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TEACHING, LEADERSHIP  
AND CURRICULUM STUDIES

EIGHTH GRADE READING CURRICULUM: HOW TEACHERS MAKE CHOICES  
(217 pp.)

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This qualitative study examined the influences on teachers' decision making when structuring eighth grade reading/language arts curriculum and their choices of reading material and accompanying activities. Nineteen teachers in six school districts participated. Data collection consisted of a pre-interview questionnaire, interviews, and additional data from public information such as local school report card ratings from the state of Ohio and Ohio data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress for comparison data.

The research questions that guided this study were: (1) What factors do eighth grade reading/language arts teachers cite as influences on their choices of reading material and activities? (2) How are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers making those decisions at the classroom level? What is the structure for curriculum decision making in the district? (3) What do eighth grade reading/language arts teachers ask students to read for instruction in reading/language arts? (4) What kinds of activities are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers asking students to do with that reading material? (5) When, where, and how are eighth grade reading/language arts teachers allowing students to make choices of reading material and activities? (6) How have eighth grade reading/language arts teachers' decisions changes over time?

Data analysis resulted in an interpretive theory that the *Ohio Academic Content Standards English Language Arts* and the Ohio Achievement Test are the driving forces in curriculum decision making. Teachers are using the standards, district curriculum maps and book lists, student interest, teacher interest, and availability of materials to decide what to ask students to read and do with the end goal being success on the achievement test. When teachers are feeling pressure from the district leadership to raise test scores, they are including a focus on skills for the test such as modeling questions, practice writing extended responses, and using practice tests. Most teachers do not feel that they can relinquish control in the curriculum to allow students to have many choices over reading materials and activities. The primary areas of student choice in reading material were in independent sustained silent reading and when doing projects such as research or book reports.

