now generally, . . . you can tell. But often times, they might get in a couple of grades in the beginning
without us knowing their accommodations. [W]e are not involved in their IEP meetings, where their other academic teachers are.”

Some of the responses explained the use of pretests to assess student knowledge, with the teachers using one-on-one follow up discussions with the students to address weaknesses as methods of triage. The teachers also indicated they would do assessments of group performances as a whole and described the development of curriculum for addressing the weaknesses of the class as a whole as exercises of triage. Comments included:

- Alice: “I think when you ask them, ‘Do you think this is for you?’ is triage. If they say ‘no’, if I can get them out of the class, I will try, and get them into another class. You’re going to come across some students that are capable of passing the class but not capable of taking it to the [state licensing] level.”

- Ursula: “By assessing where they’re at. . . . We tell him straight up. If this is not what you wanna [sic] do, you need to go back to your guidance counselor and find out something else that you want to do this year. You have to triage throughout the year. We incorporate life skills a lot with this.”

- Mack: “I usually, usually I’ve already tried to go there before it’s happened. You see him starting to slip. Go to him, try to talk to him, and see what, you know, is there a reason behind them not living up to their potential. Are you overthinking the question? I usually try to do it as a group.”

- Nate: “I analyze [the state pretest results]. What do we need to work on with these students? We got to do this as the whole group. Do I need to do more hands-on in this area with this student so maybe he’ll get it more? Everyone needs help because no one got a 100.”
**Question #10: How do your instructional choices align with your perceptions of educational and instructional triage?** The responses were examples of the frequent use of triage to address simultaneously academic and emotional deficiencies found among their students. There was an overall consensus that the teachers had the flexibility with their instructional choices of using peer-to-peer teaching, changing their classroom tests, and of administering the industry-specific test best suited to the capabilities of their students thereby increasing the likelihood of passage. Comments included:

- Carl: “Teambuilding. I will pair them up with a student who has a problem and scored low. We give a pretest. They can take that several times. We see a big jump working with those students in the deficient areas. And if they still can’t get it, we give them another test which is the same test, but a little watered down. [W]e have more choices now than what we had in the past.”

- Michael: “I find putting an excelled learner with the weaker student helps that excelled learner also.”

- Alice: “I’m going to change some of my tests to more of what is the best answer. What is the most important because that’s how the state [test] was worded. You’re looking at instructional choices based on the state [test].

- Odell: “I use my assessments to go forward. I use previous experiences, things that I’ve gone through in the past. I’ll give them examples of things that went wrong. There are 10 different tests. So, if you know if they’re not really sharp in one area it might be in another area.”

Paul remarked how the present administration provided flexibility with the use of the building which allowed him to use the entire building for instruction which kept the students engaged in
learning while having fun, such has having scavenger hunts related to their program topics. Some of the responses indicated the use of triage in their instructional choices was influenced by the negative perception either of the student or of career and technical education held by either the student himself or by those persons outside of the career and technical education environment. Those students were found to be more challenging and more prone to low passage rates because of the students’ preconceived expectations of failure. The teachers expressed their use of triage to destroy the negative perceptions in these instances on behalf of the students with the goal of helping these students matriculate at the school and obtain industry certifications. Comments included:

- Mack: “You got to find a certification that they can pass. Where before they put them over here to get them out of the mainstream, so they aren’t counted in the SOL testing. The senior class developed some relationships and they know when somebody’s weak in something. I’m very impressed about the compassion that each of them has for each other.”

- Dawn: “Now we’ve got those demons that come in. I’ve had students come to me and say they are honor students at their school, and they were discouraged. Certain counselors and from other districts that ‘Why do you want to go there, that’s where the stupid kids go. You can’t be in advanced diploma track if you go there.’ Had to deal with students with the perceptions that were implanted . . . students with intellectual disabilities, not psychological disabilities. I noticed some behavior in [one young lady]. Messing with her hair. So, I had a talk with her, and she said she’s on her ADD meds. I said. ‘Can we develop, would it be okay if I passively touch you on your shoulder because I know.” Everyone is in a different place. Sometimes, when we
are talking triage academically, instructionally, we are talking about it academically, but that’s not the most, I don’t feel that’s the most important things kids get out of it. I saw seniors had taken her under their wing and treated her as an equal. It’s like an emotional triage. Even if she doesn’t pass, she feels accepted and welcomed into society.

**Question #11. How would you describe the impact on the community of the school going from failing to passing rates on the licensing and credentialing assessments?**

Overall, the responses indicated the passing rates of the school has had a positive impact on the community. Several teachers noted the increase of employable students through the school has been recognized by the community with their increased involvement and participation in their annual career fair with vendor attendance having increased from 30 to over 70 businesses. The teachers frequently used the term “employable” as their goal for all students. The industry certification demonstrates to the community that the students were successful, qualified and competent. Comments included:

- Alice: “I think it shows them that the teachers care; that we are producing some good employees.”
- Carl: “Having students prepared to go to work. It’s always been more about making these kids employable.”
- Paul: “We have become a hotbed of student employment in a lot of firms. I think we create or are starting to create much more employable students.”
- Victor: “The biggest impact that I have seen, our numbers [of students] have increased. The community is becoming more involved because they are seeing the successes that we have.”
• Nate: “There’s a lot more community involvement now. They come to the teachers now. ‘Which kids would you recommend?’”

There were two teachers who described how their actions of triage have impacted the community because of the students becoming successful in passing their assessments:

• Michael: “Adding qualified or better people into the community that hopefully will take over . . . they will be more invested, they’ll have more self-worth and feel like they can go out and contribute, you know. I’m making a difference. I’m giving back to the community.”

• Dawn: “Our kids come here . . . they get a connection to society. They get a connection with people. They get a connection in a way, that no matter what they do in life, they have had a safe place to be. So that I think that their function in society could be better if they could get it in a place like this.”

There were two notable responses that were somewhat different from the others. A teacher chose to reference the educational community and indicated there needs to be more awareness for a larger impact on the perceptions held by those outside the school of what actually occurs in a career and technical education school. Ursula responded as follows:

I think the community needs to be more aware of what we are, what we do, how the teachers feel about their students here. I have learned so much . . . and it has changed my life so much. It impacted my life that now I know that the importance of not, not every kid is college bound ready at 17 or 18 years old. . . . The community does not support [here]. I don’t think the high schools are on board.

The other response began as a negative answer to the question; however, as he continued talking, he changed his mind upon reflection. Mack initially commented there was no impact on the
community because the students were already competent, so the community was already affected. Mack stated:

No, [no impact]. You’re getting a piece of paper. You were already competent. I always look at my students. This guy’s gonna really struggle to get that paper but I would hire him in a heartbeat. I guess what you’re saying is really that does affect the community. I didn’t really think about it like that. But it would influence the community and help it because this person is going to be a good hard-working person who’s going to pay his taxes.

**Question #12. What incidents or people intimately connected with the experience of moving towards being successful with testing stands out for you?** The teachers provided many examples of incidents during their experiences with students throughout the entire interview. Some of the teachers would refer back to examples previously mentioned in earlier questions. There were seven of the 10 responses who included accounts of students returning to them to thank them for their efforts with some regrets of not having paid attention more or heeding their corrections of their behaviors. Teachers gave words of appreciation to other teachers and the administration for their supportive efforts in moving the students forward to success. Comments included:


- Ursula: “To see them come back and they go, ‘Well, I wish I had listened to you.’ If we don’t do anything but listen, sometimes that’s all they need. They just need an adult to listen and care.”
• Dawn: “I’ve had some students were very street wise. Who came in and didn’t care. . . . [O]ne actually bucked up on me like she was going to hit me. . . . She also had an IEP. She didn’t pass. And she came to me [later in a store] and gave me the biggest hug and said, ‘I am so sorry. And I just wished I had changed my behavior.’ So, to me, that was a success. And the students who were passing my class, they may not get their license. But they also learned how to try again.”

• Odell: “We had a senior who failed everything the first time. We started to focus on another test. And when he didn’t pass that test, I actually brought in another teacher to help me. We actually found another test; it was more suited to him. And he did pass that, he did graduate. I did feel a little pressure with him being a senior.”

• Nate: “The present principal. She’ll look at the scores, and if they’re close, she’s like, ‘X, Y, and Z need help. Let’s see how we can help. Sometimes other teachers will come to you. . . . We’ll talk about some students. We ask each other for help to bring those scores up.”

• Victor: “The current staff we have here. Younger in terms of experience, willing to change our methods. Our administrator has definitely been a huge impact. The staff is a whole lot more collaborative now in our efforts to bring those scores up.”

• Carl: “Administrators. If you have an administrator that backs you, that stands behind you. . . . [The previous administrator] was key to helping us evaluate students. That was the first step to go from the low scores to the high, where there was an administrator who understood.”

• Paul: “Probably the biggest incident . . . we had a change of administration. It definitely changed the culture. There was no, there was no sit down and saying,
‘Okay, this is where we’re going.’ I think before, we felt like, let’s just stay under the radar, let’s not draw too much attention to ourselves. Let’s continue to be the proverbial red-headed stepchild of the school system, and as long as we don’t make waves, they’ll just send the students. Then it became, ‘We need to show everybody. We got to show these schools that we are important. We need to show the post-secondary schools that we create successful people, and it was more of a change in our trademark!”

Question #13. In what ways were you affected by these experiences and are you still affected? The majority of the teachers responded they were and still are affected emotionally from their experiences with working to move the students from failing to passing, and in being successful in general. The teachers explained their responses were based on the relationships developed with the students as they worked with them in their program. A teacher expressed how he has been affected because the program has seen a growth in the number of students. Some teachers indicated their experiences with low passage rates has made them more conscientious about their methods of instruction and their instructional choices with every group they have in their classrooms. Other teachers described their experiences as life-changing in their educational career. Comments included:

- Alice: “A lot. [Students told me what they did for a client] and I stood there crying. That was like a proud momma moment.”
- Odell: “I became emotionally attached, you know. You know, it hurt me a little bit when [the student] didn’t pass the things I thought he could. These are my kids.”
- Mack: “Dealing with what to do and not to do. This has affected me as well. I have lost 14 students. Not all of them were the same year. One of them died on the job.”
They ruled it as an accident. And I tell the story to the students. Now you can get qualified . . . but the bottom line is can you do it? Can you do it safely? It kinda bothers me a little bit.”

- Victor: “We were not really made aware that our scores had gotten so low. My initial reaction was a little bit of shock. It’s had to make me rethink my way of teaching, and the different ways of meeting my student’s needs. Every year is going to be a reevaluation of my teaching methods.”

- Carl: “I’m still affected. Every year I learn, I have learned a little bit more to try to help the students to succeed.”

- Michael: “Having somebody to lean on, to guide me through difficult times as far as learning. Yeah, I’m still getting affected by it. It will always affect me. When you’re dealing with students, you’re dealing with everything from learning about their home life to their girlfriends. . . . That’s what I find in CTE. You’re not only a teacher, you’re a mentor, you’re a parent, you’re a guardian, you’re a sounding board. Doctor. You’re a nurse. I cry every time they graduate. We build bonds with, you know, the people that we’ve taught.”

- Ursula: “This has got to be the most rewarding career I’ve ever had.”

**Question #14. Considering the whole experience with moving the students from failing to passing status and educational and/or instructional triage, were there any things that happened that you would describe as positive?**

**Question #15. If yes, in your opinion, what made those events positive?** Every teacher indicated positive things happened to them when they responded to question #14 prompting me to ask question #15 to allow them the opportunity to expand on their affirmative answers.
Although the responses varied, one common thread was being able to effectuate positive changes in the lives of the students they worked with. Teachers described observing improvements in student morale, student self-esteem, and student maturity growth. Comments included:

- Odell: “I got to see how happy these young adults are when they succeeded and by me being able to work with them. I feel like I was a key contributor to the happiness which made me very happy.”

- Victor: “Student morale would probably be the biggest one. Because a lot of students, it has been something that they struggled with their whole life in their educational setting. So many of our students have been accustomed to failure that when they pass something it’s great.”

- Nate: “We give them the basics to start a career. Some might need help with some of the steps. It’s a triage. As students, you’ve got a strong bunch, you’ve got a middle bunch. As teachers, you gotta [sic] bring them all together without slowing down the strong bunch. But sometimes you have to slow down the strong bunch. So, luckily, it all works out.”

- Ursula: “Lots of times you see changes, positive changes in their attitudes, their direction in life. We had a young man . . . he went through the course; it was a transitional change. Even in his appearance.”

There were three teachers who responded in terms of positive things observed with the CTE school and being a teacher in this setting because of the experiences with moving students from failing to passing. Teachers noticed a shift in the perception of the value of the school in the eyes of the teachers as well as those outside of the school because of the successes with the students previously considered unsuccessful in the academic setting. Adding to the credibility of the
school has been the addition of courses which enable the students to receive college credit.

Comments included:

- Paul: “The change in the culture. We’ve had several teacher changes. You can get very complacent. I think the attitude of ‘we’re making a difference’ from a teacher standpoint, we’re making a difference. The students are coming and the most important thing that they can have when they get here . . . is that they feel valued. And most of the other teachers would say the same thing. I get to go to a place where I am appreciated. I get to go to a place where I can show off my skill set. That’s been so valuable to the students.”

- Michael: “The whole aspect of moving them from failing to passing because it’s a challenge to us being [the school] to get a better return on our efforts. I enjoy being a CTE teacher because it’s not just sitting up here and teaching math and science and government. I’m teaching . . . I’m pouring out all my knowledge.”

- Carl: “When we did away with GED students full time. Getting guidance counselors down here, and showing them, you know, what actually goes on down here. Let’s face it. A lot of these kids, if there’s a kid who a guidance counselor thought was college bound, that’s where they push them. And that’s where, it’s always been a thing with technical centers, that’s where the lower kids end up. But, now, we’re seeing, because you know, we have two classes here, they can get college credit.”

**Question #16. What, if any, advice would you have for others concerning how to help their schools to move from failing to passing status with assessments?** Each teacher gave words of advice for different audiences: principals, teachers, and guidance counselors. The advice included statements of the importance of teachers having a relationship with their students
to the importance of pretests for beginning assessments of the level of knowledge and competency of the students. A teacher was direct with her response when she began her answer with triage. Another teacher had admonishment for guidance counselors and wrongful placement that is contrary to the interests of the students. Comments included:

- Mack: “[The former principal] shouldn’t have said anything [about the failing status] because we didn’t have any input as to which direction we went. He sat down and figured out what credentialing can we get for the population. He could have said, ‘I need you guys to look at these and see if you think that we can move forward, we can pass these.’ He didn’t solicit any input. I felt like that’s the way the education system is. It would have been better to have been in the loop. To have some input. Yeah, it was scary, but, I mean, at the same time, what are you going to do?”

- Victor: “You have to have an open line of communication and collaboration between your administration and staff. You have to be willing to accept change and understand that with today’s student population, it’s a constant reevaluation, that you’re going to limit yourself to what you can do and how you can help these students be successful.”

- Paul: “The teachers have to have a relationship with the kids. They have to find a way to connect. And once you have a really good personable connection, you can slip in some education here and then.”

- Michael: “Open your hearts, open your mind. I learned from the teachers, I learned from the students. Give your knowledge away. I own a little bit of their minds. So that’s my legacy.”

- Dawn: “Know your students. If they know their students, then that school is going to do better. You will have less behavioral problems. Because now its personal to them.”
They know you more than just their teacher. You’re their home away from home Mom.”

- Nate: “Give them all pretests. Some kids don’t test well. They put so much pressure on themselves. Some of it is getting the pressure off the students.”

- Alice: “Triage. Find out where your students are. Then bring them to where you want them to be, looking at past scores, evaluating yourself as a teacher. Understanding the person. I can’t change your home life. But I can definitely tell you this is your safe haven.”

- Odell: “The biggest thing I see that sets these kids up for their failure and the triage we go through is placement. It seems to me that the guidance counselors, they don’t listen to the kids to see what they really want.”

- Carl: “It’s the guidance counselors. I think we are going to see kids are going to choose a vocation. So, in middle school, you say well I want a technical like this. Then their whole education process is geared towards that vocation, that track. I think that’s where it needs to go.”

**Question #17. Have you shared all that is significant to the experience?** The majority of the responses were in the affirmative. Mack emphasized once more how the prior principal was uncertain about the meaning of the failed status: “He said, ‘I don’t know, what, God, they failed it?’ It kinda blew him away. It was pretty shaky around here when that happened to the end. [One teacher] left cause he was worried.” Some teachers used this opportunity to repeat their love for being a career and technical education teacher and watching the success of the students. Comments included:
• Odell: “I love watching these kids succeed. And I hope to be here until I can’t work anymore.

• Paul: “As teachers, we always share our different strategies. We really are filling these roles, filling these family roles, family-type relationship roles. To be a family within these walls, good relationships, students grow, teachers grow.”

Summary

In Chapter 4, I proffered a synopsis of my study of the lived experiences of CTE secondary teachers for the existence of educational or instructional triage as an effect of accountability threats on teachers who move students from failing to passing, and how teacher input, or lack thereof, in CTE curriculum development effects students’ academic status. The teachers who were participants in the study were seven men and three women, with professional licenses in different crafts, and teaching experience ranging from one to over 25 years. Although a few of the teachers were present during the year 2013 when the school was in failing status, all 10 teachers participated in the study by sharing experiences they had with triage either with the failing school or failing students in their individual programs. I explained my chosen methodology was an interpretative phenomenological study as the most appropriate method to explore the lived experiences of the teachers, and to have their voices heard about the impact of triage and their input in curriculum development. I provided responses on the Qualtrics survey for historical background on the teachers to include their years of experience. I detailed the processes for data collection and the data analysis with descriptions of instrumentation used for both. After a discussion of the IPA tool used for data analysis, I provided a summary of the findings. In order to answer the research questions, I conducted semistructured interviews of each teacher which were an hour in duration.
The semistructured interviews consisted of 16 questions to explore the teachers’ experiences with triage in their school and their individual programs. The questions were created to elicit their perceptions and accounts of circumstances when they used triage and their involvement in curriculum development to address low passage rates and student failures. Data was presented from the responses given by the teachers to the questions and follow-up questions posed during the interviews. The responses indicated all of the teachers have participated in triage and indicated a readiness to continue using triage as an accepted and natural tool in career and technical education.

The findings indicated the natural tendency to utilize triage holistically to effect students’ academic success. The teachers were unaware of the demarcation associated with the concepts of educational or instructional triage. All of the teachers commented on the flexibility and input teachers must have in all stages of curriculum development for addressing student failures. In Chapter 5, I further detail the findings using the themes developed from interpretations of the teachers’ responses. I also discuss how the findings and the current literature connect; specific limitations; and implications of the results on policy, practice and theory. At the end of Chapter 5, I list recommendations for further research.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Lived experiences of CTE secondary teachers (Grades 10–12) were explored for the existence of educational or instructional triage as an effect of accountability threats on teachers who are moving students from filing to passing. Policymakers use the implementation of academic reform as the reasoning supporting high stakes testing accountability measures of student performance (Firestone, 2009; Levine & Levine, 2013). Administrators and teachers have used triage to prevent academic failure status for the school and for individual students with the goal of moving the failed status to passing expeditiously (Booher-Jennings, 2005; Mathews, 2008; Gonzales, 2017). Considered an alternative to the traditional educational institutions, CTE schools serve as the learning institutions for obtaining knowledge for vocational and industrial careers. Accountability measures for traditional academic institutions have been high stakes testing subject matters such as math, English, reading, and writing, whereas accountability measures for CTE schools are high stakes testing for licensing and credentialing (Geno, 2014). In this qualitative study, I collected data to answer the following research questions:

1. How does educational or instructional triage impact secondary teachers (Grades 10–12) in CTE schools?

2. What input do the teachers have in the development of CTE curriculum?

I revealed in the findings of this study enriched by the shared accounts of the teachers the perceptions of the teachers regarding educational and instructional triage, in addition to their views of the roles they play in curriculum development to address moving students from failing to successful status for graduation and job employability.

In Chapter 5 is the summary of the results of this study and a discussion of the results
utilizing the analysis provided by IPA where I interpreted the meanings given to the experiences shared by the teachers. I discussed these results as they related to the literature and conceptual framework discussed in earlier chapters. I examined the limitations of the study and review implications of the results of this study on policy, practice, and theory. After listing recommendations for further research, I concluded the chapter.

**Summary of the Results**

I used the interpretative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of secondary CTE teachers and identified findings of the existence and impact of triage in general on secondary CTE teachers. I also found the presence of teacher input in the development of CTE curriculum. Data collection and analysis were procedures I employed to extract the meanings teachers gave of those experiences. The participants were a total of 10 teachers located in one CTE site in the mid-Atlantic, with teaching experiences ranging from one year to over 25 years. The data sources used for this study were semistructured interviews. Superordinate themes were established using IPA which provided a comprehensive analysis of common themes found in the responses from the teachers.

I solicited background information from all 10 teachers using a Qualtrics questionnaire of eight questions. There were seven men and three women, all of whom where White and held professional licenses in their respective programs. All of the teachers had taught only in Virginia, and six of the 10 teachers had taught only in a CTE program. Of the 10 teachers, one possessed a master’s degree.

The interviews were conducted one-on-one, with 16 semistructured questions to allow for flexibility with answers and follow-up questions. The questions were developed to explore the teachers’ perceptions of educational and instructional triage with respect to the failing status of
the CTE school and of students in their respective programs. The questions were also designed to explore the impact of educational or instructional triage on their instructional choices, and further included exploration of their level of input if any in the developmental stages of curriculum development to address moving student from failing to passing status.

The teachers expressed little if any acknowledgment of the formal concepts of educational or instructional triage; however, they indicated knowledge of the overall concept of triage and responded in terms of the general concept for the remainder of the interviews. The teachers described experiences of the administration and staff in CTE utilizing triage to improve the school and the passage rates of students. The administrator was the primary facilitator of triage for the CTE center with the goal of improving the total percentages of student passage rates and instituted the changes in testing. The teachers had flexibility to triage by aligning the right tests to the students’ capabilities to increase passing rates. Simultaneously, the teachers described the need to constantly triage the students by meeting challenges posed by negative perceptions of CTE, special needs of the students, and wrong student placement. Those challenges had been found to negatively impact the passage rates and the success of the students. Teachers shared experiences of emotional attachment to the students as they worked towards the goal of making the students employable by improving their life skills; improving passage of industry credentialing; and by filling pivotal roles in the lives of the students such as parental, motivator, and encourager. Triage and establishment of relationships were inclusive in the words of advice participants gave to others who need to move a student or school from failing to passing. Some of the teachers also admonished the education system to be more accountability towards the students and motivate the students to be driven more to seek education.
Discussion of the Results

The discussion of the results requires a discussion of the superordinate themes used to create the master table in the IPA. With the aid of the IPA, I identified four superordinate themes that capsulized themes interpreted from the accounts of all of the teachers. Those superordinate themes were:

1. The administrator is primarily accountable for the passing/failing status of the CTE school, and the teachers focus on the passing/failing status of their individual programs.

2. Triage is utilized in CTE informally throughout the school year for student success.

3. Different relationships are vital to the triage of the students to ensure passage of examinations and success in the workplace.

4. The aftereffects of triage on the CTE teachers range from a sense of accomplishment to a concern about the present education system.

Each superordinate theme is presented along with the subthemes and words from the teachers as supporting evidence.

**Superordinate Theme #1 The Administrator is primarily accountable for the passing/failing status of the CTE school, and the teachers focus on the passing/failing status of their individualized programs.** The unique structure of the CTE center and the role played by the administrator impacted the experiences of the teachers regarding addressing how to move the center from failing to passing status.

**Responsibility for the passing/failing status of the CTE school.** Paul stated: “This school is kind almost like a university where each program has its own school. So, I didn’t have a lot of experience with the other programs.” The teachers had various levels of knowledge regarding the
status of the school not only due to the individualization of the programs but also because they also varied in the years of experience at the center. Half of the participants lacked knowledge of the time in 2013 when the school was failing regardless of whether they were employees at the time. Nate remarked: “I didn’t know about no failing status. I wasn’t told of no failing status, didn’t know if it was low, high.” However, there was a perception of problems with the individual programs. Dawn remembered: “I didn’t know we were ever failing. I knew that my program had been not so great before I got here.”

The remaining participants indicated awareness that the administrator was the one with knowledge of the failing status of the center, but no indications of knowledge of what the actual results used to determine the failing status. Mack described the experience of the day when the administrator revealed the news to the staff:

I believe he was telling us that we weren’t . . . going to achieve it and that he didn’t know what was going to happen. [H]e was kinda like . . . “I don’t know, what, God, they failed it?” It kinda blew him away. It was pretty shaky around here from when it happened to the end. [O]ne of the teachers . . . he left cause he was worried.

The experience described by Mack suggests feelings of helplessness by the staff initially as the reality of failure forced the administrator to accept the students overall were not succeeding. The administrator’s response indicates a transformation as he struggled to acknowledge failure when he was certain the students would be successful. Mack described the feelings of uncertainty of the future not only of the center but of their jobs because the administrator lacked sufficient understanding of the gravity of the failing status.

The teachers collectively commented on testing as the area where the administrator made definitive changes in the center after determining “their tests did not align with the state
curriculum” (Victor). CTE requirements mandate students pass both subject examinations and state-recognized industry related tests to be determined completers and able to graduate from high school. The teachers remembered they were in acceptance of the administrator’s leadership capabilities and were willing to follow his lead, perhaps because the only alternative may have been to change employment. Mack recalled characteristics of the administrator at the time: “He was very good at finding testing, assessing. That was kind of his, that was his niche.” The administrator came to the conclusion the reason for the failing of the tests was that the tests utilized were not written on the students’ level of comprehension. Mack remembered: “You look at the [test] it’s written for someone who’s an apprentice, not a, somebody who is in Intro.” More specifically, Carl recalled:

So, I know no student had ever passed the testing in the state of Virginia for the first couple of years because the testing was based on industry.” I think for the state to realize that NATEF really needed to do a student testing, you know, based more on that. [W]hen the state right out started doing the student-type test . . . that made a lot of difference. Then all the sudden, students across the state started passing a test that was made for them and not for me, for somebody that had two years’ experience in the field.

The assessment of the testing by the administrator revealed the need to have different tests available based on the intellectual capabilities of the student as well as the level of skills. Victor described the situation: “We had to look, we had to really look at what was covered in those students who are functioning at the lower level. We have a lot of students on IEPs, of course, for various different reasons.” The administrator was the one who changed the testing for the center, and Mack noted: “He didn’t seek any input [from the staff]”. This recollection was repeated in the account suggesting Mack had a feeling of regret for being left out of the overall experience of
brainstorming and contributing to solutions to save the school but maintained belief in the administrator to do whatever was necessary for the center’s marks to improve.

**Responsibility of CTE teachers to improve programs and meet both educational and industry requirements.** CTE requires passage of academic examinations and industry-related skills examinations. Across the board, the teachers described the constant balancing of instructional choices to necessary to help the students meet the academic policies while fulfilling the requirements for obtaining industry credentials. There were some experiences of dealing with the challenges of student capabilities to take any tests due to limitations specific to some of the CTE students. For example, there are some CTE students who have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) requiring accommodations with instructions or need additional assistance based on some sort of disability. Dawn acknowledged: “We are given accommodations based on academic perception. We are not given accommodations for this student teaching a skill.” In addition to insufficient information regarding accommodations, Mack attributed the failures of the center to the tests: “The testing was over their head. . . . Maybe the test was too hard . . . above their knowledge.” These combined experiences indicated the teachers interpreted the failures on the assessments may have been impacted by factors such as intellectual disabilities or knowledge not within the control of the student or the teacher at the time of the testing.

Another common experience shared by the teachers was the constant need to adjust their instructional choices to ensure the students met both educational and industry credentialing. As Paul commented: “This program has three different oversights. We have to meet the Department of Education competencies [as well as industry certifications and outside college requirements if the program is enrolled in dual enrollment with a college]”. There is a sense of accepting the responsibility for the students to pass anything, whether the examinations were recognized by the
Department of Education or recognized by the particular industries. If the CTE students are successful with the industry-related tests, they could receive either a license or a certificate. Odell explained: “The way I understand, they have to pass [for graduation] one certification of some type, whether it be a NATEF one or the career readiness.” NATEF is an example of an industry test whereas the career readiness test is an example of a state recognized industry-type test. This account was indicative of the attitudes of the other participants as they detailed accounts of making instructional choices to ensure their students passed something even if the decision has to be made to forego taking an industry test and settling for a certificate from passing an industry-related test. Preparation for the industry tests involves careful coordination of the instructions with the necessary tested skills. Ursula explained: “We have a curriculum that, it, we have to follow for the state. I will, whatever chapter we’re on, we usually combine the skill with that chapter.” The coordination of the instruction with skills has not always proved successful. Alice gave an account of a student’s inability to perform the skills in the lab resulting in the student not being able to take the industry skills examination for a license. She would be able to get a certificate, but Alice opined: “If they don’t test out, it hurts my numbers.” Therefore, an instructional choice had to be made to assure the student’s success that would have a negative impact on the teacher’s passage rate for the industry licensing. Another account similar to this experience was given by Dawn, who recalled: “Some kids at the end don’t have enough hours but they have enough grades to get those credits because those credits still are for graduation. [S]o those credits can apply toward that [certificate] even if they don’t get licensed.” There seemed to be an acceptance of settling for less but satisfied that the students will still have accomplished some recognition.
Superordinate Theme #2 Triage is utilized in CTE informally throughout the school year for student success. The teachers indicated they have engaged in triage from the first day of school. Although some of them were not initially familiar with the terminology of triage as applied to the field of education, after becoming familiar with the concept, they readily admitted to having to triage the students with the aids of continuous assessments. All but two teachers expressed discontent with the public’s perception of CTE and the resulting influence of that negative perception on the placement of students at their center. All participants described challenges in the CTE environment to their instructional choices presented by students causing the need for year-round triage to move the students to pass their different assessments, written and skills.

Triage accepted generally and practiced for student success on academic and industry assessments. The teachers generally acknowledged the presence of triage in their experiences and the necessity of triage in CTE. Ursula stated: “You have to triage throughout the year.” Odell stated after reflection: “I know we have quite a bit of it and we have to go through to get through some of the students.” Victor remarked: “We do that automatically.” Dawn added: “I think that it’s a natural thing that we do as leaders and as human beings. I’m always assessing everything.” As if this was an afterthought, Ursula offered an opinion on triage: “[It’s] beneficial. I think it’s good to know where the children’s priorities are.” There was a shared attitude among the teachers that triage facilitated the need to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the students. Nate’s description of how triage is used by him was as follows:

Strong group, weak group. Just like in a hospital. Who needs the most? And it’s natural.
No matter what you do, you just try to bring the ones on the bottom up. Don’t let the top ones, you know, slide.
No signs of hesitation to use triage was observed among any of the teachers as they were explaining the use of triage in the CTE center.

**Teachers’ awareness of the terms “educational” and “instructional” triage.** Three of the teachers did not know or had little awareness of the terms “educational triage” or “instructional triage.” Victor and Odell quickly admitted never having heard those terms. On the other hand, the remaining participants decided to provide their own interpretations of how they thought the terms would apply in their worlds. The interview questions had been provided the day prior to the scheduled interviews and some of them used the time do independent research. As the participants reflected, they gave accounts of how the concepts of education and instructional triage influenced their institutional choices in the CTE center. For example, Paul first described that educational triage requires the teacher to ask questions of himself: “What are the things that I really have to hit on in order for them to understand. And, I, I reinforce the big things and then I think of triage, the least important to the most important.” Paul continued to define instructional triage:

What is, what do I believe is the best way or most important way to reach the important parts, really trying to incorporate other teaching methods, other instruction methods that may not be in my comfort zone, but I know could impact any student, any one student.

For the most part, the teachers’ descriptions of educational and instructional triage indicated these two terms were more similar in nature versus being different concepts altogether. There were no indications of objections to utilizing either concept by any of the teachers as they gave their accounts. The more direct statement about educational and instructional triage was given by Michael: “[F]ind out where they need to be, need to be lifted, need to be encouraged, need to be taught. Period.” This expression of finality seemed to describe how the teachers felt about there
being two types of triage for as far as they were concerned, triage was triage, and no further explanations were needed. Neither term was mentioned in the rest of the accounts.

**Incentives to triage influenced by negative perceptions of CTE held by others.** The teachers unexpectedly presented triage as a natural occurrence partially because those entities outside of the CTE center held negative views in general of CTE, not the school itself, and of the quality of students who should be enrolled in CTE. The description of CTE as a “dumping ground” was expressed frequently in different accounts. Michael commented how CTE has had this label since the days when he was a student in CTE: “[The school] is always being considered a dumping ground and for people ‘who aren’t academically savvy’. I was epileptic, and I was told that I wasn’t going to college, so I needed a trade.” Michael became somewhat upset while describing the past experience because the reflection triggered anger about the opinions of others. Dawn also became defensive when describing the negative perception of CTE and particular programs: “Historically, we have tended to be the dumping ground. [I]n their own mind, they think that stupid people do this [career].” The label of CTE being a dumping ground for less intelligent students apparently had been extended by others to include special needs students. Carl reflected: “We still have that stigma that this is for special needs kids. This is a facility, you know, that if you dump those kids that don’t fit, here, you know what I’m saying?” Mack’s experience appeared to answer Carl’s question: “[T]hey put them over here to get them out of the mainstream so they weren’t counted in the SOL testing. That’s my perception.” There was a feeling of resentment of this negative label as if CTE continues to be unfairly stigmatized even though CTE has been proven to be beneficial for those students who attend.

There was a strong flavor of discontent among the teachers when describing their experiences with the placement of students in CTE. The placements are done by the students’
home high school. All voiced experiences of anguish with students being placed in their programs when they should not have been. Students would be defiant because they did not want to be in a teacher’s program. Paul noted: “It was that, the experience of having students who didn’t want to be in your class. That was a new experience for me.” Other teachers similarly told how students displayed no interest at all in their programs and the teachers placed the blame on guidance counselors. Dawn recalled an incident with a student: “A student . . . who did not want to be here. Her mother tried to get her changed. Her school said there was no other place for her.” Ursula believed in being upfront with students and would go straight to the student and say: “If this is not what you want to do, you need to go back to your guidance counselor and find out something else that you want to do this year.” There also appears to be frustration because the guidance counselors may not be aware of the problems existing with placement at the CTE. Victor added: “And their counselors and case managers? They don’t visit.” Odell expressed frustration because the issue with placement has not been solved:

My biggest thing, it goes back, and it’s been saying for years, the biggest thing I see that sets these kids up for their failure and the triage we go through is placement. Some of these kids are just thrust into a class that they have no interest in being in. It seems to me that the guidance counselors, they don’t listen to the kids to see what they really want.

The anger displayed by all of the teachers when describing the impact of negativity and improper student placement suggested the teachers find themselves even more prone to triage and determined to achieve student success as a way of proving the naysayers wrong.

 Teachers meet challenges presented by students year-round. Assessments are done on a constant basis of the students by everyone to ensure students pass their examinations and license credentialing. These assessments are not only done by the teachers, but also by the
administration and the students themselves. The teachers described the necessity of assessing what intellectual, physical, or emotional deficiencies students may have that could impact student performance. CTE students must perform on written examinations and achieve a level of competence with industry-specific skills. Assessments are required to gauge their capabilities and abilities for the determination of the best instructional choices. As Nate explained:

Each student is different in CTE. Some of them totally barely passed tests. You look at them, you go in the shop, and say, “Well, testing’s not his strong point, but he is getting the part of CTE that we really want, is the hands-on.”

Nate’s experiences were similar to those accounts given by the other teachers.

The continual nature of the assessments of the student could include observations followed by a change in instructions because the teachers could not always rely on outside information about the students. Dawn was specific: “We are given accommodations [to make for the students] based on academic perception. We are not given accommodations for this student teaching a skill.” An example of making changes based on observations of a needed accommodation was given by Alice: “[A] student wore hearing aids. So, we had to change and actually purchased [an industry tool] for the hearing impaired. She wasn’t considered on an IEP [so there were no accommodations listed for her]”. There were expressions of incredulity by some of the participants as they told of incidences where their assessments of the students revealed limitations that should have been addressed before the student came to the CTE center. Victor recalled: “We have, and I have cases where parents would not sign off on their children being identified with a disability. We know them because we have been doing this long enough. We see these disabilities.”
Students posed challenges in the area of testing capabilities. For the most part, the teachers give pretests to the students initially to gauge where their students are in terms of knowledge and performance to assist in devising instructional plans. When the students take the actual tests, their scores are analyzed. Remediation may be done through practice tests and course instructions may be modified. However, the teachers indicated the subsequent assessments made to address issues become more intensive and involve teacher, student and administrative re-evaluations and the changing of tests. Victor stated: “Where they might be weak in one area, and they might score lower, I give another test so that they can bring that up.” Likewise, Odell noted: “There are 10 different tests. So, you know, if they’re not really sharp in one area, right, it might be another area.” If need be, the participants would change their classroom tests to be more like the actual industry tests to help the students. Alice described this course of action: “I’m going to change some of my tests to more of what is the best answer. What is the most important because that’s how the state [test] was worded.” Cognizant of the need for the seniors to pass tests for graduation, Nate shared a widely held understanding by all of the teachers: “There is an alternative test to save them.” Nate emphasized the word “save” when this account was given.

The notion of saving the student filtered throughout all of the accounts as evidenced by the teachers describing how they sit down with individual students and become personally involved with their remediation. Mack advised:

We’ll find out what, where the weakness existed, and try to find some information on that, and sit down and talk to them, and find out why they’re not understanding it. Are you overthinking the question, or do you just not understand the vocabulary?
Paul ensured the student is a part of the remediation by asking: “Is there something that we can do to make it better for you?” There is a mutual agreement among the teachers of the need for the students to do self-assessments of their performances and take ownership of the goal of reaching passage of the examinations. There is the similar agreement that the teachers likewise must conduct self-evaluations when their students are not achieving. Alice commented: “Yes, I always look at the group first because I’m evaluating me.” Mack makes self-inquiries: “What’s my approach gonna be with the students? What worked in the past, what didn’t work?” There appears to be a general acceptance among the participants that their means of instructing the students will not only require assessments but also modifications. As Victor admitted: “Some of the methods that we used to triage that worked with one group is not necessarily going to work with the next group coming.” Alice provided a summary of the experiences which appears to encompass the sentiments of all of the teachers about triage and teacher self-evaluations:

Triage. Find out where your students are. If you cannot teach at a level above them, you need to first meet them where they are. Then bring them up to where you want them to be. Looking at past scores, evaluating yourself as a teacher. Because every year, I’m gonna change something.

Superordinate Theme #3 Different relationships are vital to the triage of students to ensure passage of examinations and success in the workplace. The importance of relationships to CTE was emphasized in the accounts of all of the teachers. There were experiences given covering the range of teacher-student relationships to community relationships with the CTE center. Every relationship was deemed a necessary component for student success.

Teacher-administrator relationships. The teachers in this study were quick to give credit where credit was due to the administrator thereby demonstrating a positive connection between
the administration and staff. Carl reflected: “If you have an administrator that backs you, that stands behind you, then, you know, and works a different way. And I’ve seen [the administrator] sit here and work with students.” Other teachers shared similar observations. Victor verified: “The administrator here has definitely been an impact.” Paul emphatically stated: “The administration here has given fantastic advice, strategies, training, to just try. Just try.” The teachers appeared thankful to have been given instructional flexibility and the involvement of the administrator in the lives of the students. Nate recounted an experience where the administrator approached the teacher about student performances: “She’s very strong. She’ll look at the scores, and if they’re close, she’s like, ‘X, Y, and Z need help. Let’s see how we can help them.” The theme of self-evaluation as led by the administrator could be found in other accounts and the teachers appeared to welcome this sort of involvement by the administrator. Paul thoughtfully offered: “No pressure has ever been put on me to succeed. There are always strategies to encourage those things. [I]t’s more processes, ‘What are you doing to engage your students? What are you doing to help the students who are falling behind?’” Additionally, Michael described what the administrator does that is most beneficial: “Getting involved with me, getting involved with me and getting involved with the community.” The teachers described a culture of personal connection with individual interactions between the administration and teachers which fosters acceptance and respect throughout the center.

Teacher-student relationships. Prevalent in all of the accounts were the experiences of teacher-student relationships as being necessary and critical to the ability to not only have students succeed, but to also be able to move a student from failing to passing. This type of relationship developed through the use of the teacher’s own personal experiences or from the need for the teachers to assume roles in the students’ lives to enable triage. Carl explained the
need for this relationship: “Emotional support. We set goals for the end of the year and if they don’t have a goal then we create a goal.” The use of the pronoun “we” demonstrates the togetherness of the teacher-student in the endeavor of goal setting. Previous experiences are used to foster connections during instructions. Odell stated: “I will use previous experiences, things that I’ve gone through in the past. I’ll give them examples of things that went wrong. What I want you to remember, remember what they did wrong and don’t make that mistake.” Some of the teachers told of using their experiences of being a former CTE student to connect with the present CTE students. Michael reflected: “I think me having that challenge before, not being able to read so good, or spell so good, it made me have to do visual learning.” As a result, Michael utilized more PowerPoints and drawings in the class to aid instruction. The use of personal attributes and the general atmosphere of acceptance appears to have facilitated the teachers to triage by enabling the students to open up to self-assessments and remediation. The majority of the teachers noted how their relationships with the students fulfilled different roles and there were no objections to this type of involvement in the students’ lives. They displayed pleasure as they announced what they felt they meant to the students. Dawn proudly boasted: “My role is God. Encourager. Motivator. Authority. The Law.” Michael elaborated: “That’s what I find in CTE, which you’re specializing in right now. You’re not only a teacher, you’re a mentor, you’re a parent, you’re a guardian, you’re a sounding board. Doctor. You’re a nurse.” Paul summarized: “We really are filling these roles, filling these family roles, family-type relationship roles. I’ve had students to call me their ‘school-dad.’” In earlier discussions in the study, there was the account of a teacher-student relationship providing an opportunity to assess and discover disabilities of a student not previously disclosed by the student’s parents. There were expressions of gratification as the teachers described their relationships with the students.
Student-student relationships. Some of the teachers gave accounts of observing the developments of student-student relationships in the context of assisting student performances, especially during the senior year of school. Mack noted: “Your senior class developed some relationships and they know when somebody’s weak in something and somebody’s not.” The peer-to-peer relationships would either be created by the students or by the teacher as tools for triage. Nate used the student-student relationships to aid instruction: “If I see one guy that or two guys that are constantly struggling, or still below, the classmates, maybe they can get some other classmates for me.” Carl admitted: “I’ll put a kid that’s deficient in this area with a kid that’s good in that area. That’s engaging, that gets them critical thinking.” Improvement on passage rates was not the only experience given related to student-student relationships. Dawn provided this example of witnessing what she described as emotional triage between students:

[T]hat particular student was actually taken under their wing and treated as an equal, where she may never have been that before. So, to me, and I know that state and the school district look at the pass-fail and the numbers, I see what she got out of it was so much more whether she passed or not. It’s like an emotional triage. Being in a group they never had. I’m not talking about playing sports. . . . Even if she doesn’t pass, she feels accepted and welcomed into society, let’s say. Her peers.

Dawn shared that this incident was not abnormal among the students because the students have actively engaged in helping each other to succeed.

Teacher-teacher relationships. There were experiences mentioned of teachers helping teachers as everyone journeyed to obtain student successes. Victor relayed observing the teachers transforming: “Younger in terms of experience, willing to change our methods. The staff is a whole lot more collaborative now in our efforts to bring these scores up.” There were no
indications from any of the accounts of the teachers that staff had not been willing to work together in the past. There had not existed a sense of urgency to collaborate in the past until the situation was brought to the attention of the teachers by the past administrator of the CTE center having a failing status. Communication between the teachers continues to be an experience for Nate: “We’ll talk about some students. We ask each other for help.” Odell shared an experience with a student who was failing and another teacher: “And when he didn’t pass that [test], I actually brought in another teacher to help me. ‘Okay, I’m not getting through to him.’ We actually found another test; it was more suited to him.” There was an openness to receive aid from colleagues even though the appeal for help was admission of shortcomings.

**CTE school-community relationships.** The last relationship that was commented on by a few of the teachers was the relationship the community had with the CTE school. The experiences were positive in that this relationship impacted the students’ success in the future and validated the teachers’ performances. Victor shared: “Our programs are becoming more involved because they are seeing the successes that we have.” Nate noted the increased community involvement in the job/career fairs held by the CTE school. The increased community involvement contributed to the feelings of value described by Michael. Michael explained what the teachers receive from the relationships with the community: “A sense of purpose. In the end, I’m making a difference. I’m giving back to the community.” The sense of pride and accomplishment was evident as these teachers shared their experiences of providing successful students to the community.

**Superordinate Theme #4 The aftereffects of triage on the CTE teachers ranged from a sense of accomplishment to a concern about the present education system.** Every one of the teachers’ accounts described long-lasting aftereffects from utilizing triage to assist their
students. Their responses alternated from detailing the effects of past experiences to the effects of present experiences since they admitted continuing to utilize triage as a tool in their programs.

**Teachers’ satisfaction from student successes.** One aftereffect that appeared to be particular to CTE was the accomplishment of making students employable. Victor stressed this experience: “That has been one of the biggest things we have done, also, to help students become more employable. It doesn’t necessarily bring up their test scores, but you see the importance in that.” There is a sense among the teachers that the ability for the student to get a job may be more important than how high the test scores may be. Dawn claimed: “Pass rates are great, but there’s also that employability factor that we are trying to instill in them.” Nate explained why employability was important: “We give them the basics to start a career.” The teachers emphasized the importance of employability as a goal for CTE because they are teaching juniors and seniors who are working towards graduation.

The teachers shared the belief that growth in life skills of the students was more important than increase in scores, while admitting the students’ scores had to be sufficient for passing. There was not one instance where an actual test range of scores was discussed or reflected upon by the teachers. On the other hand, there were rich accounts of teachers’ observing the students’ attaining of life skills by the time for graduation. Alice told of an example where students reported actions they had taken during an exercise with outside clients: “They said, ‘We want to put a motivational quote in front of her [the citizen].’ I stood there, crying. And I thought, ‘I’ve reached these students.’ I could see the compassion.” Ursula reflected: “Oh yeah, lots of times you see changes, positive changes in their attitude, their direction in life. And I watched a young kid come in and I saw a young man leave.” The allusion to growth was also referred to by Paul: “To be a family within these walls, good relationships,
students grow, teachers grow.” The determination of what life skills are vital to the students vary with the participant. Ursula discussed what life skills students should achieve in a particular program: “We incorporate life skills a lot with this. I want my kids to leave with the understanding of what integrity is; what compassion is; what empathy is. These are our building blocks.”

The teachers expressed how they become emotionally attached to their students as an aftereffect of triage. Nate confirmed the existence of attachments: “You know, once you get your students in there, you care about each one.” The attachment became more evident to some of the teachers when they experience a student who quits or fails in the program. Nate told of the situation that would affect him negatively:

When you don’t succeed. When you get that student that quits on you. . . . Cause as teachers, we can’t up. If we give up on them, we might be their last resort they have. You know their home life is these kids’ problems too.

Odell shared a similar experience after triaging a student and the student failed an examination: “I became emotionally attached; you know. Because I really want to see him succeed. You know it hurt me a little bit when he didn’t pass.” Odell indicated they immediately began assessing the deficiencies in order to try the test once more. The immediate assessments were evidence of the determination to move the students from failing to passing voiced by all of the teachers.

**Teachers’ job satisfaction.** Job satisfaction was achieved when students pass as noted by Carl: “All my students got through industry certification. They got something.” Ursula experienced a feeling of being satisfaction with the chosen career of teaching: “This is the best job I’ve ever had. This has got to be the most rewarding career I’ve ever had.” Michael
experienced some issues with being a CTE teacher, but the overcoming of those issues has made the job worthwhile:

[T]he whole aspect of moving them from failing to passing because it is a challenge to us being [the center] to get a better, better return on our efforts. I enjoy being a CTE teacher because it’s not just sitting up here. . . . I’m just pouring it out to them. I’m pouring out all my knowledge.

Paul connected the job satisfaction to the welfare of the students:

For the most part, the students are coming . . . they feel valued. I get to go to a place where I’m appreciated. I get to go to a place where someone values me. I get to go to a place where I can show off my skillset. I think that’s been so valuable for the students.

Another aftereffect of triage has been the impact made on the lives of the CTE teachers. Ursula gave the following reflection: “I have learned so much. [I]t has changed my life so much. It impacted my life that I know now that the importance of not every kid is college-bound ready at 17 or 18 years old.” The teachers indicated these aftereffects continue to have impact on them as they remain in the field of education.

**Teachers’ concerns about education systems.** The attitudes of some of the teachers would change to display feelings of anger as they expressed concerns about the education system. There seemed to be an unwritten demarcation between the education system and CTE, with education sometimes referred to as the academic side. Mack complained: “The school system, education is mind blowing” because there are policy changes made without input from teachers. Dawn found issues in education with accountability of student absences which impact student performance:
And in the culture that the school systems are in now, there is no accountability for absences. [E]ven if they have an absence policy, they’re not usually penalized or held accountable. I’ve been disheartened. Just overall, disheartened at education. The lack of accountability has really, you know . . . [T]his lack of accountability that the school’s systems are handing out. You know, I’ve been very disheartened. I’ve been discouraged.

Dawn also blamed the education system for not motivating the students to do more:

Most of theory, you’re going to have to be driven to do on your own. Kids, the juniors and seniors, completely are not driven to do things on their own. So, we’re trying to, they’re used to the traditional academic instruction.

*Teachers’ advice to others for moving students/schools from failing to passing.* All of the teachers provided advice to others for moving students or the schools from failing status to passing based on their previous experiences. The most repeated suggestion was for the teachers to establish a relationship with their students. Paul advised teachers: “To find a way to connect with them, then I give them an opportunity to connect with me by letting them teach me something about something.” Dawn advised teachers: “Know your students. If they know their students, that school [will] do better. You will have less behavioral problems. You have less behavioral problems because now it’s personal to them.” Carl advised of the importance of pretests and strong administrators: “That was the first step to go from the low scores to the high, where there was an administrator who understood. So, I think the administrator is the key person in the facility.” Victor continued the theme of good staff: “[You need] to have an open line of communication and collaboration between our administration and staff. You have to work together. You have to be willing to accept change.”
Triage was also mentioned as a tool for to others to use for their students. Ursula noted: “You cannot group a bunch of kids together and just think they are all going to pass. It’s not going to happen. No, it’s all individualized. It really is.” Alice presented triage as the only tool for others to use: “Triage. Find out where your students are.” Triage may not be a necessity if there is a transformation within the education system Carl advised: “[You will] see a split between college bound and technical bound within the next five years where kids are going to choose a vocation. Then their whole education process is geared towards that vocation, that track.” Carl became very hopeful that his suggestion was the ultimate solution to eradicating triage as a necessity in CTE.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

The willing participation by all 10 teachers in the CTE school yielded sufficient findings for this focus study on the existence of educational or instructional triage on secondary CTE teachers as an effect of accountability threats on teachers who are moving students from failing to passing, and how teacher input, if any, in CTE curriculum development effects students’ academic success. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 addressed the topic of educational or instructional triage in traditionally academic institutions therefore the experiences shared by these CTE teachers add to the existing body of knowledge (Gilborn & Youdell, 2000; Mathews, 2008). The results of this focus study lend additional knowledge to the issue of teacher input in curriculum development and the presence of deficit thinking, areas discussed in the literature review within Chapter 2. The conceptual framework of Taylor (1911), Perrow (1967), March (1981), and Senge (1990) was used to further comprehend the findings from the lived experiences of the secondary CTE teachers. In-depth literature review revealed motifs of academic reform, accountability, triage, and deficit thinking which are issues of concern in
current literature. I was able to identify those motifs throughout the teachers’ responses as they detailed how triage impacted their experiences moving students from failing to passing status, and their input if any in developing curriculum to address the failing students.

Taylorism, the scientific management theory attributed to Taylor (1911), championed efficient task management based on the management scientifically determining the best and fastest methods for doing work. Taylor instructed Cook (1910) to apply scientific management to education as a way of addressing efficiency in higher education. Criteria for Taylorism included collaboration between management and employees with management providing detailed instruction and employees selected for their skills furthering the instructions with optimal performance. The teachers acknowledged the existence of collaboration between themselves and the administrator, especially when the situation arose of the failing status of the CTE school. At that time, the administrator gave instructions specifying which tests would be used for future assessments that would result in higher passage rates. Each CTE teacher possess professional licenses for their respective programs and were hired based on their specific skills and knowledge at the time of the failing status of the school and now. The past administrator and the current administrator rely on the teachers’ skills to efficiently and expeditiously follow instructions and make the necessary changes to improve the testing results from failing to passing. The actions of the administrators and the teachers are aligned with Taylorism and scientific management (Cook, 1910; Taylor, 1911). The cooperation between the administrators and the teachers provided standardization throughout the CTE school and resulted in the overall raising of the low passage rates for licensing and credentialing assessments for the school and for individual students.
Perrow (1967) formalized the definition of organizations as structures that use technology to transform raw materials. The structure could consist of social relationships implementing actions to move forward the goals and mission of the organization. Technology is the label given to the work done by the members to effectuate changes to raw materials otherwise referred to as people, symbols, or things (Perrow, 1967). Goals of the organization can be impacted by changes in the surrounding environment and by the relationships formed among the members. In the education environment, the changes in schools can occur as a response to low passage rates on high stakes assessments dictated by calls for academic reform. Administrators may make changes that are standard and can be done across the board with regards to instructional choices. However, methods used to effectuate changes may not be routine or standardized where relationships within the organization are not routine. The teachers described the social structure within their CTE school as a structure with relationships between the administrators and the teachers; between the teachers; between the teachers and the students; between the students; and between the community and the CTE school overall. Their responses illustrated there are two primary goals shared by all connected to the CTE school: (a) passage of licensing and credentialing assessments, and (b) development of employable students.

The goals may appear standardized as expressed by the teachers; however, the teachers noted their methods used for instruction will depend on the particular relationships they have with their students in their respective programs. Perrow (1967) advised the greater impact in organizations can be made when the relationships among the members enable the members to meet the demands of their environment. In the CTE environment, the teachers are faced with demands unique to the special needs and/or circumstances of their students. Their methods may include the adaptation of roles to help the teachers make changes in their students. The teachers
described themselves at times having to fill roles for the students similar to roles of being a parent, encourager, motivator, “edutainer,” and authority, to name a few. Although the methods used may be particular to the individual teacher, role playing as a necessity tool was expressed by all of the teachers for moving their students from failing to passing status. The existence of a social structure and operative goals align with the formal organizational theory espoused by Perrow (1967).

March (1981) explained how organizations undergo changes to adapt to changes occurring within its environment. The organizational changes may require the assumption of risks or satisficing depending on what goals need to be met and the timeframe. The CTE school operates in the educational environment where organizational changes result from the demands of academic reform. Educational policies and mandates intended to hold schools accountable for poor student performance under the guise of academic reform result in organizational changes to bring about positive transformation (Evans et al., 2012). For the teachers in this study, organizational changes were made by the prior administrator for school operations and by the teachers for their respective program operations.

Those teachers who were present when the CTE school had a low overall passage rate told of how the administrator changed the testing for every program to testing determined better aligned with the curriculum and the capabilities of the student population to achieve the goal of immediate increase in passage rates. This action taken by the administrator without input from the teachers involved the assumption of risks for the sake of expeditious reform. Levitt and March (1991) noted risks are analyzed in light of what organizations have learned from program outcomes. The prior administrator learned the current testing was producing failures and the risk of changing the testing was a necessary risk to take. The teachers indicated the calculated risk
proved to be the correct action as the change in testing allowed the teachers flexibility to administer different assessments more aligned to the curriculum and the abilities of their students. Consequently, the teachers noted the success rates rose and the CTE school has not had a low overall passage rate since that occurrence in 2013.

The structure of the CTE school was described by one of the teachers as a university where the programs are similar to individual schools in the university. The teachers explained how they institute organizational changes within their respective programs as they adapt every year to changes in their student population. Each program in the CTE school has junior and senior students who are striving to pass license and program credentialing their senior year. March (1981) explained satisficing can occur when organizations may choose alternatives to reach an immediate goal while foregoing maximum benefits that could be gained in the long term. The teachers gave accounts of approaching students in the beginning of the year, one on one in their programs, who had or were displaying either a lack of interest or capabilities to perform in their classroom. The teachers would have these students to re-assess their placement and their performance. If the assessment was negative, rather than allowing the particular students to remain in the program for possible improvement during the year, the teachers would immediately assist the students by changing them to another CTE program or exiting the CTE program completely and return to their home high school.

Similarly, teachers told of removing students immediately from the dual enrollment program if the students’ grades start to decrease because failures would prevent the students from future college financial aid. Satisficing these students in both of these examples were program organizational changes which were made to meet the goal of academic reform. The teachers
were preventing future low assessments or failures by the immediate removal and change of placement of these students. Those actions were in line with current literature.

Senge (1990) recommended the learning organization framework for optimal decision-making by leadership for the growth of the organization when instituting organizational changes. Productive learners in a learning organization are defined as those members of the organization who grow in five areas of discipline and collectively use their growth to advance the organization further towards its mission and goals. Senge (1990) defined the learning organization framework as consisting of the disciplines of personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking.

The teachers in this study told of their commitment to personal mastery in their respective crafts and their possession of professional licenses as an indication of their level of skill. Given the independent structure of the programs in the CTE school, each teacher has the responsibility for maintaining their licenses as they impart instruction and monitor the licensing and credentialing of their students. One of the teachers remarked how technology and skills change constantly within their trades thereby requiring the teachers to engage in adaptive and generative learning for the sake of the success of their students and their programs. Several teachers expressed gratification in that the CTE environment allows for them to feel their skills are valued.

The teachers are able to form mental models and rely on those models as they engage in the disciplines of shared vision and team learning. Senge (1990) explained the ability to share different world views is necessary for forming mental models of possible solutions in decision-making. The diversity of the student population and the diversity of the industries are factors which require the teachers to be cognizant of different world views as they establish working
relationships with their students, their CTE faculty and staff, and the community within which the CTE school is located. A few teachers indicated that they had new experiences at the CTE school which changed their perspectives on the theory that every child can graduate and continue to higher education because of their knowledge gained from the various perspectives of their students.

Senge (1990) emphasized that the fifth area of discipline, systems thinking, is the one discipline that enables the other four disciplines to work together. Systems thinking requires collaboration among the leadership and members as they constantly assess the reality of the environment and how well the organization is holistically meeting the needs of those whom the organization serves. Cooperation can be obtained if the administrator has taken on the responsibility as required by Senge (1990) of motivating the teachers to feel invested in their growth and the growth of the school. The prior administrator of the CTE school in this study may not have allowed the teachers to have input in the developmental stages of curriculum development to address the low passage rates for the school in 2013. However, after he made the changes in the testing to testing more aligned with the state curriculum being taught at the school, the prior administrator fostered collaboration and cooperation by bringing the teachers together as a team to use systems thinking when making decisions within their classrooms regarding testing and instructional choices for their individual students. The teachers did make the observations that the present administrator does allow the teachers to have input in the goals and mission of their programs and of the school overall. The teachers acknowledged their responsibilities included moving the students from failing to passing their credentials and creating employable students for the community.
The teachers responded overwhelmingly that the high level of cooperation and collaboration within the CTE school has continued. All of the teachers noted involvement between themselves, the administration, and the students when addressing areas for remediation or the need to change testing to meet the capabilities of the students. One teacher told of a remediation class held by another teacher in a different program for students from all of the programs who needed personal assistance. The actions of the teachers are in line with the framework for a learning organization detailed in literature, and one teacher noted that as the student grows, the teacher and the school grow.

The theme of accountability permeated the current literature. Academic reform is the action of organizational change necessitated to hold schools accountable for poor student achievement (Bonner, Koch, & Longmeyer, 2004). Although all children are entitled by the Constitution to quality education, Valencia (1997) found there were administrators who avoided accountability for their low school performances by placing blame for the failures on student internal deficiencies. Educators using deficit thinking attributed low grades to the class, genetics, and socialization of the students. Skrla and Scheuric (2001) found that accountability measures of high stakes testing displaced deficit thinking since the test scores reflected low standards of education for the entire student population in the schools. Authors in the literature provided understanding of the level of accountability these teachers embraced for their students’ performances in their programs, to include the willingness to make organizational changes to address areas of weakness found in the testing results. The literature provided knowledge needed for the expressions by some of the teachers that persons outside of the CTE school were currently engaged in behaviors similar to deficit thinking. The teachers told of the negative stigma attached to CTE by others that special needs students and students not capable of passing
the academic standardized tests have no other alternative but to be placed in CTE programs. Those students are perceived as ones who will eventually fail due to their deficiencies, whether or not those deficiencies had been diagnosed or formally recognized with IEPs.

Sharma (2018) commented that a component of deficit thinking is modification where intervention with school-based relationships and other resources would modify the deficiencies to the extent that the student could successfully function. The teachers are in agreement that the mission and goal of CTE is the intervention in the lives of the students for success in academics and life-skills. Each teacher told of the importance of building relationships with the students to motivate the students to succeed. The school-based relationships took on various family-type roles as the teachers made various instructional choices that would aid in making the students employable.

The findings of this study verify the findings of Perrow (2010) that deficit thinking by administrators and teachers have not been totally displaced with the advent of high-stakes testing. In fact, this study has shown evidence of current influence of deficit thinking on placement decisions with respect to students in CTE programs. The CTE teachers are expected to provide the modification to offset the deficiencies noted with deficit thinking with their instructional choices in the education of the disadvantaged students. One of the teachers acknowledged the CTE teachers expect and accept the challenge of working with the students and provide resources equally to every student while working with those students having special needs. The teachers are held accountable by the home schools of the students and the community for the success of the students placed in their programs.

The accountability measures for student performance are primarily the results from high-stakes testing used for crucial decision-making (Levine & Levine, 2013). Funding and staff
decisions are made according to the ability of students to pass academic benchmarks scores thereby indicating the level of performance of the teachers in the schools (Gonzales et al., 2016). Licensing and credentialing assessments in CTE schools have been found to meet the criteria to be considered high-stakes testing (Geno, 2014). Federal funding for CTE schools may not be based on the passage of the assessments, but, the continued existence of the CTE schools that receive the funding may be threatened because a decrease in the passage rates could cause a decrease in enrollment and a decrease in the number of students employable in the community. The students which comprise the population in CTE schools are juniors and seniors in high school and the licensing and credentialing assessments are mandatory for graduation and employment.

I found within current literature sentiments of frustration from teachers who were not able to have input in curriculum development to institute changes to meet accountability demands (Vali & Buese, 2007). There were concerns that curriculum development changes would require the teachers to implement standardized instruction not responsive to the particularized needs of their students. Woodward (2011) determined through the lived experiences of teachers that they felt pressured to accept changes made by outsiders to address problems with their students without their input on the recommended curriculum. The concern of the lack of teacher input was noted by authors to be the foundation for teachers believing policymakers were creating impediments to their freedom of instructional choices (Firestone, 2009; Schuler, 2017). The teachers in this study confirmed their current relationships with the administrator facilitate full participation by the teachers in curriculum development decisions, thereby allowing them the flexibility to implement instructional choices beneficial to the success of their students. Those teachers who were employed in 2013 when the CTE school was in
failing status commented they were not able to provide input when the prior administrator was forced to implement changes to move the school from failing to passing. They also admitted they had faith in the administrator because of his strengths in the area of testing and the teachers willingly accepted his recommendations. Overall, the results in this study were aligned with the literature in that these teachers who are able to provide input in policymaking have more flexibility with instructional choices. Those teachers will also participate with greater understanding in the implementation of policies to meet accountability measures. These results expand the findings of Woodward (2011) as applied to CTE.

Gilborn and Youdell (2000) and Mathews (2008) extended studies of accountability to include the concept of triage as a tool to reduce academic failures once the need for intervention has been established. Educational triage was one method of choice by teachers to allocate resources to those students near the benchmark scores of the high stakes testing for the purpose of moving those students expeditiously to the passing marks (Ballou & Springer, 2017). Instructional triage would be the method used by teachers to implement curriculum changes based on the areas where all students needed assistance regardless of individual student performances (Jennings & Sohn, 2014). The teachers in the present study were familiar with the concept behind triage, and collectively defined triage as finding where the students are weak and using their resources to improve the students’ performances. The teachers did not indicate formal utilization of triage nor were there acknowledgements of formal implementation of either educational or instructional triage. Some of the teachers voiced their opinion of no differentiation between the two identified classifications. Year-round assessments done by these teachers which provide the basis for instructional changes in curriculum verify the high level of accountability
the teachers possess to ensure successful passage of their students of the licensing and credentialing assessments.

O’Mara (2014) noted some teachers felt pressured to meet accountability measures would do remediation of students or would guide students to attend other schools with the goal of improving the levels of student proficiency at their schools. Those actions were described as triage behaviors. Similarly, the teachers in this study admitted to engaging in remediation combined with conversations with low-performing students about reevaluating their placement in CTE. They readily admitted their actions were examples of triage which they considered to be beneficial as they continuously assess the abilities of their students. It is important to note current literature has noted incidences where students who have not received the benefit of triage tend to disengage from school and drop out (Schoeneberger, 2012; Suh & Suh, 2006). Roycki (1999) found triage causes division and disengagement in the classrooms as teachers focus their resources towards particular students. The teachers avoided the issues of disengagement and division by systematically triaging every student in their programs regardless of the existence of any indication of poor performance on assessments. These teachers achieve student engagement by involving every student in their instructional choices to combat low passage rates. There are no divisions made within the classrooms other than the peer-to-peer assignments of placing strong students with weak students. Several teachers described how they would read the test questions to the whole class to avoid singling out those students who could not read. The current literature would classify the actions of the teachers as examples of educational and instructional triage combined to meet the needs of improving the students’ scores.
Limitations

This study was limited by date and time constraints with respect to access to the teachers at the CTE school. Instructions from the administrator were specific that contract limitations of the teachers prohibited any requests for the teachers to participate when their contracts ended at the close of term for the summer. The limitation did not remain with the study because the teachers promptly scheduled and willingly participated in one-hour interviews over the course of 72 hours the last week of the term. The teachers further provided their personal contact information for future member-checking of the interview transcriptions.

This study was limited by the use of the CTE site which served as a regional center for three high schools in the mid-Atlantic region. There were no interviews with CTE teachers employed at other sites or engaged with other student populations located in other states. This limitation remained with the study and the research was limited to the experiences of these CTE teachers. Connected to this limitation is the limitation of the study by the experiences of these 10 teachers at this CTE school. The recollections of their experiences with triage were limited to their years of experiences at the particular CTE school. There was the possibility of teachers in the study who were not employed at the CTE school during the time period when the school had overall low passage rates on testing, therefore those teachers would not have been involved in moving the school’s status from failing to passing. As teachers responded to the interview questions, the reality became apparent that some of the teachers did not have that experience with the school’s status but did have similar experiences of students failing testing within their individual programs at the school. This limitation remained with the study and the context of the questions were modified for those particular teachers to allow them to share their experiences.
Implications of the Results for Transformation

The findings of this study have implications for transformation, especially in the areas of policy, practice, and theory. The results revealed the experiences of the teachers of triage as they moved students from failing to passing, and the input they have with the developing stages of curriculum development. Consequently, the knowledge gained from this study will enable academic policy makers to facilitate student achievement within CTE for success with licensing and credentialing and with graduation from high school.

Implications on Policy

The organizational changes evidenced in this study as a result of triage have implications for policy changes. Academic policy makers have mandated status-based high stakes testing as accountability measures but are shifting towards growth-based testing as more indicative of students’ holistic capabilities. It became readily apparent to policy makers that CTE was a viable alternative for students who were not performing well on the academic tests or who did not want to go to college. Congress increased federal funding to CTE where students would gain vocational abilities and strengthen the workforce. The current CTE organizational pipeline begins when the students are juniors in high school and ends upon graduation.

The research indicated the primary incentive for triage in CTE was the need to save the student who is wrongly placed in CTE for various reasons and subsequently fails the tests. A short-term policy change would be to require the input of CTE teachers together with Guidance Counselors of the home schools to design and implement placement guidelines to ensure students who want to attend CTE are placed in the program best suited to their capabilities and interests.
A long-term policy change would require districts to demonstrate a greater commitment to CTE by establishing a vocational track of study for students to begin in the earlier grades of sixth or seventh grade. Presently, the policy of students entering CTE in their junior and senior years places additional weight on the licensing and credentialing assessments and create the need to triage year-round. Policy changes creating a vocational track would increase participation of students and would provide more instructional time needed to ensure graduation and potential employment. The implementation of this long-term new policy could have a large impact on the educational environment and curriculum development across the states. Technology and skills required in the workplace continue to change, so must CTE and academic organizations with the goal of producing knowledgeable and capable students.

**Implications on Practice**

In this study, the teachers provided ideas for curriculum development and instructional methods which would implicate changes in practice for both CTE and academic instructors which could increase teacher input while producing maximum output from the students (Mallett, Trudel, Lyle, & Rynne, 2009). There were several areas where practices separate the CTE teachers from the academic teachers who are responsible for the students in the high schools resulting in a lack of shared knowledge that could be beneficial to the success of the students. Input from the CTE teachers at earlier stages of curriculum development could facilitate the exploration of potential areas students would need intervention. Key relationships would need to be fostered and maintained between CTE and the academic institutions with an enhanced focus on listening to the students as they voice their wants and needs from education (Mallett et al., 2009).
The teachers expressed a feeling of exclusion from the creation of students’ IEPs. The Individualized Education Program in practice assesses students’ academic deficiencies and lists accommodations needed for academic instruction but fails to address accommodations for skill instructions. CET requires students to be proficient in the technology and in skills for the respective program. Therefore, the CET teachers find themselves in a constant state of triage as they continuously assess the needs and make accommodations during the course of the school year. To minimize the need for constant triage, the CET teachers should be allowed to have input at the IEP meetings of their potential students.

The placement of students in CTE according to internal deficiencies appear to be a practice as evidenced by observations made by the teachers. The displacement of deficit thinking influenced by a perceived stigma attached to CTE has become a challenge to the CTE teachers and impacts their instructional choices. Increased input by the CTE teachers with placement coupled with the implementation of strategies to address the deficit thinking displayed by those outside the CTE environment could facilitate both short-term and long-term changes in practice by the respective administrators.

**Implications on Theory**

This present study explored the lived experiences of CTE secondary teachers (Grades 10–12) for the existence of educational or instructional triage as an effect of accountability threats on teachers moving students from failing to passing. The literature provided knowledge detailing the educational or instructional triage used by teachers in traditional education to improve student performances when results of high-stakes testing indicated low student achievement. Authors in the literature further provided the circumstances where teachers gave input through collaboration in curriculum development for addressing the goal of academic reform for student
success. The findings of this study reinforce the theories of Taylor (1911), Cook (1910), Perrow (1961), March (1981), and Senge (1990) as foundation for understanding the experiences of the teachers with triage and curriculum development as highlighted in the literature.

The findings of this study support the scientific management theory of Taylor (1911) as championed by his protégé Cook (1910) that emphasized the importance of cooperation between management and workers to scientifically determine the most efficient and expeditious methods to achieve optimal output. In the educational setting, the administrators would hire teachers possessing the requisite skills, and those administrators would provide detailed instruction to those teachers as guidance for using their skills to meet the goals of educational policies. The teachers in this study were hired because they have professional licenses in their respective craft verifying their have the requisite skills to carry out the duties and responsibilities for curriculum development and instruction in the CTE school. The administrator and the teachers collaborate to determine the most expedient methods and practices for instructional choices needed to ensure the graduation and employability of the student within the 2-year time frame given to them. These responses lend support to Taylorism, the theory attributed to Taylor (1911) and applied to education by Cook (1910) in that science is applied by the administrator and skilled teachers to determine the best ways to move students from failing to passing.

The findings of this study support the formalized definition of organizational theory of Perrow (1967) that organizations operate as structures that use technology to transform raw materials. The structure may be a social structure comprised of relationships working together to meet the demands of their environment. The raw materials in the CTE environment can be the students, and the technology is the work necessary for the teachers to create successful and employable students in today’s workforce. The importance of various relationships such as
teacher-teacher; teacher-student; teacher-administrator; student-student; and school-community was stressed by all of the teachers as the key factor to student success for academic reform. These accounts support the views of Perrow (1967) that the social structure within organizations is important for the technology needed to transform raw materials to meet organization goals.

March’s (1981) theory of organizational changes described how organizations change in response to changes within their environments. Academic reform necessitates organizational changes within schools to address failing or low student performances. The leaders may use different methods, such as the method of satisficing, to effect the changes when the need to change is to reach a short-term versus a long-term goal. The responses indicated the teachers in this study addressed issues of poor student performance and failing tests with immediate remedial actions that included changing the tests to be administered; reading test questions aloud to all students as opposed to certain ones; and removing students either from their particular CTE program or from the CTE school entirely. These actions evince the theory of organizational change as outlined by March (1981) that organizations will effect changes in response to environmental changes using methods that will best address the changing needs.

Senge’s (1990) theory of a learning organization stressed that successful organizations should be learning organizations continuously producing learners who improve their organizations with their knowledge. As learners engage in the five disciplines of (a) personal mastery, (b) mental models, (c) shared vision, (d) team learning, and (e) systems thinking, the learners together with the leadership can engage in realistic changes for the growth of the organization. The responses of the teachers in this study evidenced their commitment to all five areas of disciplines and support the learning organization theory of Senge (1990).
Recommendations for Further Research

The present study explored the lived experiences of CTE secondary teachers (10–12) for the existence of educational or instructional triage as an effect of accountability threats on teachers moving students from failing. The previous studies provided the categories of educational and instructional triage in the context of traditional education but was limited with respect to the application of the concepts in the context of career and technical education (Booher & Jennings, 2005; Gilborn & Youdell, 2000; Levine & Levine, 2013). Future research is recommended to explore the concept of triage holistically from the focus of growth-based competencies addressed in career and technical education. The teachers indicated accommodations and expectations of students provided to them were centered around academic perceptions versus perceptions of the students’ skills and capabilities.

Future research is recommended for the exploration of the perspectives of more CTE teachers for their experiences with triage and curriculum development. The limitations of this study may have influenced the results in that the results were particular to this institution and this region. Exploring the experiences of CTE teachers in other jurisdictions and states may reveal more insight regarding triage and teacher input in curriculum development to meet accountability measures.

Lastly, further recommendation for continued research includes the exploration of deficit thinking and career and technical education. The teachers insisted the negative stigma remains that CTE is the only placement for low-functioning and special needs students. Placement of students in CTE founded on deficit thinking continues to place teachers in a state of triage requiring daily assessments of students for potential failure. By exploring the possible existence of deficit thinking in CTE, future studies may provide the knowledge by which deficit thinking
may be displaced and placement for CTE students will experience an increase in positive outcomes.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of CTE secondary teachers for the existence of educational or instructional triage as an effect of accountability threats on teachers who are moving students from failing to passing. The research questions were:

1. How does educational or instructional impact secondary teachers (Grades 10–12) in CTE schools?
2. What input do the teachers have in the development of CTE curriculum?

The population chosen for the research was the staff at a CTE school in the mid-Atlantic region. Data collection was done through semistructured interviews. IPA was used to explore the meanings the teachers gave to the phenomenon of triage and their input on curriculum development. With the use of axial coding, and the model established by Smith (2009), four superordinate themes emerged from the accounts of the teachers:

1. The Administrator is primarily accountable for the passing/failing status of the CTE school, and the teachers focus on the passing/failing status of their individualized programs.
2. Triage is utilized in CTE informally throughout the school year for student success.
3. Different relationships are vital to the triage of students to ensure passage of examinations and success in the workplace.
4. The aftereffects of triage on the CTE teachers ranged from a sense of accomplishment to a concern about the present education system.
The CTE teachers acknowledged in this study that triage in general is accepted as a tool to address all issues found with students as a means to solving whatever problems may be impeding the ability of the child to succeed. The teachers are not aware of the demarcation between the concepts of educational or instructional triage. The impediments may exist because of deficit thinking by the administrators who place the students in career and technical education based on perceived inabilities to function in traditional school settings; inappropriate or wrongful selection of a vocation or field of interest; or even physical disabilities rendering the student incapable of performing. The relationships formed as a result of the use of triage and the active input teachers have in curriculum development to address deficiencies found with the students demonstrate the positive impact triage has on the students and teachers. Modifications are made to ensure students who have failed can perform successfully on assessments more suited to the individual student’s capabilities while remedial instruction is provided to reinforce technical knowledge mandated by the written portions of the credentialing. It is hoped the results of this study can be used to give educators and policy makers a greater understanding of triage and the importance of teacher input in the development of curriculum.
References


Retrieved from https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/747d/19abfdd2c19c8d796dea84e79531143312df.pdf


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Appendix A: Research Participant Consent Form

Research Study Title: An Interpretative Phenomenological Study: How (10–12) Secondary Teachers are Impacted by Triage within a Career and Technical Education Program.

Principal Investigator: Cassandra S. Conover
Research Institution: Concordia University–Portland
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Christopher Maddox

Purpose and what you will be doing:
The purpose of this Interpretative Phenomenological Study will be to explore how (10–12) Secondary Teachers are Impacted by Triage within a Career and Technical Education Program. The problem is teachers are expected to utilize Career and Technical Education Program curriculum without having an opinion during the developmental and selection processes. The study will consist of one long interview of open-ended questions to allow you to fully share your experiences and observations. There will be follow-up meetings to give you a chance to review the transcript for accuracy, additions, or corrections. Doing these things should take no more than one hour of your time.

Risks:
There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside a storage box. When we or any of our investigators look at the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. We will refer to your data with a code that only you and the principal investigator knows links to you. This way, your identifiable information will not be stored with the data. We will not identify you in any publication or report. Sessions will be audio recorded. Recordings will be deleted immediately following transcription and member-checking. All other study related materials will be kept securely for 3 years from the close of the study and will then be destroyed. Your information will always be kept private.

Benefits:
Information you provide will help educators and legislators understand the impact of accountability measures on your roles as teachers in the classrooms, mandated to meet those measures. More specifically, your participation may provide greater insight to education stakeholders of the impact triage has on education. You could benefit this by sharing the successes of your school and your students which enhances the credibility of your institution and your professional reputation.

Confidentiality:
This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.
**Right to Withdraw:**
Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

**Contact Information:**
You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Cassandra Conover, at [redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

**Your Statement of Consent:**
I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

____________________________________________________________________________
Participant Name                                          Date

____________________________________________________________________________
Participant Signature                                      Date

____________________________________________________________________________
Investigator Name                                           Date

____________________________________________________________________________
Investigator Signature                                     Date

Investigator: Cassandra S. Conover; email: [redacted]  
c/o: Professor Christopher Maddox, Ph.D.  
Concordia University–Portland  
2811 NE Holman Street  
Portland, Oregon 97221
Appendix B : Interview Protocol

1. What are your experiences with the time of moving your school from failing status because of low passage rates for licensing and credentialing to passing status?

2. What areas in the school were you working in?

3. In order to understand your experiences, please describe your experiences in detail.

4. What was your role in helping the students go from failing to passing the assessments?

5. What situations influenced or affected your instructional choices during the time following the revelation of the low passage rates of the students?

6. What is your understanding of the phrase “educational triage”?

7. What is your understanding of the phrase “instructional triage”?

8. What are your perceptions of educational and instructional triage?

9. In what ways do you feel you utilize triage to help your students?

10. How do your instructional choices align with your perceptions of educational and instructional triage?

11. How would you describe the impact on the community of the school going from failing to passing rates on the licensing and credentialing assessments?

12. What incidents or people intimately connected with the experience of moving towards being successful with testing stands out for you?

13. In what ways were you affected by these experiences and are you still affected?

14. Considering the whole experience with moving the students from failing to passing status and educational and/or instructional triage, were there any things that happened that you would describe as positive?
15. If yes, in your opinion, what made those events positive?

16. What, if any, advice would you have for others concerning how to help their schools to move from failing to passing status with assessments?

17. Have you shared all that is significant to the experience?
Appendix C : Qualtrics Survey Questions

1. What grades do you teach?

2. How many years of teaching experience do you have?

3. What other states have you taught in?

4. Have you always taught in a CTE center/program?

5. What licenses do you possess?

6. Do you have a master’s degree?

7. What other disciplines have you taught?

8. What is your nationality?
Appendix D: Master Table of Superordinate Themes and Subthemes Summarized

SUPERORDINATE THEME #1
THE ADMINISTRATOR IS PRIMARILY ACCOUNTABLE FOR THE PASSING/FAILING STATUS OF THE SCHOOL, AND THE TEACHERS FOCUS ON THE PASSING/FAILING STATUS OF THEIR INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMS.

1. Responsibility for the passing/failing status of the CTE school
   a. Teacher not aware of school’s status
   b. Teacher aware only of program status
   c. Teacher knew administrator was aware of school’s status
   d. Teacher knows changes made by administrator

2. Responsibility of the CTE teachers to improve the status of their programs based on the mandates of both educational policies and requirements for industry credentialing.
   a. Had conflicts with testing alignments and student abilities
   b. Instructional choices must meet educational and industry policies

SUPERORDINATE THEME #2
TRIAGE IS UTILIZED IN CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION INFORMALLY THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL YEAR FOR STUDENT SUCCESS.

1. Triage generally accepted by the CTE teachers and practiced for student passage of academic and industrial examinations
   a. Described as natural and beneficial
   b. Seen as a necessity
   c. Requires assessments of strengths and weaknesses

2. Teachers’ awareness of the terms “educational” and “instructional” triage varied
   a. Little to no awareness
   b. Defined either terms or both terms

3. Incentives to triage were influenced by negative perceptions of CTE held by others
   a. Described the stigma of CTE as a dumping ground
   b. Believed impacted guidance counselors’ placement of students

4. CTE teachers meet challenges presented by students year-round
   a. Conducts assessments of limitations
   b. Conducts assessments of testing capabilities
   c. Adjusts instructions
SUPERORDINATE THEME #3
DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIPS ARE VITAL TO THE TRIAGE OF THE STUDENTS TO ENSURE PASSAGE OF EXAMINATIONS AND SUCCESS IN THE WORKPLACE.

1. Teacher-administrator relationships
   a. Provides needed support with advice and strategies
   b. Promotes self-evaluation of teachers and students
   c. Promotes success to the community
2. Teachers – student relationships
   a. Enables use of personal experiences for emotional support
   b. Enables students to evaluate own deficiencies
   c. Allows teachers to fill different roles in students’ lives
   d. Ensures identification of issues not specified by parents
3. Student- student relationships
   a. Peer-peer teaching
   b. Seniors recognize weaknesses
4. Teacher-teacher relationships
   a. Advice regarding instruction
   b. Advice regarding students
5. CTE school-community relationship
   a. Community requests student referrals
   b. Teachers able to contribute by producing capable students

SUPERORDINATE THEME #4
THE AFTERTREATMENTS OF TRIAGE ON THE CTE TEACHERS RANGE FROM A SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT TO A CONCERN ABOUT THE PRESENT EDUCATION SYSTEM.

1. Teachers’ satisfaction from students’ successes
   a. Described students as employable
   b. Observed growth in life skills
   c. Formed emotional attachments from working towards passage of examinations
2. Teachers’ job satisfaction
   a. Impact on career
   b. Impact on life
3. Teachers’ concerns about the education system
   a. About the education system in general
   b. About how the system handles students
4. Teachers’ advice to others for moving students/schools from failing to passing
   a. Importance of the Administrator
   b. Placement of the students
   c. Relationship with the students
   d. Pretests
   e. Triage
   f. Willingness to accept change and to make changes
### Example of a Portion of one Master Table

#### SUPERORDINATE THEME #1
THE ADMINISTRATOR IS PRIMARILY ACCOUNTABLE FOR THE PASSING/FAILING STATUS OF THE SCHOOL AND THE TEACHERS FOCUS ON THE PASSING/FAILING STATUS OF THEIR INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMS.

<table>
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<th>SUBTHEME</th>
<th>Carl</th>
<th>Victor</th>
<th>Mack</th>
<th>Paul</th>
<th>Michael</th>
<th>Odell</th>
<th>Nate</th>
<th>Dawn</th>
<th>Ursula</th>
<th>Alice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 Responsibility for the CTE school rests with the administrator who seeks solutions to improve the failing status of the school</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Teacher not aware of center’s status</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>1.2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Teacher aware only of program status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Teacher knew administrator was aware of center’s status</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>14.21</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Teacher knows changes made by administrator</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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Appendix E: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does “fraudulent” mean?

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multimedia files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

What is “unauthorized” assistance?

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.
Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.

2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.

Cassandra Stroud Conover
Digital Signature

Cassandra Stroud Conover
Name (Typed)

February 14, 2020
Date