

Spring 5-16-2015

# Teachers' navigation of policy context: Plotting the course for balance between conviction and reform

Linda James  
*Georgia State University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/mse\\_diss](https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/mse_diss)

---

## Recommended Citation

James, Linda, "Teachers' navigation of policy context: Plotting the course for balance between conviction and reform." Dissertation, Georgia State University, 2015.  
[https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/mse\\_diss/9](https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/mse_diss/9)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Middle and Secondary Education at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Middle and Secondary Education Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@gsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@gsu.edu).

## ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, TEACHERS' NAVIGATION OF POLICY CONTEXT: PLOTTING THE COURSE FOR BALANCE BETWEEN CONVICTION AND REFORM, by LINDA JAMES, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

---

Amy Seely Flint, Ph.D.  
Committee Chair

---

Michelle Zoss, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

---

Mona Matthews, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

---

Peggy Albers, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

---

Date

---

Gertrude Tinker Sachs, Ph.D.  
Chairperson, Department of Middle and Secondary Education

---

Paul Alberto, Ph.D

Dean, College of Education

## AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

By presenting this dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the advanced degree from Georgia State University, I agree that the library of Georgia State University shall make it available for inspection and circulation in accordance with its regulations governing materials of this type. I agree that permission to quote, to copy from, or to publish this dissertation may be granted by the professor under whose direction it was written, by the College of Education's Director of Graduate Studies, or by me. Such quoting, copying, or publishing must be solely for scholarly purposes and will not involve potential financial gain. It is understood that any copying from or publication of this dissertation, which involves potential financial gain, will not be allowed without my written permission.

---

NAME

## **NOTICE TO BORROWERS**

All dissertations deposited in the Georgia State University library must be used in accordance with the stipulations prescribed by the author in the preceding statement. The author of this dissertation is:

Linda C. James  
4635 Blue Ridge Road  
Morganton, GA 30345

The director of this dissertation is:

Dr. Amy Seely Flint  
Department of MSE  
College of Education  
Georgia State University  
Atlanta, GA 30303

## CURRICULUM VITAE

Linda James

### EDUCATION:

Ph.D.	2015	Georgia State University Language and Literacy
Masters Degree	2009	Nova Southeastern University Teaching and Learning
Bachelors Degree	2007	Mercer University Early Childhood Education

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

2007-present	Teacher Morganton County School System
1993-2005	Teacher/Director Casa Montessori School

### PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS:

Flint, A., Anderson, N., Allen, E., Campbell, T., Fraser, I., Hilaski, D., James, L., Rodriguez,

S., Thornton, N., (2011). When policies collide with conviction: Educators striving to overcome obstacles in the face of adversity. *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*.

Flint, A., Anderson, N., Allen, E., Campbell, T., Fraser, I., Hilaski, D., James, L., Rodriguez, S., Thornton, N., (November, 2011). *When policies collide with conviction: Educators striving to overcome obstacles in the face of adversity*. Keynote presentation at the NCTE conference, Chicago, IL.

## PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

2012

National Council of Teachers of English

Teachers' Navigation of Policy Context: Plotting the Course for Balance Between Conviction and Reform

by

Linda James

Under the Direction of Amy Seely Flint

ABSTRACT

This study examined an aspect of educational policy that has on the whole, been neglected in the extensive sum of research conducted on the topic. Specifically, it sought to investigate the ways in which elementary teachers navigate and negotiate the policy context in which they work and teach. The framework for this study examined the mediated constructs of teacher practices in politically restrictive environments through the theoretical lenses of symbolic interactionism and critical pedagogy. Symbolic interactionism was used to interpret the actions, both individual and social, of the participants as they discussed the ways in which they cope with educational policies and the impact on them as individuals and as educators. Critical pedagogy was employed to investigate issues of power, and how this power affected those navigating educational policies. (Freire, 1970). The participants in this study were three early childhood teachers; all with a vast

amount of teaching experiences. Qualitative interview data (Seidman, 2013) was collected to understand and report the philosophical and social constructs that served as a catalyst for the meaning-making process behind educational policies and the ways in which teachers understand and implement them into classroom practice. Constant comparative analysis was used to identify codes and later, categories as they emerged through a comparison of the data. In addition, discourse analysis; specifically Gee's (2011) seven building tasks were applied to identify the ways in which power was exercised daily in schools, classrooms, and in the politically charged realm of education. Findings reveal that boundaries separating one's home life from one's teaching life are nonexistent, as well as a lack of humanness present in the current teaching environment creates a sense of despondency by the participants as they reflect on how their own agency as educators is placed into the hands of policy makers. Moreover, a critical need exists to build relationships between policy makers and teachers as both groups continue to work and move forward for the positive advancement of students *and* teachers.

INDEX WORDS: Educational policy, Accountability, No Child Left Behind, Policy context

TEACHERS' NAVIGATION OF POLICY CONTEXT: PLOTTING THE COURSE FOR  
BALANCE BETWEEN CONVICTION AND REFORM

by

Linda C. James

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Teaching and Learning

in

the Department of Middle and Secondary Education

in

the College of Education

Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA  
2015

Copyright by:  
Linda C. James

2015

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all teachers who sacrifice themselves daily as they champion the cause for their students. You have my most heart-felt love, honor, and appreciation for all you have done and will do for students no matter the cost to yourselves. Remember, we are all rewarded for the service we do to others in this life. It is my ardent prayer that even after leaving the confines of the classroom, I never forget nor become far removed from what it's like to live and be you.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I feel like another person looking in on my own life as I near the end of this journey that at times seemed as if it may get the proverbial ‘best of me’. One could never emerge on the other side of such an experience the same as when they went in. I am so thankful for every word of support and encouragement from friends, co-workers, and family. I will be forever grateful to my committee members: Dr. Amy Seely Flint, Dr. Peggy Albers, Dr. Mona Matthews, and Dr. Michelle Zoss. Each of you throughout this process have provided me with advice and words of wisdom that have served me in multiple capacities more than you will ever know. My studies as a doctoral student have forever changed me because of you. Dr. Flint, for the barrage of weekend e-mails, random notes in my writing, being the lead in my first publication, and helping me to do, say and write things I never knew I could, I thank you. You are indeed the epitome of a true mentor *and* teacher...always uplifting the positive and quietly whittling away at the things needing refining.

I am thankful to my husband Randy, who has for twelve years supported me in my endeavor to continue learning and bettering myself. From building projects while I was an undergraduate, to learning to become quite an efficient cook during my doctoral years, to figuring out ways to come up with tuition funds, he has allowed me to put my studies first and him second for a very long time. I am just so thankful for all the times he has championed my cause, and I will miss his now famous line, “Shouldn’t you be doing school work?”

To my mother and the ultimate role model of how to succeed in the face of adversity, I thank you for all the times you rallied me on when I was tired, for all the times you’ve bragged on me to anyone who would listen, and for all the prayers you’ve submitted on my behalf, I love and thank you.

To my daughter, Lindsay, I pray with all my heart that my studies have never detracted from being your mom. I hope that you recognize through my journey the things in life worth having are also the things worth working for. You have and always will be the apple of my eye and I pray your educational endeavors impart to you the same number of learning experiences mine have for me. The end is more than a fancy piece of paper; it’s evidence of your personal commitment and fortitude to the things you hold dear.

Finally, I thank God for providing me with all of the above; a caring, knowledgeable group of people to lead me through such an arduous journey, a husband who supports my life decisions, a beautiful, caring daughter who is never afraid to tell the world how much she loves her mom, an ending with no student loans, and finally, his guidance through the most difficult undertaking I’ve ever set out to accomplish.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables.....	v
List of Figures.....	vi
<b>1. THE PROBLEM .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Problem Statement.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Research Questions.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Background to the Study.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Significance of the Study.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Researcher Worldview.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Theoretical Framework.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>High-Stakes Testing &amp;/or Accountability.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Teacher Responses to Policy.....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Negotiation vs. Concession.....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>3. METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Methodological Orientation.....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Participants.....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Data Collection &amp; Analysis.....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Data Sources &amp; Collection Methods.....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Data Analysis.....</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Researcher Role.....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>Timeline.....</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>4. CONTEXT OF STUDY.....</b>	<b>92</b>

<b>Research Sites.....</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>Participants.....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>5. FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>Theme One: Policy Makers Are Not Educators.....</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>Theme Two: School Work Sundays.....</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>Theme Three: Negative Effects on Students.....</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>Theme Four: Standardization vs. Individuality.....</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>167</b>
<b>6. DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>169</b>
<b>Themes.....</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>Explanation of Conclusions.....</b>	<b>175</b>
<b>Limitations.....</b>	<b>179</b>
<b>Implications.....</b>	<b>183</b>
<b>Concluding Thoughts.....</b>	<b>187</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>190</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>199</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Original Codes and Categories .....	82
Table 2 Timeline .....	91

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Symbolic Interactionism.....	27
---------------------------------------	----

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **THE PROBLEM**

Existing research indicates that introducing and implementing pedagogical changes involve great difficulties, particularly in cases in which educational reform is not introduced by the same people who are asked to implement changes. In addition...the ability of teachers to play an active role in the process of implementing changes is crucial for the implementation of radical and long-lasting reforms throughout the entire educational system (Maskit, 2007, p. 851).

#### **Vignettes**

My experiences and seemingly juxtaposed personas as a teacher and a doctoral student for the most part, stand in contrast with one another; yet, there are times when these two personas become inextricably intertwined. Each day as I walk into a classroom full of children, my ‘doctoral self’ seems to inevitably follow me there, and the more time I spend in my graduate program, the more distressed I become about what is happening within the confines of the place my students call school. Similar to the sentiments noted in the opening quote, my teaching has consisted of numerous occasions when reform mandated by those uninformed about the realities of what happens in day-to-day classrooms has adversely affected student success and sometimes, efficacy. I share three vignettes about such specific experiences I have had with students that are reflective of the reasons that out of an innumerable number of topics for which I could be writing, I chose the one for which this study concentrates.

## **One Fall Day**

In the fall of 2012, I had taken my third grade students to the playground. I cannot remember the circumstances that led to my class being the only one out there for the whole of our recess period, but nevertheless, we were there by ourselves. The wind was blowing, and there was just a slight chill, but certainly not so cold that it would dissuade the children from wanting to play. Our playground is fairly large with many pieces of equipment that are enclosed in ground barriers with mulch. There is another large, open area covered in rocks where children just typically run around. At the bottom edge of this open area is a very large tree, and on this particular day, leaves were slowly and continually falling to the ground as a result of the wind. When the children noticed this continuous trickle of falling leaves in addition to the large leaf pile that was on the ground, most of them ran underneath the tree trying to catch the leaves as they fell. I was sitting on one of the two iron benches watching this scene. I saw children running around in excitement, throwing handfuls of leaves at each other, jumping in piles, and re-creating new ones. I heard them screaming and laughing and as I sat there, I was surprised at the tears rolling down my cheeks. I was thinking that for just a moment, my students were having fun at school. As I sat and continued to watch, I began to question myself as to why such an ordinary scene would move me in such an emotional way. Why was I crying because children were running and laughing? I thought about how often I actually remember seeing sincere happiness on their faces, and at once my question was answered. That day became a painful reminder of the stress involved in being a third grader and how seldom I am privy to the sheer happiness of students.

## **My Manuel**

During the 2012-2013 school year, I had a child in my class named Manuel (all students' names are pseudonyms). Manuel struggled in many areas of his life; his parents worked at night cleaning offices, their financial status was strained, and Manuel struggled greatly with reading. He left my classroom every day for forty-five minutes to work with an ESOL teacher. One part of my students' homework is to read on school nights and write a short summary of what they had read. After many times of Manuel not completing this part of his homework, I became what I will call somewhat short with him and asked him why he would not read when he knew it was one of our class expectations. He said, "Because I do not have any books to read at my house." After recovering from my enormous guilt, I bought a crate and filled it with chapter books for him to take home for himself and his younger brother. Things went on this way for the remainder of the school year; sometimes he had no coat, sometimes no shoes, and certainly, no school supplies. Our school is thankfully very vigilant in helping our students in need and so he always received the outward items he needed. He continued however, to struggle academically; telling me often that he was not smart or that he was dumb. In April, upon sitting down before the reading section of the CRCT, his eyes became as big as saucers as he sat there and looked at passage after passage (all very lengthy), each followed by several multiple-choice questions. His eyes and body language immediately revealed the fact that he had no intention of even attempting this seemingly impossible feat. So, he bubbled in answers in a fancy design on his bubble sheet and sat while the other students took two seventy-minute sessions to complete their tests.

The next day as we were standing in the hallway, Manuel came up to me and started whispering. He said, “Mrs. J., if I don’t pass the CRCT, will I have to go all the way back to second grade and start over?” It only took about one second for tears to well up in my eyes as I stood there looking at him, trying my best to blink them away. I put my hand on his head and smiled while furiously thinking of an appropriate response (I did after all know that he had failed). I assured him that no one gets sent back to the second grade from the third grade and that he shouldn’t worry. I reminded Manuel that no matter what happened, I loved him and that life always presented new opportunities and ways for us to show our talents. It would be impossible for me to count the number of questions I am asked by students even over the course of one week, and to think about the number of questions I have been asked over my eighteen year teaching career is mind boggling. This one question however, asked of me by Manuel, is one I will never forget.

### **Saturday School**

Saturday school is something we often think of as an extra, but in the case of one student, it was viewed as a potential bonus. I had a student in my third grade class named Jacob. For the first six weeks of school, I noticed that Jacob had great difficulty paying attention to anything going on in the classroom. He could not focus when lessons were delivered, during small groups, or when he was working independently. During a parent conference in which I mentioned my concerns to Jacob’s mom, she asked me if I thought she should take him to a doctor to have this issue evaluated. I told her that as I was not an expert and could not make any type of diagnosis, but it might be a good idea. This agreement or suggestion, unknown to me at the time, was apparently taboo. I, the teacher, had mentioned the word ‘doctor’ in a parent conference. Following this conference were many unpleasant meetings with our education

evaluator wherein I had been admonished for agreeing with Jacob's mom that yes, seeing a physician may be helpful in determining why he struggled so significantly to focus. This type of conversation, according to the policy, apparently held the school liable for the testing process to assess Jacob's potential diagnosis of attention deficit disorder or any other possible diagnosis. However, Jacob did see a doctor whereby he was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder. The attending physician placed him on medication, and his football coach, his mom, and myself noticed an almost immediate change in his ability to focus. Jacob no longer played with his shoelaces during lessons, he no longer shuffled his feet around instead of paying attention to plays called on the football field, and he worked diligently instead of tapping pencils all through work time.

A few weeks after this noticeable change, Jacob's mom met me by accident in the hallway one morning, and told me about a conversation she and Jacob had the night before. She told me how Jacob used to hate coming to school (I did not know this), and how he would try and talk her into letting him stay home for any minute reason. The night before however, he told her how much he now loved school and wished that he could come to school on Saturday! A few weeks later when he took the CRCT test, his mom was full of anxiety about how Jacob would do. The day I shared his scores with her, she cried as she saw that all five tests he had taken reflected passing scores, and some areas even reflected 'exceeds' scores.

Approximately one year later, Jacob's mom sent me an e-mail asking if she could come to my class to conduct observations as she is studying to become a teacher. In her e-mail she said the following:

Jacob has all A's and B's, and he's in the Beta Club. He is so happy... his self-confidence has returned. You made such an impact on him, and he says all the time Mrs.

James will always be my favorite teacher because she truly cared about me. I could never thank you enough for the time you spent with him (personal communication, January 18, 2014)

In my experience with Jacob, I observed how a policy meant to protect the school system could potentially keep a student who needed specialized help from receiving it. Special education departments in districts across the country work as diligently as possible to provide services to students in need. Jacob's situation revealed to me once again, that educational policy has the potential to keep much needed resources from students who often times need them the most.

While I had no intention of breaking any standing policy of my school or district, I have no regrets about the events surrounding Jacob's progression from hating school to wishing he could attend school on Saturday. As a teacher, I am an advocate for students such as Jacob and all others for whose paths I have yet to cross.

### **Problem Statement**

“Society may expect those in a given line of work to achieve results beyond their capacity, and those within the occupation may demand more of themselves than is readily possible.”

(Lortie, 1975, p.134)

I believe I can count on one hand the number of truer statements ever made. The demands placed upon teachers by society are greater than they have ever been, but so are the demands by none other than teachers themselves because of their commitment to what they do for students. As a teacher myself, I can attest to the authenticity of both accounts. I often times feel as if all those included in the conglomerate we know as education view me as a robotic

being that can accomplish the impossible if only given the appropriate program and tools in which to carry out a specified set of objectives. Even though I see this as reality, I too seemingly place impossible demands upon myself as I seek to ‘pull’ every student up to what is deemed in today’s educational realm as academic success. Teachers who once spent countless hours creating lessons and/or projects experiential in nature now spend even more hours creating or grading a myriad of assessments and seeking out ways to help students achieve acceptable scores on standardized tests. This shift in paradigm from exploratory lesson planning and experiential learning environments to data-driven planning has caused teacher agency to be replaced by prescriptive programs, testing, and standardization that crosses many aspects of teaching. On the whole, teachers are experiencing increased frustration by the demands that educational policies mandate. This frustration stems primarily because mandates “detract from what they perceive is their primary responsibility: teaching their students and doing so in dynamic ways that foster creative thinking and personal growth both intellectually and emotionally” (Smith & Kovacs, 2011, p. 218). Hopkins (2001) goes so far as to call our current state of persistent reform a “policy epidemic” (p. 4). With Hopkins’ (2001) epidemic in mind, this study worked to identify the ways in which educational policies, specifically policies that affect curriculum and endorse complex levels of accountability for students and teachers, have infiltrated the classrooms and teaching lives of teachers. In addition, I endeavored to discuss the ways in which teachers navigate the political restraint placed upon them; and what mechanisms they use (if any) to remain true to their own philosophical underpinnings as they pertain to a core set of beliefs about teaching and learning. The questions that have guided this inquiry are as follows:

- ❖ What are the ways in which teachers navigate and negotiate the policy context in which they teach?

- ❖ What are potential causes that necessitate the navigation and negotiation of policy context?

While multiple studies focus on educational policy and its effects on schools, there are a limited number of studies that closely attend to the impact of policy on teachers' own belief systems and how these said beliefs are balanced with reform efforts. And even fewer studies could be found that investigate teachers' decision making when faced with prescriptive policy mandates. Therefore, this study seeks to understand how teachers manage their practices in an environment that has become more about the standardization of student achievement than that of individual student success. Moreover, the study hopes to identify the ways in which the decision making process behind said practices have been the driving force behind the strategies teachers use to emotionally, professionally, and philosophically operate in an arena in which the heart prescribes one desire, but outside forces attempt to impose another.

### *Operationalization of Terms*

Given the notion that the foundation of this study rested upon the tenets of educational policy and/or reform, I provide clarification for this term by using Tyack & Cuban's (1995) rendering of the term policy and/or reform. They define the term reform as, "planned efforts to change schools in order to correct perceived social and educational problems" (p. 4). I focus on the notion that educational reforms and policies are pervasively created in response to perceived problems that policy makers see as requiring a solution. In this study, the terms reform and policy are used interchangeably. Next, I define the term politics. Again, using Tyack & Cuban's (1995) framework for the term; they make the contention that "educational reforms are intrinsically political" (p. 8). I use the term politics in this study as a means to not only agree

with their contention, but also to remind readers of the power behind politics as many in education seek to attend to personal and/or organizational agendas more than to that of individual student needs.

After defining the terms reform/policy and politics, as used in this study, I delineate the specific type(s) of policy upon which the study focuses. During the course of the nine interviews, the policies discussed most often by participants were those relating to notions of accountability. These discussions were inclusive of local, state, and federal accountability policies. Examples of federal accountability policies examined multiple times across the nine interviews include the countless ramifications stemming from NCLB, such as an endless course of testing at all grade levels and the submission of school district report cards as an attempt to demonstrate adequate progress in student achievement. Another example of federal policy brought up by participants included the implementation of the Common Core State Standards; a nationwide set of standards by which the curriculum in all schools would be based.

State policies around accountability and evaluation also came up during the interview. The Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES), in which teachers are evaluated six times over the course of a school year based upon ten accountability standards, was discussed on numerous occasions. Poor performance as assessed by the school administrator results in the teacher being placed on a professional development plan (PDP) in which the teacher will be monitored even further in the future. Finally, local school systems have been forced to develop policies of their own in an attempt to avoid federal and state sanctions. Local policies discussed during the interview process included the implementation of programs such as Leader in Me, Learning Focused Schools, and other electronic assessment devices as local districts work towards meeting the expectations of the state and federal policies noted above.

Finally, I define the terms negotiate and navigate. I decided that this terminology would be a part of the research question before conducting any interviews based upon my own experiences of navigating and making negotiations as a teacher. After conducting interviews with each of the three participants, I was surprised at the number of times the notion of negotiation manifested itself. In this study, the terms navigate and negotiate may seem interchangeable, but they are used to describe two different positions. First, to navigate represents the ways teachers move and progress as reforms are unremittingly handed down from policy makers. Negotiate on the other hand, represents the ways in which teachers manage a balance between the reforms/mandates and their own personal convictions about said reforms and the ways they believe reforms affect students.

### **Background to the Study**

In my years as a teacher, and even more so in the years I have studied as a doctoral student, I have come to see all the world of education as political in nature. In these two roles, I have not only read about, but experienced first-hand the ways in which those in power use their position and authority to influence decision-making as it pertains to the social, financial, and cultural structures of school districts, schools, classrooms, and ultimately, students and teachers. I recently stumbled across an example of this influence when I was in one of the supply closets in my school going through various reading materials. I was looking for some challenging informational text for one of my advanced students, and in my search, I picked up the fifth grade anthology used by my school system (Reading Street, Pearson Education, 2010). As I flipped through the pages, I came to a lesson about Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War. The lesson was meant to help students re-create sentences that were less ‘wordy’ by replacing a set of given words with a possessive noun phrase. The set of six sentences were about the president of the

United States, and I have included three of the six below along with the question or thought in my own mind as I read each one:

1. “He (the president) makes sure the laws of the country are fair” (*This is an untrue statement. The judicial branch of government holds this job, not the president*).
2. “The commands of government officials must be obeyed by all” (*Who gets to define a government ‘official’ and does “all” really mean “ALL”?*).
3. “The wants of an individual are less important than the well being of a nation” (*according to whom?*).

If not for my experience as a doctoral student and maybe even my persistent misgivings about educational policy, I may have flipped through this lesson haphazardly with no notice to the above statements. As I read through the lesson, I wondered if this lackadaisical attitude towards what teachers are asked to put before students is the very attitude curriculum writers are hoping for. My realistic mind tells me yes, but my teacher’s heart encourages me to hope this is not the case. Whichever of these realities may be true, this example of how we, as citizens, often accepted what is printed in our school textbooks as fact is a political statement. This is just one very small illustration of how education is political. Other, more observable circumstances that demonstrate the permeation of politics in education include the large-scale, countrywide implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) and the recent push to employ the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

With reforms and policies such as these, I seek to understand how political agendas affect teachers in their endeavors to use their own philosophical beliefs about teaching and learning to

work with diverse student populations. In the 1980s, the National Commission on Excellence in Education published a report, *A Nation at Risk* (1983) which brought to light the idea that American students' performances on national and international assessments were lacking, as were the standards in which school systems used to create curriculum (Goertz, 2005). This report was the catalyst that instigated a reform movement to include such initiatives such as the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) and Goals 2000, a set of goals focused on outcomes-based education whereby students would achieve more if expectations were raised (Goertz, 2005). In response to these initiatives, school systems adopted reform models such as America's Choice (1998) and Success for All (1987) in an attempt to help teachers meet the ever changing and more demanding expectations placed upon them and ultimately, students.

In 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was a mechanism for changing the face of teaching and learning indefinitely. One of NCLB's major components was its emphasis on local capacity building through the allocation and targeting of resources for professional development, school wide reform initiatives, and effective instructional programs and materials (Hochberg & Desimone, 2010). Hochberg & Desimone (2010) clearly delineate how NCLB set the stage for accountability for all teachers, schools, and school districts as it created achievement targets for every student that would be measured by standardized testing. Rewards and/or sanctions were a part of this accountability process for schools that did or did not meet the goals set forth by each state. These rewards and/or sanctions have shifted not only what is presented in classrooms across the country, but the context in which it is presented as well. In the end, NCLB created high levels of accountability for teachers as they struggled to change teaching practices and prepare students for high-stakes, statewide standardized testing. As a

result, the ways in which teachers could push students over the proverbial threshold of meeting and/or exceeding expectations on standardized tests became and remains the focus of policy makers and the majority of new legislation.

In the eight years I have been teaching in the public sector, my school district has made every attempt possible to help their schools remain in the good graces and avoid sanctions by the NCLB (2002) legislation that would hopefully raise student achievement and/or make student assessment data available. First, we were trained on and implemented Learning Focused Schools (LFS) as a structural support for foundational lesson planning. The Learning Focused Schools Model is a framework developed by Dr. Max Thompson (2000) in response to national, state, and local efforts to increase achievement for all students and to reduce achievement gaps. When I entered my school district as a new public school teacher in the summer of 2007, I attended a four-day training on this model of instruction. I had spent the last thirteen years working in Montessori schools, which are in every way a stark contrast to the public arena, and so even though I was not technically a “new” teacher, in the space called public education, I was indeed a “new teacher.” Akin to most new teachers, I grabbed tight to every nugget of information being shared with me in this training. It was after all, not merely suggestions for teaching practice, but expectations for which I would be evaluated in the near future.

The LFS framework consists of a set of ‘best practices’ that teachers are to use as they implement backwards design to plan lessons, units, and assessments. Essential questions, activating and summarizing strategies, and differentiated teaching strategies are the core components of these practices. Every teacher in our district was trained on LFS methods when s/he was hired, and again in 2010 by re-delivery method from teachers, such as myself, who had been asked to be the LFS representatives and trainers for our respective school buildings. Since

this time, LFS has developed a new program entitled Next Generation for which I attended a two-day training. The district is currently in the planning stages of implementing the LFS Next Generation. I viewed approximately 30 hours of training videos over the course of my summer break in preparation for this new version of implementation, and now serve on a countywide core committee that will oversee the implementation of the new version.

In addition to re-training teachers on the LFS model in the fall of 2010 and again in 2014, my district introduced two new programs to be used for student assessment. This prompted a series of training events that seemed to result in a sense of weariness and stress in our school and district as teachers were trying to absorb a number of new programs at the same time. Before this time, teachers had been giving what were called benchmark assessments at the beginning and end of every math and reading unit. A newly adopted program called Thinkgate (<http://www.thinkgate.com/>) replaced this benchmark regimen with common district assessments (CDAs). Teachers administer to every student a common district assessment in math, reading/ELA, social studies, and science at the end of each unit (some of the reading CDA's for third graders were twenty pages in length). After being trained on how to enter data into the Thinkgate program, teachers produce reports to indicate student deficiency in each subject. Some schools compare the data with other schools in the county to see how their teachers and students paralleled each other. We are now asked to use this data to create data sheets that report on gaps identified by the assessments as well as proof of when we plan to re-teach low scoring skills.

Finally, a third program called AIMSWEB (<http://www.aimsweb.com/>) for the input and analysis of basic reading and math data such as fluency and computation has been implemented in our district in recent years. In addition to specified assessment programs,

implementing Response to Intervention (RTI) strategies and attending RTI meetings have been added as means to collect and assess data on students who are functioning below grade level. In addition to these implementations, our district is now on our third teacher evaluation system as the state continues to roll out new programs that include more and more teacher and leader accountability.

In regard to curriculum in my district, elementary schools have rolled out two new textbook adoptions in reading and science, but are currently using an outdated math curriculum due to a lack of funding to purchase a new series that would correlate to Common Core State Standards, the new national standards, also recently implemented. At the inception of the 2014-2015 school year, teachers received a new writing program during pre-planning and were asked to implement into writing lessons at the beginning of the school year. The litany of initiatives must certainly cause one to wonder about the behind the scenes logistics of training, implementation, and ongoing maintenance required by teachers as they try to find ways to incorporate all of the above into an already demanding schedule. Abrahamson (as cited in Hargreaves, 2004) refers to such a situation as *initiative overload*. How do teachers receive training on the implementation and use of all these programs? How are they supported in the ongoing maintenance of said implementation? When and how do they find the time to employ all of these tools into a school day in which every minute is already accounted for? How much of their family time is relegated to the utilization of these instruments? Finally, how many teachers see a direct improvement in student achievement as a result of using said instruments? These are all questions I have sought to answer as I conducted interviews with teachers who have used these tools or others similar in nature.

### *My Interest in Educational Policy*

Teachers' epistemological beliefs-such as the extent to which they view teaching as a process of transmission or transaction, or knowledge in a content area as fixed or changeable over time-maybe inconsistent with the epistemological orientation of instructional reforms targeted at improving teaching and learning, and these beliefs are especially difficult to change (Hochberg & Desimone, 2010, p. 92).

While I could make the claim that educational policy has always intrigued me, I instead admit that I had no interest in the tenets of policy until I realized the ways it was affecting me (and my students) personally. When I began the Ph.D. program at Georgia State University, I was a Learning Focused Schools (LFS) trainer in my school. I was charged with implementing the LFS program in my own classroom, as well as training and assisting other teachers to do the same in theirs. While seeking to find a way to cope with what was turning out to be an exceptionally stressful school year and my newfound responsibilities as a doctoral student, I found myself reading provocative ideas and notions that prompted some profound feelings and realizations about myself and my profession. Did anyone care about any of the things I was doing with students that could not be charted? Did everyone around me think of students in a numerical sense? Was I being over-dramatic? Were literacy practices that did not include a multiple choice set of answers meaningful to anyone but myself? What about students who would never pass a standardized test...what would happen to them? Newkirk (2009) says, "In this new era of accountability, if you can't count it (preferably with a machine), it doesn't count" (p. 4). Even *I* had started creating lessons based on CDA questions to ensure students could pass them. Did this mean I was equally contributing to what I understood to be the dehumanization of

students? At this time of struggle, I had no idea that not only would my list of such questions grow, but so would the list of reforms (Common Core was right around the corner).

Hochberg and Desimone's (2010) above quote speaks to the notion that teachers maintain certain epistemological beliefs about teaching and learning and these beliefs usually manifest themselves in most aspects of respective teachers' classrooms via multiple forms of instruction and interaction with students. It was when my own epistemological beliefs began to be challenged that my interest in educational policy grew. The first year I taught, I was so busy just trying to keep up that I couldn't see the forest for the trees, so to speak. I was consumed with trying to figure out what I was supposed to be doing on any given day, that I didn't even realize it was policy and the corresponding mandates that kept me in a consistent state of frenzy. After realizing that this was not new teacher syndrome, but instead, the way in which my teaching career would continue indefinitely, I became aware of the research literature on educational policy, such as a study conducted by Valli & Buese (2007), which claimed, "teachers may be placed in the position of violating their own deeply felt beliefs about what children in their care need" (p. 552).

Today, my interest in educational policy lies in making evident the trials that teachers have and continue to experience as they attempt to implement one policy after another with fidelity while at the same time retaining their own set of values as they pertain to the ways in which teaching should take place. Furthermore, I find it of value in this space to indicate not only my interests, but to also denote that of which I am not interested. I am not interested in demonizing policy makers as I find it necessary to seek out the best in all those who work to educate children. Instead, I stand on the premise that policy makers could, if willing, be more informed by those who are actually expected to implement and carry out the policies that

eventually make their way into our classrooms and finally to the educational experiences of our students. In this way, those writing the policy and those employing the policy could work hand in hand with similar goals in mind.

### **Significance of the Study**

As the flurry surrounding reform, accountability, and standardization in education continues to grow, more and more teachers are coming to the realization that the weight of these movements eventually and ultimately fall upon their shoulders. Although policy after policy can be written and mandated, it is the classroom teacher who is ultimately responsible for the implementation of said policies (Borko, 2004). Educational policy is only as effective as those who are implementing it into classrooms. When MacDonald and Shirley (2009) discuss the effects of teacher compliance with mandates, they assert, “teachers’ compliance comes at a considerable cost, as teachers’ loss of professional autonomy and agency can lead to low morale, a loss of self-efficacy, and disinvestment from teaching” (p. 16). While it is certain that various policies have been begrudgingly implemented in classrooms all around the country, the intended effects of any long term goal will not be as successful in this manner as when employed with enthusiasm and a belief that success is imminent. Moreover, mandated reforms often compel teachers to implement structural changes in classrooms; this tradition is representative of half-hearted change that embodies only structural modifications and not a lasting epistemological transformation (Little, 1993). It is for these reasons I have made the contention that this study has significance. We must work towards a goal of efficacy as it pertains to the implementation of educational policy, and I believe that teachers, not policy makers or even the policies themselves, are at the heart of this goal.

### **Researcher Worldview**

Whether I think broadly in terms of education or on a more micro level in terms of classrooms or schools, I find it difficult, maybe even impossible, to escape the conception that politics are inextricably intertwined with policy. When dominant groups are in command of entities as large as education, politics are inevitable (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 1989). As I have already made clear my position that all of education has become political, I use this perception to note that even the questions asked by researchers (such as the ones asked in this study) are political in nature. As a researcher, I am now a part of the system that has created this political nature of teaching and learning, and my experiences as a researcher as well as an educator have created in me a reality in which I view the world through a defined lens (Damasio, 1999). This point bears to ask how a white, middle-class educator and doctoral student came to develop a research question surrounding the notions of what happens in classrooms and schools as educational reforms are mandated and implemented. Why, out of all the possible questions to ask, did I rest upon the one noted above? What brought me to such a final and specific decision, and how have I used this question to further my investigation? Through research and readings, I have come to understand that questions such as these can be answered with the awareness that my realities are subjective, experiential, and created in relation to the social experiences I have had as an educator as well as a doctoral student (Dewey, 1997/1938; Vygotsky, 1962).

According to Damasio (1999), we possess an extended consciousness that includes a capacity to connect the present with a remembered past and an anticipated future. In this study, as I referred to my own remembered past as an educator and the past almost five years as a doctoral student, I frequently considered the notion that my thinking about a number of ideas has

changed along the way. Some of these include for example, the ways in which students are standardized and why, reasons why teachers behave in certain ways, and the trickle-down effects emanating from top-down policies, just to name a few. However, I now consider my thinking to have been broadened and/or enlightened more than I believe it to have been changed. Examples of scholars who have enlightened my thinking include Maxine Greene (1988) and Richard Quantz (2011). Their work has caused me to not only think back to Damasio's (1999) remembered past, but also to the premise of an anticipated future as I consider their conceptions of the current state of things in schools vs. the existing potential I believe to be there for the taking.

Quantz (2011) has caused me to think ardently about the rituals in which I take part, and even institute and/or foster every day in my own school and respective classroom. These rituals can include the ways students are required to march up and down hallways in soldier-like lines or the methods I use to make decisions about the formation of reading groups (data based). He calls such rituals "non-rational aspects of schooling" (p. 80), and asks readers to, at a minimum, question why so many ritualistic events are created and carried out aimlessly in our schools. In addition, he asks us not only to question their purpose/s, but also to decide if they even have a purpose - a meaningful one anyway. Maxine Greene (1988) also examined mechanistic events that occur in schools and has helped me recognize what she viewed as a forced conformity of students as she inquired as to whom (if anyone) experiences freedom in today's standardized schools. I had never even considered for example, the ways in which we give students limited, or more times than not, no choice as to what educative experiences they will participate in; it's just the way I have always experienced public education. I have given a great deal of thought since reading Greene's (1988) work to the ways in which I personally perpetuate the ideals (even if

unintentionally) that contribute to her contention that freedom does not exist in education today...for students or teachers. It is in this vein that I began to think intensely about the issues that concern me most, once again, for both students *and* teachers alike.

As I tried to situate my worldview as it pertained to the lack of freedom in schools as suggested by Greene (1998) and the context of this study, I was led to draw attention to the current standardization movement in which teachers are expected to teach and students are expected to learn. The premise adopted by such a large body of dominant people in education that conveys the message that all students, no matter their culture, background experiences, cognitive level, or socioeconomic status, should be held to the exact same set of expectations is in my mind, far from reasonable thinking or what one would expect from those charged with the care of an entire society's body of students. How is it possible to think a student who doesn't eat on a regular basis and sleeps in their family car could offer the same academic performance as students who have all of life's necessities and then some? Will the student whose parents clean offices at night (while the child is at home alone or with other siblings) perform at the same level as the student whose parents sit with them every night as they read or do homework? What about students with a low IQ, but no other apparent reason to be given additional resources? Will the students who live in volatile home environments be thinking more about how to create equivalent fractions or what will happen at home as soon as they step off the bus in the afternoon? I daresay any reader knows the answers to these rhetorical questions and therefore recognizes the lack of sensibility behind consolidating such a group of students into one arena with the anticipation that all will perform with relative vigor and success.

Some may think this pervasive standardization movement applies only to students. The fact that this notion is very far from the truth lies at the heart of my study. While pondering the

ways in which even teachers are privy to the ever-present standardization movement, I thought about my own identity as a teacher; a part of myself for which I hold dear, and have been reminded of all the times I've tried to compel eight year old children to write formal, persuasive texts, work tirelessly to prepare them for the standardized test they are to take each spring, and create graph after graph to report to an administrator as to why a particular student is not able to be successful at the performance level in which we think he/she should be performing. As I have daily created mounds of paper work that include constant reporting on district assessments, tally charts, and a myriad of other information of the like, I have sometimes felt as if I am an abomination to my own field, and certainly my personal conviction and beliefs about what it is I should be doing with children. I ask myself what am I doing and why am I doing it? Why am I working feverishly to do the things that are directly against the tenets of what I know and believe to be the right thing for students, and then I wonder if Maxine Greene would argue that teachers work this way due to a lack of freedom to do what they know is best.

### **Theoretical Framework**

According to Crotty (2003, p. 2-3), research proposals should be able to justify the theory of knowledge embedded in their theoretical perspective(s) within an epistemology. This study examined the mediated constructs of teacher practices in politically restrictive environments through the theoretical lenses of symbolic interactionism and critical pedagogy. Constructivism served as the epistemology over the underpinnings of this study as it construed meaning making as being shaped interpretively based upon individual experiences and the ways in which those experiences were then socially mediated. This social facet of teaching and co-existing with others in the profession was examined first, through the theoretical perspective, symbolic interactionism. Finally, as teachers must consistently find new ways of seeing and knowing

(Wink, 2000) in an ever-changing profession in which issues of power and the way in which it is wielded over others is an ongoing obstacle, a second theoretical perspective, critical pedagogy was used to investigate this notion of power, who holds it, and how it affects those who are under its influence. I believe these three constructs have provided a comprehensive theoretical framework for which to investigate the tenets of this study.

### ***Constructivism***

The overarching theory that guided this study was Constructivism. Constructivism attempts to explain the ways in which new knowledge is constructed as a means of acting upon existing knowledge acquired through past experiences. It suggests that knowledge is individually constructed, but socially mediated. Constructivism focuses on the individual's meaning-making process as it is derived from social experiences, and also values the uniqueness of each individual as they use cultural experiences to form new ways of thinking about things (Wertsch, 1997). I have argued that even though many aspects of teaching is indeed a collective process; it is at the point when teachers disband into their respective and isolated classrooms and it becomes just themselves and their students that this study placed its focus, and it is for these reasons, Constructivism has driven its focus.

Vygotsky (1962) argued time and time again that knowledge is realized via context. Teachers' lives are filled with contextual experiences every day. These include isolated experiences, times when only the teacher and students are present and of course, experiences with fellow teachers and colleagues. Constructivism is inclusionary of individual experiences as well as those made socially. Even those experiences made in isolated circumstances are eventually mediated in a sociocultural nature, which can be considered social, historical, cultural, and/or political in context (Wink, 2000). In sum, while this study (as noted) concentrated upon

the individual experiences and behaviors of teachers, these experiences were derived from politically charged notions, which were considered social in nature and context.

In this study, Mead's symbolic interactionism and constructivism worked hand in hand as symbolic interactionism *is* a constructivist theory. In his explication of the varying versions of constructivism, Prawatt (1996) calls symbolic interactionism, "a "constructivist" approach to social psychology" (p. 219). Symbolic interactionism provides a clear reflection of constructivist ideals by marrying the concepts of individual learning and social dynamics by transitioning the focus back and forth from the group to the individual and eventually, back to the group (Prawatt, 1996). In Vygotsky's *Thought and Language* (1962/1986), Kozulin identifies Vygotsky and Mead as having 'striking similarities' (p. xxiv) in their positions on the social nature of learning. Schools are social environments where teachers are consistently reacting to peers and other social groups and the varying social protocols that accompany each of these specific groups of people. This has created a clear link between symbolic interactionism and constructivism. Blumer (1969) supports this contention when he says, "A key premise of symbolic interactionism is that meanings assigned to objects in the world arise out of the social interactions one has with one's fellows" (p. 2). Even though constructivism focuses upon the *individual's* meaning-making process, this process is predicated upon the social nature and encounters of each individual in which the mediated notions of social experiences cannot be negated. Prawatt (1996) reports the strength of symbolic interactionism to be the ability of a group to comprise meaning as a group while still considering that the individuals within the group may have their own distinctive perception of the same meaning. Individuals and society are mutually dependent one upon the other, and therefore, human understanding and actions can be explained via the interpretation(s) made from social and cultural signs and symbols. While

symbolic interactionism explored the experiences of teachers as they pertained to the social system of the profession, my emphasis was placed upon the teacher's decision-making process as an individual and how past experiences have fostered their current philosophical stance on teaching and learning. This emphasis prevailed upon me to use constructivism as the channel by which I examined and interpreted findings as they related to the means and motives behind why teachers make the classroom practice decisions they do.

### *Symbolic Interactionism*

Symbolic interactionism originated from Pragmatism, and was coined by George Herbert Mead who, according to Crotty (2003) said, "Every person is a social construction" (p. 62). The term symbolic refers to the underlying linguistic associations that exist between human groups while the term interactionist refers to the notion that people do not interact towards one another, but with one another (Denzin, 2004). Symbolic interactionism emphasizes the meaningful nature of people's participation in social and cultural life and helps to explore our understandings of the way said culture guides our lives. Its basic premise is the notion of defining and interpreting one another's actions (Prawatt, 1996). Blumer (1969) and Prawatt (1996) view the meaning made from such interpretations as a social product that emanates from interactions between people. According to Mead (1934), human behavior embodies a social order. Crotty's (2003) interpretation of the Meadian analysis of behavior says that, "Human behavior is social in origin, shaped by social forces, and permeated by the social even in its biological and physical aspects" (p. 62). Based upon my own experiences as a teacher for almost twenty years, many aspects of the teaching profession are social in nature, and therefore lend themselves to symbolic interactionism and its tenets of social order in which humans are understood as social beings who

exhibit certain behaviors based upon interactions they have with individual others as well as society as a whole.

One of the main differences that separate symbolic interactionism from other theories of constructivism (sociocultural theory, for example) is the allowance for individual autonomy. Individuals who are employed in varying social activities do not only take into account the socially constructed meaning from the activity, but they also correspond with themselves as an individual about the inherited meaning(s) as it is or was socially constructed. The illustration below (figure 1.1) shows the individual on the outside of the circle labeled 'socially shared activity' to represent the individual autonomy provided by symbolic interactionism. The artifacts and objects/events move towards one another because the artifacts are not an extension of the individual, but instead, they become part of the object world to which the individual responds. Examples of objects include abstract ideas such as language, memory, and agency while physical objects include things such as policy documents. Events, in the context of this study as Prawatt (1996) describes them include paradigm shifts, curriculum swings, training events, administrative changes, and evaluative situations just to name a few. Prawatt (1996) demonstrates with this figure the notion that symbolic interactionism relies upon socially constructed artifacts to define *objects and events* in the world, whereas other constructivist theories such as sociocultural theory relies upon socially constructed artifacts to define *individuals* (p. 221).

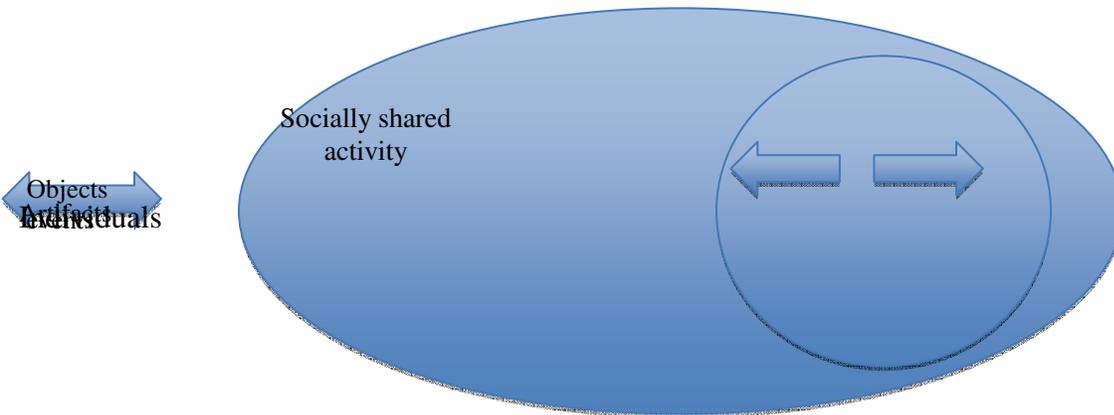


Figure 1 Symbolic Interactionism

Blumer, a student of Mead's, asserts three basic interactionist assumptions which are as follows:

1. 'That human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them'.
2. 'That the meanings of such things are derived from, and arise out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows'.
3. 'That these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters'.

In adopting symbolic interactionism as an approach for positioning my research, I am interested in understanding the ways in which teachers navigate and negotiate their teaching decisions in light of policy mandates. Specifically, I want to investigate whether or not teachers' practices are implemented based upon social expectation to abide by mandated policies or if other motivations are present. I use Blumer's assumptions in my effort to accomplish this task.

These assertions facilitate the ability to identify social entities that prompt teachers to behave in ways that defy their own philosophical belief system(s).

### **Critical Pedagogy**

“Education can only be liberatory when everyone claims knowledge as a field in which we all labor” (bell hooks, 1994, p. 14)

The second theoretical perspective guiding this study is that of critical pedagogy. As the above quote suggests, teachers should be significant agents in the journey taken to help students acquire knowledge as many view it as a process in which all labor together towards a common goal. The current circumstance however, is the antithesis of this notion as teachers have very little agency when it comes to the decision-making process behind the ways in which they will teach and students will learn. Teachers with varying levels of experience, education, and a multiplicity of philosophical stances have for many years been demoralized by an establishment that utilizes power, knowledge, and means of social change to influence what happens in schools. This demoralization or oppression, if you will, is what critical pedagogy endeavors to attend. It is interested in maintaining a balance between social change and fostering the intellect of students *and* teachers (Kincheloe, 2008). Critical pedagogy attempts to “disrupt the effects of oppressive regimes of power both in the classroom and in the larger society” (Nikolakiki, Giroux, & Freire 2012, p. 397). Along the same vein, Wink, (2000) asserts, “Critical pedagogy forces educators to look again at the fundamental issues of power and their relationship to the greater societal forces that affect schools” (p. 36). This conception of viewing the ways in which power affects schools is one of the main tenets that drew me to investigate this theory more closely. McLaren (1989) argues that critical pedagogy “examines schools both in their historical

context and as part of the existing social and political fabric that characterizes the dominant society” (p. 159). Pedagogy in the *critical* sense should illuminate the relationship between knowledge, authority, and power (Giroux, 2011, p. 30) in a way that includes all who contribute to the teaching and learning process. Engaging this critical perspective helps the inquirer discover new ways of seeing and knowing (Wink, 2000). If a desire exists to create a democratic educational environment, then this democracy should help students *and* teachers find their respective voices. Whose voices are or are not being heard is one of the tenets McLaren (1989) focuses upon as he heralds the goals of critical pedagogy. Keeping in line with the notion of democratic education, he delineates one of the main concepts of critical pedagogy when he argues, “Critical pedagogy asks how and why knowledge gets constructed the way it does, and how and why some constructions of reality are legitimated and celebrated by the dominant culture while others clearly are not” (p. 169). Conducting inquiry into this very perception was one of the main objectives of this study.

Critical pedagogy was first described by Paulo Freire (1970) and developed further by Henry Giroux (2011). As a Brazilian educator, Freire worked closely with illiterate and economically disadvantaged groups of people. In his work, he recognized himself as a youngster when he and his own family lived in poverty, and therefore, desired to seek out ways to improve the lives of those with which he worked. As he worked toward this goal, Freire involved the illiterate and poor as his “partners” (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011) and taught them to think about themselves and their lives through a critical lens by helping them understand that a higher standard existed than automatic acceptance of the status quo. His “partners” began to understand the differences between the oppressors and those who were oppressed. They began to learn ways to question the decisions of those in power and as they learned to read and use

language to their benefit; they learned to operate as reflective, self-managing people who had control and agency over themselves as individuals (Giroux, 2011). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire's most popular and influential work, he clearly articulated the notion that pedagogy is not a standardized set of skills, methods, or techniques in which one uses to learn, but instead, a political tradition that provided knowledge in such a way that students are able to investigate the possibilities of what it means to be a citizen in a functional democracy. He says, "Apart from inquiry, individuals cannot be human" (p. 72). McLaren (1989) endorses Freire's concept of politics as he represents one of critical pedagogy's main tasks as disclosing the role schools play in political life.

Critical pedagogy endorses the view that trying to understand schooling outside the realm of social, historical, cultural, political, or psychological contexts that shape it is futile, and that any curriculum or learning environment making an attempt to meet individual, student needs is pointless without taking these concepts into consideration (Kincheloe, et al., 2011). I believed this to also hold true as I thought about teachers and the decisions that are made for them by others in positions of power every day. In the same way as students, teachers have individual contexts that have brought them to be the complex persons they have become, and creating their profession *for* them instead of *with* them while foregoing these contexts frequently results in a disconnect between teachers and those making decisions that directly affect them. In the words of Freire (1970), "Pedagogy should be forged with and not for the oppressed" (p. 48) and "The oppressed should be engaged in their own liberation" (p. 56). He is reiterating here, his own assertion that dialogue in which two individuals or groups discuss the views of each respectively is a must as opposed to dialogue in which one view is imposed upon the other. As policy writers have created an environment in which teachers are held accountable for every aspect of teaching

and learning, according to Giroux (2011) and his framework surrounding critical pedagogy, so should policy makers be held politically and morally accountable for their role in the process that ultimately drives teacher decision-making. Instead of generating what Freire (1970) describes as prescriptive behavior (p. 47) in which a more powerful group imposes their choice over that of another causing the less powerful to conform, both entities, teachers and policy makers should be working collectively for the common good of all participants. According to McLaren (1989), critical theorists endeavor to understand more than *what* schooling means, but instead *how* it has come to mean what it has. While I thought deeply about critical pedagogy, I also thought about how most of today's students are lulled into the schooling process as accepting beings of what they are told and very quickly become complacent as recipients of knowledge instead of doers of knowledge. As a result, I believed the longer teachers are required to teach under a guise of "let me see how much information you can recite back to me via a defined multiple choice test," the stronger the chance that complacency takes its stronghold with students *and* teachers. This complacency is what critical pedagogy endeavors to transform as it asks teachers to "question the commonsense assumptions that shape their own lives as well as those assumptions that influence and legitimize existing forms of public school classroom knowledge, teaching styles, and evaluation" (Giroux, 2011, p. 42). Moreover, Giroux (2011) suggests, "Critical pedagogy must be interdisciplinary...and engage the complex relationships between power and knowledge, critically address the institutional constraints under which learning takes place, and focus on how students can engage the imperatives of social citizenship" (p. 81). Leistyna, Lavandez, and Nelson (2004) argue that explorations of the inseparable relationship among knowledge, ideology, and power should be fundamental to any critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy asks us to take risks, think outside the established realm of authority, and act upon the social

responsibility to question present circumstances in such a way that suggests we have power over our selves as individuals, professionals, social citizens, and cultural beings. Armed with the knowledge that teachers hold this potential power, I use critical pedagogy to explore the ways in which they may be inhibited from engaging the empowering nature they possess to be all of these and more. While I make no claim to be an authority on critical pedagogy, in the words of Freire (1970) I use it in an “attempt to know more than I know now” (p. 90).

### *Am I a Critical Pedagogue?*

“Teacher empowerment does not occur just because we wish it to. Instead, it takes place when teachers develop the knowledge-work skills, the power literacy, and the pedagogical abilities befitting the calling of teaching” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 19)

While reading extensively about critical pedagogy, I started to question almost immediately how, or if, this theory aligned with my own worldview. The reason for this query began as I noticed in very quick fashion the copious allegations against the ‘right-wing reforms’ (Giroux, 2011; Kincheloe, 2008; McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007) being passed down from conservatives looking for a resurgence of traditional education by many of the theory’s top supporters (Kincheloe, 2008). Michael Apple (1996) goes so far as to contend that conservatives take a stance that blames those who do poorly in school on the actual students and/or their parents; thus articulating that inequality is actually fair. Needless to say, I was shocked during my process of becoming more informed on the critical pedagogy theory and its advocates. As a conservative, I pride myself upon the political beliefs for which I choose to live *and teach* by. I can assure any reader of this study that as a conservative, I in no way blame marginalized students and/or their families for poor school performance nor do I take a “no one to blame but

yourself' stance towards unsuccessful academic experiences. On the contrary, I take Wink's (2000) assessment of Dewey's (1944) belief that children should be accepted with their own potential as a starting place from which teaching can begin. Wink (2000) argues that today's critical pedagogy in North America is grounded upon this premise of Dewey's and this argument is one of the things that in the beginning stages, kept my mind open to it as a theory for my research.

The results of my initial reading of the theory led me to think about closing my mind to critical pedagogy, but something prompted me to continue reading and contemplating. According to Leistyna and Woodrum (1996), questions posed by critical pedagogues include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Whose values, interpretations, and goals constitute the foundation of public education?
- Whose stories are told and whose are not?
- Who selects classroom content and whose interest does this body of knowledge further?
- How is the 'official' core curriculum presented as universal, objective, and ultimately imposed on the greater society?

Since I, too, was interested in seeking answers to these questions and others similar in nature in this study and beyond, I continued my examination of critical pedagogy. I wondered how I could justify aligning myself with a theory whose proponents were (seemingly) condemning me for the plight of all that is wrong in education. By way of reading and talking with colleagues and advisors, I came to understand that the original tenets of critical pedagogy stand true no matter how many of its advocates choose to participate in condemning those whose views differ from their own. Moreover, I began to think back to all I have read and learned

about the meaning making process, interpretation of experiences, and Vygotsky's (1962) constructivist view of social learning. I took what I believe to be a critical look at the theory itself and not the opinions of those who write about it. What resulted from this critical scrutiny was an appreciation for all the precepts of critical pedagogy that drew me to it in the beginning. One of these includes the view that critical pedagogy encourages its supporters to search for the truth in education regardless of where it may lead, and another was my goal to help empower teachers in spite of the countless reforms under which they struggle to operate. McLaren (1989) maintains a fundamental goal of critical pedagogy is to understand this relationship between power and knowledge. Giroux (2011) suggests, "Approaching pedagogy as a critical and political practice suggests that educators refuse all attempts to reduce classroom teaching exclusively to matters of technique and method" (p. 79). This attempt on the part of teachers is after all, the objective of this study, and I therefore aim to use critical pedagogy as I interpret it towards this end.

So, as I thought about the question, "Am I a critical pedagogue?"... I thought about the following statement made by Kincheloe (2008): "Advocates of critical pedagogy know where they're coming from: they are making a case for fairness, for delineation of both sides of a question" (p. 35). In response, I answer with an unambiguous yes; I am a critical pedagogue. In this particular space I am a critical pedagogue because in this study, I hope to make a case for fairness in regard to the ways in which teachers are excluded from educational reform, yet are compelled to comply with whatever mandates said reforms deem appropriate or applicable. In addition, I plan to demonstrate the need to evaluate the necessity for reform based upon more than a one-sided perspective, as suggested by Kincheloe (2008). So, even though the leading names in critical pedagogy, including the ones I have referenced and/or quoted in this chapter

situate culpability directly upon the heads of the “right-wing” for which I am one; they are also advocates for teachers and their rights as cultural and social beings to enjoy the freedoms of teaching and learning apart from hidden political assumptions. An example of this notion would be to note McLaren’s argument that critical pedagogy “provides historical, cultural, political, and ethical direction for those in education who still dare to hope” (p. 160), and as a critical educator who realizes that the more advocates standing behind teachers, the better; I assume the role of critical pedagogue. While I certainly have no interest in participating in a cultural right/left wing rivalry in which fault is to be placed or others are to be disparaged, I do have a desire to promote the interests of educators as I as well as my participants see and have experienced them.

### *Disclaimer*

Before moving forward with the literature review for this study, it is my expressed desire to convey that I, in no uncertain terms hold neither my own school district, nor that of any other individual district, negatively responsible for the sentiments, reactions, responses, and/or attitudes communicated in this study. On the contrary, Smith and Kovacs (2011) noted the quandary that school districts find themselves in when they said, “Given the political sanctions school districts face under NCLB, one can hardly blame districts for choosing these strategies” (p. 219). This statement was given as the researchers discussed the abundance of test preparation strategies and professional development opportunities afforded in many districts as a result of attempting to meet the demands and avoiding sanctions of NCLB. Speaking for my own district, I believe they do all they can to ensure teacher and student efficacy in today’s restrictive climate of standardization. As I thought not only about my own school district, but the countless others in the same challenging situation, I hope to keep Freire’s (1970) words close: “In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a

way to create it), become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both” (p. 44).

## **Conclusion**

This introduction provided some of the personal experiences that led me to the decision to choose the topic for which this study is based and provided additional background to further explain my reasons for conducting a study grounded upon educational policy. Moreover, it explains the theoretical framework that guides the study. In chapter two, I introduce empirical studies that demonstrate the ways in which high-stakes standardization and testing has affected teacher practices and strategies used by teachers to navigate this high-stakes policy arena. In chapter three, I explain my methodology including the tenets behind interviewing and how discourses analysis is used to analyze the interview data. In chapter four, I provide a context in which the participants and their respective schools and communities have been introduced to the reader. In chapter five, I describe in detail the data analysis process and the resulting themes. Finally, in chapter six, I offer conclusions resulting from the four themes identified in chapter five, and provide insight for future implications of educational policy for researchers, teachers and policy makers.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

I often wonder how many teachers under the pressure of what Hargreaves (2003) hails the “standards stampede” (p. 176) close the door to their classrooms and implement their preferred practice secluded from the data driven frenzy that is now called school. Cuban, (2009) emphasizes the influences that constitute sound teaching practices as innumerable (e.g., the knowledge, skills, and prior experiences of teachers *and* students, organization and learning opportunities offered by schools, class size, curriculum mandates, and available funding in varying schools just to name a few), thereby making the act of teaching exceptionally complex. Cuban (2009) goes on to indicate how this complexity becomes exponentially convoluted as policymakers work tirelessly to equate public schools and classroom teachers as both the problem and solution to the current crisis in education. The policies set forth by said policymakers and the standardization movement that has preceded them set the backdrop for this literature review and my study that investigates the mechanisms that teachers enact that support or challenge their philosophical integrity as they work to maintain compliance with district, state, and federal mandates.

Policy has always played a role in the public school arena. Unfortunately for educators, the methods by which said policies are established, authorized, and implemented is what has changed dramatically. For as long as teaching has been a profession, teachers have entered their respective classrooms, closed the door, and began to implement instruction; acting politically as their instruction is and has been based upon the premise of either their own or someone else’s notion of how children learn and how teachers should teach (Edmondson, 2004). As noted, the establishment and implementation of these policies has gradually been removed from those

employing the instruction and replaced by law and policymakers (most with no educational experience or training) whose articulation of the way teaching should happen is highly valued even though oftentimes uniformed (Edmondson, 2004). This exchange of *who* has moved into the decision-making seat in classrooms can be viewed as an exercise in power according to Woodside-Jiron (2003). McLaren (1989) reiterates this notion of power as he indicates those with influence over what happens in schools includes a host of people such as media, journalists, and politicians to the exclusion of those that matter most, teachers, parents, and of course, students.

As policymakers have become more and more consumed with test scores, or outputs as Wixson and Yochum (2004) call them, a single-minded vision of what happens, or more appropriately, *should* be happening in classrooms to raise said test scores has become the status quo. This vision has led to what MacDonald and Shirley (2009) describe as “alienated teaching” (p. 2). They describe alienated teaching as “a kind of teaching that teachers perform when they feel they must comply with external conditions that they have not chosen and from which they inwardly dissent because they feel that new reforms do not serve their children well” (p. 2). This perception of mandated compliance bears heavily upon teacher efficacy as a loss of professional autonomy over the past eight to ten years has become more evident. Some may or may not find it a surprising notion that in Lortie’s (1975) sociological portrait of a teacher, he made predictions about the potential plight of future teachers, which reflect this current loss of autonomy. As he speculated on future change, he made the assertion that teachers’ individualism would come under pressure and that “the autonomy of the individual teacher will be reduced” (p. 224). Almost forty years later, it seems that Lortie’s (1975) prediction could not have been more informed as he described the potential for “distasteful programs” (p. 220), which may be based

upon pedagogy alien to teachers and based upon philosophies in direct opposition to their own. This notion directs us to literature that discusses the ways in which teachers have come to cope with this type of alien pedagogy.

Cuban (2009) conducted teacher interviews as he investigated the ways in which teachers were changing their classroom practices. Valli and Buese (2007) assert that teachers often have to engage in practices “antithetical to their beliefs about a good instructional environment” (p. 552). My personal experiences with this concept of antithetical teaching practices are what have ultimately led me to pursue this particular study.

The following literature represents the experiences of other educators and the ways in which educational policy affects their teaching practices. The studies presented were organized first, by offering a view of the ways in which high-stakes testing affects teachers, classrooms, and students. Next, I used studies to describe the manner in which teachers respond to the anxieties that accompany such high-stakes accountability, and finally, I used the literature to provide examples of when and how teachers either make positive negotiations or undesirable concessions in response to the accountability and standardization movement in which they currently work. Researching with the following terms identified these studies: educational policy, educational reform, teachers and policy in education, policy and high-stakes testing, and teacher response to educational policy.

### **High-Stakes Testing and/or Accountability**

“Virtually all organizations need to engage in top-down control because the people at the top have goals they want people at the bottom to pursue and something has to be done to bring about the desired behaviors” (Moe, 2003, p. 81).

There have been a number of studies at all grade levels that consider the impact of policies around high-stakes testing on teachers' practice and understandings of curriculum development (Apple, 1996; Au, 2007; Cuban, 2009). The following studies surround the ways in which high-stakes testing has caused teachers to make concessions within the classroom in regard to curriculum content. Specifically, they highlight notions of narrowing the curriculum in an attempt to accommodate skill and drill type instruction in preparation for standardized testing. Furthermore, these studies emphasize how much influence high-stakes testing bears upon teachers and their teaching identities as well as the content they deliver.

One study (Archbald, 1997) organized across three different districts demonstrates how the curriculum control model interferes with content coverage. The researcher conducted interviews in three high schools across three school districts to determine the effects of the curriculum control model's effect on teacher practice. Specifically, inquiry was conducted on textbook adoption, curriculum guides, and district-wide testing. Though I found the conclusions to contain positive aspects, I also found aspects of the study to be troubling. First, teachers in all three schools reported to be very reliant upon course textbooks even when given opportunity to provide experiential learning experiences in the curriculum. While I believe textbooks to have their place in certain classroom settings, I view them as a resource, and not an entire curriculum. One of the schools in this particular study was given an opportunity to teach a civics course by implementing experiential learning practices such as "projects, participation in civic affairs, student service activities, and the like" (p. 163). The teacher of the course however, was concerned that there would be no textbook "to keep the students busy" (p. 162). Furthermore, he shared with the researcher that it was not his strength or role to create course materials, and expressed doubts about the "feasibility of experiential learning and its benefits" (p. 163).

Another concern emanating from this study is the amount of time teachers spend reviewing for district-wide testing as well as the notion that instruction is often times delivered based upon the content of said testing. Many teachers reported not being able to cover the entire course content as a result of spending weeks reviewing for end of course tests. As a result, many related how they chose what they thought to be the most significant parts of the course content (usually tested material), and focused on those skills specifically. One teacher interviewed reported, “What you start to do is to basically figure out what will be on the exam so that they can pass the exam, so that hopefully they have learned something” (p. 164). As a teacher, I understand this concept completely as I often feel compelled to follow the very same practice. What really opened my eyes surrounds the idea that I teach in an elementary setting, and this study is focused on high school students. While in my mind’s eye, I knew it all along; this study has helped me see that we start our students in elementary school with this monotonous procedure of testing drill and review, and it becomes an experience they must endure throughout their entire school career.

In Diamond’s (2007) study on the connections between high-stakes testing and classroom instruction, he focuses on the ways in which standards-based accountability, including standardized testing, affects instructional content and pedagogy. He conducted interviews with 47 teachers across 8 schools with varying student populations. In addition, 50-70 days were devoted to observing 105 classroom lessons focusing on content and the pedagogy of the tasks by which the content was conveyed. His goal in the study was to first outline the multiple influences on teachers’ instructional decisions and then place high-stakes testing policies in the context of the broader array of influences. The way in which he separated the analysis into data

on changes in pedagogy and changes in instructional content made the findings more transparent and surprising at the same time.

It was the notion of changes made to pedagogy (how teachers engage students around instructional content) that surprised me. Diamond's (2007) data suggests that testing did not have an overwhelming influence on pedagogy in the classrooms he observed. He noted many situations in which teachers mediated their own meanings behind policies and while being bound by a certain content, a freedom of choice by which to deliver said content existed, thereby allowing teachers autonomy in their pedagogical practices. Although I am pleased to know that this autonomy exists in the eight schools studied by Diamond (2007), I also work with the awareness that there are many schools and/or districts that do not allocate such autonomy. In many districts, teachers are given very specified programs, curriculums, texts, and means by which content is to be delivered with no option to waiver from a prescribed and/or authorized approach. Another point made by Diamond (2007) includes the conception that a change in pedagogy is not always felt to be a necessity by many teachers, especially those teaching in low-income/low performing schools. The reasoning behind this opinion is that in many high-poverty schools, didactic instruction is predominantly the method of instruction used and a change in pedagogy from didactic to interactive is considered a great challenge by the teachers charged with implementation.

While Diamond (2007) noted a limited amount of pedagogical change with high-stakes testing, his findings reveal a much greater change in the delivery of instructional content and he describes a number of ways in which teachers described this process and/or he observed it firsthand. When reporting on his findings as they pertain to change in content, he says, "Testing and standards shape the instructional content that teachers cover, which suggests a relatively

powerful link between the policy environment and this instructional dimension” (p. 294). His observations include the narrowing of curriculum towards math and language arts with social studies and science being taught “intermittently” (p. 294). One third-grade teacher described the ways in which she “narrowed the content she taught to the subjects that could affect the testing outcomes of her students” (p. 295). Diamond warns against this practice as he suggests it prompts, or gives the appearance of inflated test scores without actually enhancing student learning. In addition to a narrowing of the curriculum, Diamond recounted teacher reports of covering skills in an expeditious manner in an attempt to encompass all standards before testing. Some teachers in his interviews even used the term “cramming” (p. 206) to refer to the method of teaching all standards prior to testing time. Finally, he shares the reports of many teachers in his study who devoted time to practice test preparation and simulating testing environments during times when new instruction could have been introduced or more challenging skills could have been given additional instructional time. Some schools in which he observed “engaged in substantial test preparation” (p. 297).

Although this study shows that pedagogy changed little in the schools observed, the data indicate that in many cases this could be due to a stagnant set of pedagogical practices set forth in the first place; especially in urban classrooms. While standards-based accountability policies clearly preempts teachers to change their instructional content based upon the nature, complexities, and timing of testing, the changes made do not seem to be in the best interest of long-term learning goals for students. Diamond (2007) asserts, “Simply raising stakes and assuming that teachers’ motivation will lead to needed changes underplays the complexity of transforming instruction” (p. 306).

Valli and Buese (2007) focus on high-stakes accountability policies in general as opposed to high-stakes testing specifically. The researchers endeavored to examine the ways in which teachers' roles have changed as high-stakes accountability has come to be progressively prevalent in their daily teaching lives. The study was conducted with 150 fourth and fifth grade teachers across 25 schools over a four-year span of time. Classroom instruction was observed throughout various times in the school year and individual and focus group interviews were conducted each of the four years. The three questions guiding the study were:

- How have teachers' roles changed in the past few years?
- What has influenced those changes?
- What were the consequences?

The data providing answers to these questions for reasons, to which I am yet unsure, surprised me. After all, I experience daily the “veritable deluge of directives” (p. 522) that has in recent years compelled a reshaping of teacher roles. As I read however, page after page, the innumerable externally imposed mandates and/or policies that have been the impetus for not only changing but “increasing, intensifying, and expanding” (p. 523) the role and responsibilities of teachers, I was overwhelmed to envision it all in one space. Some of these roles and/or responsibilities include learning how to provide instruction to ESOL students, curriculum pacing, curriculum alignment, innumerable data-related tasks such as analyzing data for re-teaching, tutoring, response to intervention (RTI) tasks, and differentiating instruction across multiple levels and multiple subjects, just to name a few. As a result of these changes in teacher roles, “Teachers were swept up in a flow of mandates that consumed their thinking, their energy, and for some, even their love of teaching” (p. 545).

Valli and Buese's (2007) data indicate a negative impact on pedagogy as a result of the control, standardization, and systematized measures emanating from high-stakes accountability policies. During the interview process, some teachers reported a deterioration of their pedagogies due to the brisk pace of content delivery so much so that they felt a necessity to stop creating lessons that involved inquiry due to time restraints. Teachers termed this "drive-by" and "hit or miss" teaching (p. 545). The researchers' observations indicated an increase in basic skills instruction at every grade level and a decline in cognitively complex instruction. They report, "Teachers, indeed, seemed to become better managers of activities, resources, and data, but we saw little evidence that their pedagogies improved as they assumed the many roles dedicated to instructional differentiation" (p. 546). Even the 53 classes observed with the purpose of providing reading intervention for low-achieving students functioned as "test preparation sessions" (p. 547). In their closing remarks, Valli and Buese make the following statement about their four-year study on high-stakes accountability policies: "Teachers' pedagogy, relations to students, and sense of professional well-being deteriorated over these 4 years" (p. 553). Given the copious ways in which this data revealed undesirable changes in teacher roles and practices as a result of accountability mandates, this statement gives credence to a line of inquiry that questions the benefits of a seemingly boundless stream of educational policy.

To conclude this section on effects of high-stakes testing, I examine Au's (2007) qualitative metasynthesis (or metaanalysis) study of 49 qualitative studies addressing the impact(s) of high-stakes testing on curriculum at the K-12 classroom level. The study includes over 1,500 participants (teachers and administrators) across 96 schools and 38 districts in 19 different states. Some of the notions of inquiry conducted in this study include whether or not

teachers changed or aligned their classroom content to high-stakes tests, how often teachers reduced the amount of instruction in non-tested subject areas or increased the amount of instruction in tested areas, how teachers structured the knowledge they taught, and finally, ways in which teachers' pedagogical practices may have changed in relation to high-stakes tests.

Au's (2007) findings reveal high-stakes testing does hold a critical amount of control over curriculum. He divides this control into three types; content control in which teachers expand or contract the amount of instructional time dedicated to specific curricular content, pedagogical control in which teachers changed their pedagogical style of teaching by exchanging student-centered learning for teacher-centered learning, and finally, formal control in which teachers increase the amount of fragmented instruction by teaching in direct relation to tests as opposed to the content as a whole. These forms of control represent a narrowing of the curriculum to focus on test alignment to the exclusion of non-tested subject matter. In discussing his conclusions, Au says, "This conclusion should not be surprising to educational researchers and practitioners because systems of educational accountability built on high-stakes, standardized tests are in fact intended to increase external control over what happens in schools and classrooms" (p. 264). He goes on to suggest this control is part and parcel of a system of educational policies set forth at their inception with the notion of controlling teacher behavior, pedagogical implementation, and classroom practice with a system that sets forth punitive actions for failure to meet policy expectations.

As an educator, I can personally attest to Au's (2007) findings as I have found myself in the very dilemma for which he conducted his inquiry. I could have been a participant in his study and rendered the same results. I certainly do not disclose this information with pride, but instead with disparagement for myself, and the ways in which I allow myself to succumb to the

very thing I loathe most about teaching. On the inside, I know that students should be a part of experiential, student-centered learning on a daily basis. On the outside, however, I eventually let the system of accountability seep into my thoughts, plans, classroom, and teaching practices. This is a philosophical battle I fight daily, and it is my goal not only to rebuff this inclination each time it creeps in, but also to help other teachers learn to do the same. Although there is a great deal of literature reporting on the conception that teachers struggle with the ever present pressure to effectively implement new reforms into their daily teaching practices, I have found there to be a gap, or missing link as it pertains to ways in which teachers can negotiate this struggle.

### **Teacher Responses to Policy**

“Teachers need to create and maintain reflective and critical perspectives on their own educational values and the policies and power structures that affect the classroom.” (Assaf, 2006, p. 166)

The following studies represent a compilation of responses by teachers in regard to educational legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2002). Unquestionably, the No Child Left Behind Act has been one of the most comprehensive pieces of educational legislation to ever be written in the United States. Its initial goals were ambitious to say the least, and its controversial effects have been far reaching and continue to be a topic of great debate today. One issue I have noticed across multiple studies (Archbald, 1997; Smith & Kovacs, 2011) is teachers’ concern over the sacrifice of subjects such as history, government, and the arts in exchange for additional time spent on testable subjects such as math and reading. Smith and Kovacs (2011) make what I consider to be a significant observation on this issue when they make the following thought provoking assertion: “As political participation reaches an all time

low in many respects, decreasing time spent on exposing students to ideas related to our nation's history and political system will only serve to further apathy and disinterest, two things a democracy can ill afford" (p. 214). With this in mind, Smith and Kovacs (2011) conducted a study in which they surveyed K-8 teachers in one southern school district to determine ways in which teachers believe the legislation has affected their instructional practices, attitudes towards their profession, and teacher retention in general. The results indicated dissatisfaction among teachers of all grade levels surveyed. Specifically, concerns included narrowing of the curriculum and reducing the quality of instruction to accommodate testing, reduction of instruction in non-tested areas such as history, government, geography, and the arts, and the exorbitant amount of time taken away from instructional planning to complete mandated paperwork. In one of the open-ended survey questions, a teacher responded by saying he felt like teachers "spend more time on paperwork related to testing than on instruction and that teachers are becoming 'professional testers', not teachers" (p. 216). I, along with the teachers in this study, share the same concern as I find my time far better spent when planning instruction for students than on mounds of ambiguous paperwork.

In many teacher response studies, researchers sought to investigate the ways in which teachers responded emotionally to the consistent barrage of change in education. One such example is Hargreaves (2004) study in which he compares teacher responses to mandated changes to self-initiated changes (changes made by teachers' choice). He points out that, "legislated change and initiatives have had largely emotionally negative and painful effects on teachers" (p. 288) and goes on later to say, "the self of the teacher has been subdued by the demands of the system" (p. 304). Many of the teachers interviewed for his study represented their emotions towards educational change as negative based upon the notion that changes are

typically forced upon them with no agency on their part, and are implemented with the expectation of unreasonable timetables, no resources with which to carry out the change and no support for implementation. Self-initiated changes on the other hand, were viewed in a much more positive light as teachers sought to make changes that were aligned to their own inclinations and interests while ultimately serving the needs of students.

Another way policy is often implemented is through that of external school reform models in which reform organizations create programs for underperforming schools that tout an “expeditious route to improved student outcomes” (p. 358). In Datnow’s (2000) three studies of 22 schools across three states in which reform models had been implemented, the role of power, micro politics, and differing perspectives were present in a majority of implementation processes. The team conducted extensive classroom observations, focus groups, and interviews with teachers, administrators and district leaders as a part of their data collection. Some of the reform designs used in the schools in which they studied include (but are not limited to) Roots and Wings, Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, Audrey Cohen College System of Education, ATLAS, Accelerated Schools, and Paideia.

In some districts, schools were given an option to choose from a list of reform choices while other districts, the reform model chosen was done so as a result of the district pushing the model of their choice. Finally, other schools adopted reforms as a result of principal recommendation. One important thing to note is that in none of the cases did the reform model chosen or recommended emanate from among a group of teachers. Datnow (2000) reported, “Free, fully informed choice about reform adoption seldom existed for teachers” (p. 367). This goes to reiterate the notion of power involved in educational reform adoptions. The findings of this compilation of studies reveal first, that the lack of authentic teacher buy-in at the inception

of reform adoption negatively impacted the ultimate success of the reform implementation. This negative impact was evident in a number of circumstances including in many cases a complete abandonment of the reform adoption within three to five years of inception.

There were cases in Datnow's (2000) studies in which reforms were successful. In these circumstances, even though teachers did not have choice in the initial selection of reform choices, they were able to conduct inquiries and ultimately vote upon adoption. In addition, in instances of success, districts did not mandate reform methods, but instead offered them as a means of improving student achievement and then providing support for teachers to do so. This compilation of studies indicates that top-down directives are oftentimes setting themselves up for a breakdown when teacher buy-in is not a significant part of the adoption and implementation process of any reform. Datnow said it best when she argued, "Thus perhaps it is not the particular reform choice that makes the most difference for successful implementation (though good fit is obviously important); it is the context for how it was introduced" (2000, p. 367).

While this next study would certainly fit into the category related to studies on testing, it is the teacher's response to the testing regime that fascinated me enough to include it in the teacher response category. In her introduction of the study Assaf (2006) says, "In this world of high-stakes testing, staying true to what teachers know and believe about how children learn to read can be difficult." (p. 158). She spent over 300 hours in the classroom of a reading specialist. Marsha had been a reading specialist for seven years and an educator for approximately 37. She believed whole-heartedly in a holistic method of teaching children to read. More specifically, she exposed her students to rich literature through book discussions and exposure to a multiplicity of texts as she worked to create life-long readers. This philosophy was evident in the first few weeks of the study. As the time for standardized testing came nearer however,

Marsha began to abandon her resonant literature instruction for skills-based instruction with a focus on testing strategies. In response, Marsha discussed the punitive consequences for students and teachers with the researcher in this study and noted that they were never far from her mind; especially the closer it came to testing time. To prepare students and teachers, Marsha's school spent a total of 12 instructional days testing students with benchmarks to assess or predict how they would perform on the state's main test. Assaf (2006) shares multiple conversations between herself and Marsha in which Marsha reveals a consistent philosophical pull at what she was doing with students versus what she felt she *should* be doing. While her personal teaching philosophy coupled with her own experiences charged her to continue with authentic books discussions, the school's atmosphere of test score compliance conveyed a message of another order. This message was to get as many of the school's 90% Hispanic population to pass the state standardized test as possible. Marsha "felt torn between what she believed to be right for her students and what she was being called to do by the accountability measures set forth by her district", "neglecting long-term goals for short-term test success" (p. 165). In addition, "She understood that the consequences of not passing the TAKS were greater and more immediate than learning to be real readers" (p. 181). As a teacher, this solemn situation in which Marsha found herself, is not lost on myself nor the majority of educators with whom I have talked with almost daily. On the contrary, I believe Marsha to be one in a sea of a thousand who see the critical need for students to be exposed to authentic language around literacy, but instead spin their proverbial wheels and precious time conducting lessons surrounding testing strategies.

In an attempt to regulate my bias for mandated educational policy, I include a study conducted by Sloan (2006) that represents policy, specifically systems of accountability, in an impartial fashion. Sloan (2006) makes clear that the goal of the study is not to depict systems of

accountability in an all positive nor all negative light; but instead to submit data from a three year case study in a neutral way. She spent three years in an urban school setting alongside three participants with teacher identity and agency as the focus of the study. Sloan (2006) focused distinctively on the ways the three teachers' identity and agency were affected as a result of accountability-related curriculum policies that were implemented during the course of the study. Extensive classroom observations and teacher interviews were conducted as a means to gather data.

The findings indicate an argument both for and against systems of high accountability as two of the teachers' teaching practices seemingly improved as a result of district mandates. The third participant on the other hand, felt that her teaching practices were significantly compromised and therefore took her concerns to district leaders where she was allotted a considerable amount of flexibility with her instructional practices. As I thought about reasons behind this turn of events, I found it possible that this set of results could be contributed to the original teaching practices of each participant. It could be that the first two participants' practices indeed needed development and the mandates forced them to make changes that turned out to be positive for students. The third participant on the other hand, already had developed a set of instructional practices that were sound and the new accountability policies prevented her from keeping them in place. Notwithstanding the reason(s), this study indicates there may be situations in which accountability systems can bring about a positive change. It also shows that teachers do not experience and respond to policies in mechanistic or predictable ways.

This study on teacher response to policy questioned the ways in which accountability policies affect teacher motivation. An empirical study was conducted over the course of two years in 10 schools that had recently or were currently deemed a probationary school as a result

of the 1995 School Reform Act passed by the Illinois legislature. Finnigan and Gross (2007), related their study's premise to NCLB's theoretical assumption that consequences will motivate school staff to perform at higher levels and focus attention on student outcomes. The article specifically discusses teachers' perceptions regarding whether motivation levels change as a result of accountability policy sanctions and whether or not these motivations prompt a change in instructional practices.

The researchers reported a definite modification in the ways teachers delivered instruction; some by choice and many others by mandate of school principals. Some schools in the study provided teachers adequate support in their efforts to improve instruction and were therefore able to eventually be removed from probationary status. It was in these schools that researchers noticed positive teacher motivation to continue making adjustments and keeping and/or raising expectations for student success. Other schools did not provide such support and even chose to employ such strategies such as copying and sharing test scores of individuals with the entire faculty as a means of shaming teachers into raising student achievement. It was in these schools where teachers began to express feelings of despair and hopelessness that they themselves, their students and/or their school(s) would ever be removed from probationary status. It was also in these schools that teacher motivation decreased instead of increased as hoped by the state's accountability policies, and as morale also decreased, any efforts of change in teacher practice and/or effort was negated.

Even though some motivational changes were observed, Finnigan and Gross' (2007) overall data analysis revealed that policy mechanisms assumed to have an influence on motivation by threat of job loss and other sanctions and even those promising incentives, did very little to transform motivation. The schools in which the most motivational change was

observed was determined to be achieved by purposive incentives which are internal incentives within a teacher to see students succeed and not part and parcel of an external reward or retribution. In closing, Finnigan and Gross (2007) assert, “Our findings warn that teachers in schools under these types of sanctions, particularly those that languish on probation, could ultimately become overwhelmed by the pressure and demoralized, feeling blamed for the larger inequities in our society” (p. 625). What I find to be the most interesting about this study is that the teachers interviewed gave a general consensus that accountability and standards were a necessary part of the educational system; it was the methods by which the accountability and standards were administered and implemented that troubled them in such a profound way. This indicates to me that teachers are not resentful about being held accountable for a job executed with high effectiveness, but that they are instead seeking a reasonable amount of respect and consideration for the complexities that surround teaching and are looking for support in this arduous endeavor and not retributive action.

After conducting data analysis for this study, I began to think about the ways in which policy makers viewed teachers. Based on interviews with my participants, I recognized in their responses that they felt as if policy makers regarded them as robotic beings, capable of any and all policy implementations mandated upon them (no matter the cost to their personal or professional lives) instead of the actual human beings they happened to be. As a result, I began to investigate the humanness behind the face of teaching and discovered a study conducted by Hargreaves (1998) in which he sought to investigate the emotional aspects of teaching practices. He claimed those initiating and writing about educational reform were ignoring what he describes as “one of the most fundamental aspects of teaching” (p. 835), the emotional dimension. He goes on to say that “Emotions are at the heart of teaching. They comprise its

most dynamic qualities” (p. 835). Instead of the robotic beings mentioned above, he states, “Good teachers are not just well-oiled machines. They are emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students” (p. 835). Moreover, he makes the assertion that aside from a few brief analyses, emotions have been fundamentally lacking in the mainstream literature on educational reform

In his study of 32 seventh and eighth grade teachers in four different school districts, Hargreaves (1998) interviewed each teacher and their principals individually. The purpose behind the interviews was to seek out references made by the teachers in regard to the emotional aspects of their work and then categorize these responses into themes surrounding various types of emotion. Some of the themes derived from the interview data included emotional relationships with students, emotional responses to changes in curriculum and assessment, and caring relationships. The data revealed that educational reform affected teacher’s emotional responses based upon the ways in which the teachers filtered the reforms through the feelings they had for students. These feelings were broken down into three themes: (a) students as an emotional filter, (b) feelings about structure, and (c) feelings about pedagogy. These three themes emanated from sociological literature used as a basis for the study’s interviews that spoke to the following four points in regard to the emotions of teaching:

1. Teaching is an emotional practice
2. Teaching and learning involve emotional understanding
3. Teaching is a form of emotional labor
4. Teachers’ emotions are inseparable from their moral purposes and their ability to achieve those purposes

The consensus of the three combined themes and four interrelated points indicate the ways in which teachers' classroom commitments extend beyond cognitive instruction. The teachers in the study indicated in multiple ways their commitment to emotional relationships with students and their interest in implementing emotional practices that create understandings beyond the cognitive to ensure academic success in their students is well rounded. Because the districts in which these teachers worked allowed for what Hargreaves (1998) calls "emotional labor" (p. 840), their students received the benefits of this labor as it positively affected the way the teachers taught, planned, and even implemented mandates. This notable study demonstrates not only the humanness that exists within teachers, but also the value that exists when this humanness is recognized and utilized as a means to positively affect teachers *and* students.

### **Negotiation vs. Concession**

In multiple studies, researchers have sought to identify the concessions made by teachers as they comply with state and federal mandates. Other studies, while limited in number, seek to identify ways teachers comply with said mandates while maintaining an effort to remain true to their own beliefs about teaching and learning. The following studies reflect circumstances in which teachers make concessions based upon implemented policy in their state and/or district and the effects these policies have on instruction, while others reflect negotiations made by teachers as they implement policy into their learning environments while still maintaining a stronghold to the practices that have made them the teachers they have become.

One such study in which teachers made negotiations was conducted by Goldstein (2008) in which she worked with four kindergarten teachers to identify a variety of ways they became their own policy makers by actively interpreting the mandates of their state and school district through the lens of their own professional beliefs and past experiences in teaching. These

teachers saw kindergarten as “a place to honor and respond to the unique needs of young learners” (p. 463), and in so doing, they sought to transform policy into an interactive process whereby they could reinterpret and customize instruction based upon the needs of their own students. The way they chose to do this was to utilize portions of the district-mandated materials, and blend these materials into their own repertoire of resources, lessons, and instructional strategies. Some taught mandated lessons early in the week to “get them out of the way” (p. 463) so they could then make their own instructional choices for the remainder of the week. In essence, what these teachers were trying to avoid was the patterned and/or programmed materials that were not in their professional opinion, engaging nor thought provoking to kindergarten aged children. One important thing to note about the school in which the participants worked is that the principal gave the teachers permission to conduct their classrooms in this manner. This, of course would not be an opportunity afforded in all schools; especially those with low test scores. This study does however; show how teachers can integrate mandates into their own methods of teaching to make a reasonable compromise. What I found to be the most poignant conception of this study is the idea that all involved in the implementation of educational policy (teachers, superintendents, and/or principals) “creates a partial, specialized interpretation of any given policy that reflects the nature of their position, their own strategic knowledge base, and their professional purposes and goals” (Goldstein, 2008, p. 471).

While high stakes testing is mostly focused on math, reading, and/or ELA, writing is not exempt. In my own third grade classroom, students were formally assessed on their performance in writing persuasive, narrative, and expository essays. Other third grade teachers in the building assessed these writings using a state approved rubric and they became a permanent part of the students’ academic record. In addition, all fifth grade students must participate in a yearly; state

mandated writing assessment in which their writings for the same genres are sent to the state for grading. Higgins, Miller, and Wegman (2006) make the assertion that high-stakes testing and standardization now drives the writing curriculum, causing students to lose out on meaningful learning experiences. As a part of this discussion, they quote Barrentine (1999) as saying, “Teachers are falling into line and teaching to the test not because they agree with instruction that is driven by standardized testing, but because the consequences of low test scores are so great” (p. 5). In their effort to discuss ways to improve writing instruction while still following standards and mandates as they relate to teaching writing, Higgins, et. al, (2006) report on three studies in which teachers use what they call best practices, or research-based methods for writing instruction. These practices, according to the researchers enable students and teachers to meet state protocol while creating meaningful experiences in writing instruction, and therefore can be considered another means of negotiation.

The best practices suggested and studied by the researchers in this article include writing workshop (Atwell, 1987; Graves, 1983), 6 + 1 Traits writing (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2004), and modes of writing (Cooper & Kiger, 2003). Based upon my experiences with each of these methods, I view writing workshop and modes of writing as ways to engage students through the process of writing and 6 + 1 Traits as a writing program. While I typically do not place high value upon boxed programs, I advocate neither for nor against the 6 + 1 Traits writing in this review. In a study on the 6 + 1 writing program, Higgins, et. al, (2007) do however, make valid arguments in their data as they share ways in which the program helped raise writing scores across several grade levels in multiple schools. In one study of 780 papers from third, fifth, eighth, and eleventh grade students, the usage of the 6 + 1 Traits program was shown to be indicative of an ability to pass the Washington Assessment of Student Learning in

writing. In another study where writing workshop, modes of writing, and the 6 + 1 Traits were used in combination, writing scores increased over a nine-week grading period. Finally, in a three-year study of kindergarten through fifth grade students' writing, improvements in narrative writing were shown as scores increased from a 1 or 2 to a 3, 4, or 5 with average increases ranging from 40% to 92%.

The main premise of this article is to communicate the notion that authentic literature and experiential teaching and learning can happen in today's climate of high-stakes assessment, curriculum narrowing, and loss of teacher autonomy when it comes to creating meaningful writing instruction. Higgins, et al, (2007) contend that the use of writing workshop, modes of writing, and the 6 + 1 Traits program are all ways to avoid product-oriented writing events and instead, create a process-oriented environment for writing instruction in which students encompass the "human act of composing" (p. 313). They provide teachers who believe in experiential learning with ways to compromise with state writing standards and assessments in that that these suggested methods can meet the needs of both teacher beliefs about the teaching of writing and acceptable writing scores. "Writing workshop", they say, "the writing process, 6 + 1 Traits, and modes of writing prepare students to take standardized tests, but test preparation is not the goal. The goal of good writing instruction is to produce good writers" (p. 316).

Concession and negotiation, as I describe it in this set of studies can be viewed as a desirable or an undesirable notion. I present concession in these particular studies as undesirable while negotiation is viewed in a more positive light. In Valli and Chambliss' (2007) study that compares and contrasts two reading lessons taught by the same teacher, the concession made in the name of test preparation is clearly undesirable. The primary goal in this study was to determine the effects of a high-accountability climate on classroom cultures. Within a larger

scale study including observations of fourth and fifth grade reading and reading intervention classes, Valli and Chambliss' (2007) observed one fifth grade teacher in two learning environments; one general education reading class which the researchers termed "child-centered classroom culture" (p. 59) and a reading intervention class set up by the school's administration as an extra source of reading instruction for low-achieving students. The researchers described this class as a "test-centered classroom culture" (p. 59). In addition to the teacher for which this particular observation was made (Ms. Gabriel), 70 other teachers across 11-18 schools were observed 6 to 8 times per year for four years so that comparisons of each observations could be made. In total, 56 intervention classes and 143 reading classes were observed. Ms. Gabriel was chosen because her administrators considered her an exceptional teacher and was given freedom of choice as to how she would conduct lessons in the intervention class when other teachers were required to follow a script. The researchers therefore expected to observe two exemplary lessons, even when one of them was to be geared towards test prep.

Instead of two exemplary lessons, Valli and Chambliss (2007) observed lessons in which "instructional goals and tasks, classroom discourses, and teacher-student roles and relationships were strikingly different" (p. 62) and images of "distinctively different classroom cultures" (p. 62) entered the mind's eye. In the reading class, Ms. Gabriel chose the text for each reading group with precision, based upon the interests, levels, and needs of students. The actual lesson was built on student experiences and attempts to think analytically and in a metacognitive manner were encouraged. The researchers present a clear presence of respect for individual student English proficiency, prior knowledge, and cultural experiences. The reading intervention lesson on the other hand, utilized a multiple-choice test-prep packet as its basis. The reading text that accompanied the multiple-choice questions was a three-page magazine article, that

according to researchers; was too complex for the students. No forethought for students' prior or cultural knowledge was a consideration when choosing this particular text. The majority of this lesson concentrated on test-taking strategies and Ms. Gabriel exhibited clear frustration with students as they lost interest and began to giggle and be silly about one another's responses to questions. Valli and Chambliss (2007) refer to Ms. Gabriel in this lesson as a "test coach" (p. 71) and present their data as an indication that "high-stakes accountability influences instructional processes, as well as curriculum coverage" (p. 73).

I chose this study because of Ms. Gabriel and the characteristics she exhibits in her teaching that I see not only in myself, but also in many teachers and personal colleagues. The teachers I know (including myself) characteristically teach lessons like Ms. Gabriel's reading class lesson; with enthusiasm and a deep desire to engage students in the spirit of experiential learning. I also am the first to acknowledge that the closer testing time comes, the more willing I become to give lessons such as the one presented in Ms. Gabriel's intervention class in which she was clearly making concessions and not negotiations. The closer the calendar gets to April each year, the deeper my desperation becomes to help my low students meet expectations on the upcoming standardized test by giving them testing strategies that I know full well does not enhance their learning experiences, but trains them to beat the testing system. I apply no judgment as I compare the differences between Ms. Gabriel's two lessons, nor do I detect judgment from the researchers who conducted the observations. The fact that she is hailed in her school as an exemplary teacher is just an additional reaffirmation to me that even excellent teachers fall prey to the undesirable consequences of accountability policies. I believe Valli and Chambliss (2007) would undoubtedly concur since they assert, "To the extent that a child-centered culture is supplanted by a test-centered culture, it is likely that academic achievement,

as well as meaningful school experiences and personal bonds among teachers and students, will diminish” (p. 73).

Yet another study in which teachers make undesired concessions in reaction to educational policy is Olson’s (2009) study of teacher practices as they respond to the California Proposition 227, otherwise known as English for the Children Initiative. This legislation was written in response to the No Child Left Behind Act in an attempt to raise test scores (administered in English) among English language learners. Proposition 227 mandated that a one-year class be provided for English language learners that would provide a quick means to mainstream them into general education classrooms by the following school year. Olson’s (2009) case study was conducted in two second-grade classrooms in which the literacy practices of the two teachers were compared. Based upon classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, Olson’s findings reveal that literacy instruction in both classrooms focused upon basic skills (or testable skills) 60% of the time. In an interview, one teacher justified the skill and drill practice with the contention that this type of instruction is delivered with the intention of raising test scores. While the second teacher in the study preferred a more holistic approach to teaching, she admitted that she had sacrificed a great deal of her whole language approach for a skills-based approach in an attempt to comply with state mandates. A clear notion of “ideological mismatch” (p. 86) between the teacher’s beliefs about teaching and educational policy was present in this classroom just as it was in Ms. Gabriel’s class in Valli and Chambliss’ (2007) study. In the case of both teachers in this study, the power of federal and state accountability to shape classroom practice is once again palpable and clearly ever-present.

“How do teachers negotiate the philosophical rift between mandated pedagogy and their personal beliefs about teaching and learning?” (Friedman, Galligan, Caitlyn, & O’Connor, 2009).

Does this question sound familiar? I came across this article (and research question) on the democratic practices of teachers many weeks after developing my own research question for this study and in the end stages of writing this literature review. Its striking resemblance to my own inquiry prompted me to momentarily contemplate the notion that my inquiry had previously been conducted. When I thought about whether or not a group of nine teachers (the number of participants in the Friedman, et.al study) could single-handedly and effectually answer such a complex question, I realized the need to continue my investigation.

Friedman, et al., (2009) conducted a study including nine teachers in an urban elementary school, and eight teachers in a suburban elementary school. The goal of the study was to answer the aforementioned question by conducting collaborative discussion, personal interviews with each teacher, and classroom observations over the course of one school year. The researchers came to identify four teacher cultures of democratic practice when recognition exists that teachers are excluded from democratic participation in major curriculum events and decisions about teaching and learning. Those four subcultures are as follows:

- Compliance: In a subculture of compliance, teachers feel oppressed, devalued, incompetent, afraid, and angry noting a loss of autonomy and increased powerlessness in how they choose, develop, and implement instruction. As a result, they comply without careful evaluation of either mandated or personal pedagogy (p. 254).
- Non-compliance: These teachers also feel oppressed, devalued, incompetent, afraid, and angry at loss of autonomy, and experience increased powerlessness in how they select, develop, and implement curriculum and instruction. These teachers, however, refuse to implement potentially effective initiatives and thus, maintain status quo in their instruction through noncompliance (p. 255).

- Subversion: Although teachers perceive that mandated initiatives do not effectively and justly address the needs of the diverse learners they serve, they ostensibly comply, but within the confines of the classroom and modify prescriptive pedagogy to accommodate the needs of their learners, thus creating a subculture of subversion (p. 255).
- Democratic inquiry & practice: In this subculture, teachers practice democracy by conducting systematic and comparative inquiry into mandated and personal pedagogy. They systematically inquire into practice to compare a variety of constructs and conceptualizations of pupil learning and achievement. Based on evidence, they either implement the new initiative, refuse to implement the new initiative, or modify the initiative to serve their pupils most effectively (p. 255).

Friedman, et al., (2009) find and identify shortcomings in the subcultures of compliance, noncompliance, and subversion, and instead, encourage teachers to practice democratic inquiry and practice as they seek a return of autonomy, professionalism, and a voice in their profession. From their observations and interviews, the researchers identified feelings of de-professionalism, anger, powerlessness, and a fear of reprisal from school and district leaders when feeling propelled to speak out about reforms and initiatives that were not meeting with student success in classrooms. One classroom teacher called herself a “constructivist who had pitted herself against the new status-quo in education being driven by outcomes-based assessments” (p. 263). This study sought to identify ways in which teachers negotiated their philosophical stances along with mandated pedagogy, and its analysis revealed a vast array of responses from its participants. Some were discovered to act in desperation as they do anything from willingly, but begrudgingly comply, while others were found to do just the antithesis and refuse to implement initiatives into their classrooms at all; even ones that may be beneficial. The analysis of Friedman, et al., (2009)

exposed a sense amongst teachers that the democratic process was a thing of the past, and that they currently live and work in a “do as I say, and not as I do” environment (p. 256). The meaning-making process of the teachers in this study as it pertains to policies that affect their teaching practices was clearly understood as concession and not that of negotiation. In this vein, they make the following reflective statement that speaks to the heart of my study:

In a nation where teachers are responsible for modeling and promoting democratic values, ideals, ways of knowing, and paths of action, they are becoming increasingly excluded from the dialogue of curriculum and instruction. Teachers are expected to uphold democratic ideals but are not part of the democratic process that ensures a competent, reflective, and informed sharing of ideas that is based on education, expertise, professional development, experience, and comprehensive evidence of pupil performance that moves far beyond a single score on a standardized test. (Friedman, et al., 2009, p. 256)

“Reformers often want teachers all to “be on the same page” and to “get everyone on board, but the reality is that educators have very different, and sometimes opposing, philosophies of education that often originate in their different life experiences.” (Macdonald & Shirley, 2009). Often times, teachers’ life experiences may lead them in a different direction in the classroom than the direction a new reform may take them. This notion of which path to take; that of the policy or what life experiences divulge as best is what this study has sought to investigate.

### **Conclusion**

This review of the literature has first, confirmed that the effects of high-stakes testing on classrooms can have negative ramifications in terms of student progression, narrowing of

curriculum, and teacher efficacy. The studies presented demonstrate the ways in which teachers experience a hindrance in the learning process as a result of high stakes testing for students and high stakes accountability for themselves. In addition, the review identified ways in which teachers adversely respond to the mandated policies for which they have no active part in creating. These adverse reactions cause undesirable practices such as tailoring instruction to testing content to manifest themselves in classrooms, which directly affects students in unfavorable ways. Finally, the studies discussed in this review of the literature have revealed the notion that a fine line exists between the negotiations teachers make in classrooms versus the concessions they make in the name of policy. Teachers feel that they are on the receiving end of far more concessions than negotiations. This perception has begun to create bitterness within teachers towards the policies in which they are expected to implement. Ways in which additional research may be beneficial to the field is included in chapter six. In chapter three, I described the methodology applied and how I used discourse analysis to analyze the interview data.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### A Qualitative Paradigm Study

The goals of this study sought not only to understand the impact of policy on teachers as practitioners, but also to understand teachers' meaning making process of educational policy, which is based upon their social realities and lived experiences. Because these goals are inductive in description, complex, and not quantifiable, this study is qualitative in nature. Qualitative research consists of interpretive practices including interviewing, conversations, and observations that represent a naturalistic approach to viewing the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In addition, it is useful for exploring, discovering, describing, and constructing human experiences (Mallette & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest a pragmatic approach to choosing a research method when they maintain the topic of inquiry and what the researcher actually desires to discover is what should guide the appropriate research method of choice. Qualitative inquiry compels the researcher to engage with participants as they examine participants' beliefs, experiences, perceptions, and notions of pedagogy. As the researcher in this study, I took Bogdan and Biklen's (2007) pragmatic approach as I considered the desired outcome in the decision-making process of choosing how each component of the study would be conducted. Another important aspect to consider when conducting qualitative research is the social aspect of the inquiry. While speaking to the characteristics of qualitative research, Ezzy (2002) says, "Describing the social processes that make life meaningful is at the heart of good qualitative research" (p. xii). It was my goal as a qualitative researcher in this particular study to consistently work to establish relationships with those I was studying in an attempt to form decisive understandings of their cultures, practices, and ways of being while at the same time

looking towards implications for social policy and as Ezzy (2002) suggests, the socialized processes behind it.

To define qualitative research more definitively as it was used in this study, qualitative research is appropriate when a topic, participant, or group is studied in their natural setting(s), attempting to make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). When conducting qualitative research, the researchers' goals are to gather a comprehensive understanding of human behavior in addition to what regulates said behavior. They are seeking to understand more than the *what* and *where*, but the *why* and *how* such behavior exists or transcends. In this study, I interviewed teachers to understand the ways in which they navigate personal and classroom experiences in light of educational policies and reforms. Qualitative purists (sometimes known as constructivists or interpretivists) reject the notion of positivism (from which quantitative research stems) as they maintain that multiple-constructed realities do indeed exist and that a detached and objective way of viewing people is simply not always feasible. Qualitative research is, in my view, a multicultural process, and it is my responsibility as the researcher at the helm of this study to report the ways in which participants navigate their experiences based upon their own cultural practices through the politicized arena of teaching and learning. In light of this view, this study sought to reveal teacher beliefs and how they have developed over the course of a teaching career, investigated the teaching reality as the participants have experienced it, and attempted to understand how participants understand the ways in which policy has affected their personal and professional lives and maybe even the lives of their students. These constructed realities call upon the tenets of qualitative research for inquiry and for these reasons; the qualitative paradigm was the key influence guiding this study.

This study, grounded in the theoretical constructs of constructivism, symbolic interactionism, and critical pedagogy, also takes up a methodological orientation that was critical in nature, and the next section provides a rationale for this perspective. Following this section is a discussion on discourse analysis, the semi-structured interview process and the participants themselves. Finally, I discuss my role as researcher, trustworthiness of the study, a timeline, and the process behind writing up the study.

### **Methodological Orientation**

“All discourse analysis needs to be critical, not because discourse analysts are or need to be political, but because language itself is...political” (Gee, 2011, p. 9)

In seeking to put a theoretical and methodological face to my study, I persisted in my attempts to shy away from a critical stance. Having never regarded myself as one who would operate under the guise of critical theorist due to my own misconceptions about what it meant to ‘be critical,’ I continued to seek out other means to bring attention to the realities as I came to understand them about my research. One of the central concepts behind critical research however, is based upon the notion of political power, and I cannot escape the conception that my study positions itself directly in the path of the politics behind education. Kincheloe (2008) affirms this concept when he describes the hiring processes in schools, which curriculum and/or textbooks will be adopted, and the types of language used to teach mathematics, for example, as all profoundly political decisions. Crotty (2003) points out how in many cases, critical inquiry can be radical, and that “the spirit of social critique...expresses itself in many ways” (p. 159). I have come to understand first, that critical inquiry has the ability to take on many forms; but its search for emancipatory knowledge and social justice are existent throughout, and second, it is not the radical form of thinking critically that Crotty (2003) speaks about that I should feel

compelled to adopt. This recognition diminished my resolve against taking a critical position and instead facilitated my awareness that there is indeed a place for this thinking in my study.

### *Discourse Analysis*

“Discourse is an association of socially accepted ways of using language, other symbolic expressions and artifacts of thinking, feeling, behaving, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify yourself as a member of a socially meaningful group” (Gee, 1996, p. 144).

Considering this study focused upon policy and consistent with Gee’s (2011) assertion that “language is always “political” in a deep sense” (p. 7), his method(s) for discourse analysis were employed as an instrument to identify the social meanings of teaching as the participants in this study understand them as well as their perceptions of the political notions behind educational mandates and the practices that ensue as a result. As this study sought to understand the ways in which teachers navigate the policy context as it pertains to the practices they implement daily in classrooms, discourse analysis served to help me understand the language behind the *who* my participants are or feel they have become as a result of policy and *what* they are saying about their experiences as a result. My first step after transcribing the data was to read the transcripts through one time. Next, I began to re-read with a closer lens; thinking deeply about what each participant was saying as an individual. Rogers, Mosley, and O’Garro (2005) explain that educational researchers turn to discourse analysis as a way to make sense of the ways in which people make meaning in educational contexts. Gee (2011) describes discourse analysis as “the study of language-in-use” (p. 8) and his method for implementation includes the study of the ways in which people use language not only to say things, but also how others use language to *do* and *be* things (p. 3). This approach helped in my endeavor to determine situated meanings and the socially situated identities behind the practices of my participants. In addition, discourse

analysis is an appropriate method to ascertain levels of power (as viewed by participants) that would prompt a critical outlook on the political arena in education. As I read through the transcripts for a third time, I began to look for these notions of power while also identifying other patterns.

Even though the use of discourse analysis by critical inquirers may be relatively modernistic, there is adequate cause to support the notion that it can accompany critical pedagogy and symbolic interactionism as a commanding instrument for interpreting the ways in which teachers navigate policy context with students. Gee (2011) confirms this when he suggests, “all discourse analysis is critical discourse analysis, since all language is political and all language is part of the way we build and sustain our world, cultures, and institutions” (p. 10). Crotty (2003) too, affirms this position when he argues the way in which others view society must be considered and studied seriously. Rogers (2011) also sustains this notion when she suggests, “The process of learning critical discourse analysis is not linear. Rather, it involves a cycling through deepened understandings of the role of language in social life” (p. xvi). The views of the participants in this study as they pertain to their own experiences based upon the interactions with language, policy, and the symbolic tools they may choose as a means of communication were all at the heart of my inquiry and ultimately, analysis.

Many interpretations of discourse analysis exist as well as a wide variety of approaches from which analyses are preferably performed. Fairclough (1989) for example, relies heavily upon a linguistic analysis of text; especially that of Halliday’s (1985, 1994, 2004) systemic functional linguistics and focuses upon a detailed textual analysis. He consistently conducts recursive movement between linguistic and social analysis in his dialectical approach (Rogers, 2011). Gee (2005, 2011) and van Dijk (1997), on the other hand, have fostered a toolkit that

places less emphasis on lexicon and more prominence on social and cultural contexts (action, context, power, ideology, for example) of the language being analyzed. Since I was interested in more than an interpretation of patterns in social interaction as they emanated in language, I used Gee's (2005, 2011) approach to discourse analysis as I sought to determine implications of, and causalities behind certain social practices of teachers.

The frame problem (Gee, 2005), an issue of validity or context for analyses of situated meaning is both a problem and a tool. It is a problem because our discourse analytic interpretations are always vulnerable to changing as we widen the context within which we interpret a piece of language. It is a tool because we can use it – widening the context – to see what information and values are being left unsaid or effaced in a piece of language. As I analyzed the interview data, I sought to keep the frame problem in mind, as I desired to keep an open mind as to what the data was trying to communicate.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

### ***Setting***

In this study, I interviewed one first grade and two third grade teachers who work with culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students in high-needs elementary schools. Here I provide a brief overview of the two communities, Morgantown and Kenwood (both pseudonyms), in which the respective schools are located. A more descriptive narrative of each community, school system and its policies, and each school is included in chapter four.

The interviews conducted for this study took place in two research sites located in the southeastern part of the United States. Both sites, neighboring in proximity, are considered suburban in area, and their school systems are comparable in size. Morganton, a city in existence since 1870, boasts a rich, cultural heritage and prides itself on its balance of suburban

and rural areas created for the enjoyment of its citizens. Kenwood, a city since 1832, also features metropolitan living, but its green space that includes local farms and several localities for outdoor events is more expansive than that of Morganton. While Morganton has been experiencing progressive growth since 1980, Kenwood's growth has happened rapidly over the past ten years. In addition, the demographics differ, as Morganton's population of White and African American residents is 47.6% and 41.2% while Kenwood's is 74.8% and 17.5% respectively. Both Morganton and Kenwood's school systems take pride in their family oriented communities and work to build relationships with those in their respective communities as they work towards greater student growth and achievement.

### **Participants**

Participants in this study were chosen through purposeful selection (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). My reasoning for choosing purposeful selection as a means to garner participants is because the *purpose* of this study is to glean information-rich data from participants who have had a wide variety of experiences in teaching as educational policy continuously changes, but whose experiences may not be specifically generalizable to all teachers. Purposeful selection requires the researcher to establish a set of parameters by which participants will be selected (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, LeCompte & Priessle, 1993; Merriam, 1998). In this study, I interviewed three participants from the two school districts described earlier; one from Kenwood County and two from Morganton County. Three participants were chosen in order to provide a diverse perspective as well as a range of experiences from teachers who have taught across multiple eras of reform as well as multiple grade levels. The parameters set forth to choose the participants for this study included the following:

- At least one of the three participants should have a minimum of 25 years experience as a public educator in an effort to discuss and identify the changes experienced in education across an extended period of time. The other participants should have at least 10 years teaching experience.
- Each participant should have an education level of a Specialist degree or higher.
- Participants should be knowledgeable about educational policies and reforms that have been created and passed over the last ten years. This knowledge will be considered by a review of district level evaluations and participation in teacher learning events; local and/or statewide.
- An inclusion of at least two high-pressure grade levels (determined by gateway testing years, for example).
- At least one participant representing each of the two grade levels has taught in the same grade for at least ten years.

### **Data Sources and Collection Methods**

Data sources for this study included three individual interviews (See Appendices A-C for all interview questions) with each participant for a total of nine interviews over the course of four weeks. This study focused upon the lived experiences of human beings, specifically, teachers. As an educator, I understand that many others share my anxieties about the ways in which educational policy affects me as a person and as a teacher, that my story is not exclusive, and that the experiences of teachers constitute a large portion of what we understand as schooling. I recognize that the experiences of others are of equal importance to my own and this is why I chose to use interview as the method by which this study was conducted. According to Seidman

(2013), interviewing “is a powerful way to gain insight into educational and other important social issues through understanding the experiences of the individuals whose lives reflect those issues (p. 13). The interviewing process permits participants to express their own personal meanings through language, and the understanding of these meanings and the lived experiences behind them are the root of in-depth interviewing. I used interviewing as suggested by Seidman (2013) to gain insight into the teaching lives of the teachers who work diligently to implement policies into their classrooms and instruction while still endeavoring to embrace their core beliefs about learning.

The first initial interview focused a great deal on the past school experiences of the participants and a few brief questions about policy. The second interview consisted of a more thorough investigation of participant feelings and experiences with educational policies that effect the daily operations of the classroom, and the third and final interview consisted of questions pertaining to teacher individuality and follow-up questions raised by the researcher after transcribing and coding responses from the first set of interviews. In each interview, I tried to create an environment in which the conversations were fluid and holistic and not “Q & A” sessions. Other data sources included artifacts such as lesson plans from participants and completed teacher evaluation forms. Lesson planning documents affirmed a level of conformity to district policy for planning as well as individual teaching practices and/or styles of participants. Teacher evaluation forms specified the nature of expectations for participants as set forth by district and/or state mandates.

Additional data sources include a researcher’s journal and memos. The researcher’s journal consisted of my experiences, mindsets, sentiments, and reactions throughout the process of interviewing, getting to know participants, and collecting and analyzing data. Memos were

written to record my responses and/or questions throughout the coding process. Finally, transcripts or postings from teacher blogs to which I subscribe were used in an effort to consider the sentiments of other educators on a wider scale.

### ***Organization of data***

All data was stored on a password-protected computer as well as on a password protected Sky drive account. After conducting each interview, the data was immediately moved from a voice recorder to an electronic audio file. Each audio file was named with the participants' initials and the interview number (KK.interview.2, for example). After transcription, a hard copy of each interview was printed so that I could use various colors for marking in the initial open-coding process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I also created an electronic backup for all memos and journals created in Evernote.

### **Data Analysis**

Gee (2011) emphasizes time and time again the notion that analysis begins as soon as the first data are collected. As suggested by Seidman (2013), this study followed a three-interview series. The first interviews for this study consisted mostly of questions surrounding participants' past school experiences and why they chose to become a teacher. The second set of interviews dealt mostly with educational policy and how participants felt it affected their teaching practices and student learning experiences; and the third set included questions about teacher individuality and follow-up questions emanating from the first two. After conducting the first set of interviews, I immediately began listening to the corresponding audio files, examining and comparing transcriptions, and recording what seemed to be recurring ideas. I conducted one interview with each participant during the first week of data collection and a second interview

with each participant the following week. Each set of interviews were set up to parallel each other so that I could focus on one set of questions at a time. As I conducted each interview, I made notes about questions I wanted to add to that interview as well as possibilities for the next one. Following, is an example of the thought process I employed as proposed by Seidman (2013) during and after one set of interviews.

During the first set of interviews, I asked participants to share in depth teaching practices in an attempt to better understand them as educators. As they responded, I garnered data that would be applicable to questions originally planned for the second set of interviews. For example, as they spoke about practices in their own classrooms, the topic of mandates surfaced. I realized that it was inevitable that issues around policy manifested when the participants discussed personal teaching practices and decisions. Their preferred practices were deeply embedded in their personal, past experiences. Therefore, external forces of policy, according to all three, provided them with a pervasive reminder of how many of the practices they held dear were at odds with mandated practices. As a result of coming to initially understand how deeply policy has affected the teaching practices of each participant, I removed or edited some of the questions written for the second set of interviews and added others. This flexibility afforded in semi-structured interviews allowed for fluid and logical planning as each individual interview was conducted, analyzed, and reflected upon.

After the second series of three interviews, I began to bracket the data (Seidman, 2013), first by color-coding the ideas that were recurring on a regular basis so I could later organize existing patterns in language with each of Gee's (2011) building tasks. I accomplished this by using Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative analysis. This method allowed for the emergence of codes and the delineation of categories as new questions consistently made

themselves known through the comparison of data. It also aided my reflection upon the data as a whole each time I reviewed the transcripts or re-listened to the audio. This left me with 58 original codes (or brackets). The following are examples of a few of the codes originating from this practice:

- Developmentally inappropriate expectations of students
- Testing
- Conformity
- Personal time
- Validation of testing and accountability
- Misalignment of policy
- Burn-out
- Student anxiety
- Evaluative (teacher)
- Agency

As I listened to the audio files and revisited the hard copy transcripts on multiple occasions, there were nine codes that stood out as prevalent, meaning two or more participants mentioned them on numerous occasions throughout each interview. Of those nine codes, all three participants mentioned eight of them across the first two sets of interviews. During this process of coding, I began to make memos (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Charmaz, 2006) about ideas I thought were interesting or maybe things I wanted to think about later. These memos helped me as a researcher to continuously reflect upon my own feelings as they pertain to the data. The following is an example of a memo I created as I read through the first six transcripts for a third time:

As I go through the transcripts for a third time today, I am struck by the fact that all 3 participants validate the need for testing &/or assessment for students. They also validate the need for teachers to be evaluated in some way (albeit, a fair way). Clearly, they are not seeking a 'free pass' for themselves or students. This validation has been mentioned multiple times by all three participants in the 2 interviews conducted thus far (Personal Memo, September 19, 2014).

In addition to creating memos, I also started a journal in Evernote of my coding process so I could keep up and reflect back upon each step. The following is an example of one of the first few entries:

September 13/14

- Today, I started coding the other 3 interviews I have conducted (I have done 6 so far). I followed the same process as last week...listening to audio file while coding transcription @ the same time. I have color-coded all codes with a specific color marker, pen, and/or highlighter. Using the list of codes I developed last week, each of the other 3 interviews were coded on 9/13. After coding, I re-read each one for a more thorough understanding of the data. I continued to mark lots of terms/phrases with the 'not sure what I'm doing with this, but I know I'm going to do something' marking:) (all green)
- Now I am going back to each of the 6 interviews to find these markings and decide what code (if any) will be applied to them...there's a lot! This is going to take a while!
- Here are the new codes I developed from the "green" markings: personal school experience, outsiders' lack of understanding, overwhelmed, multiple social roles, validation of testing/accountability, stress, lack of trust, student experiences, student

anxiety, negative effects of students, fear (teachers), evaluative (teachers), burn-out, guilt, data, evidence/proof, documenting, class size, meaningful learning experiences, philosophical stance, teacher responsibility, agency, misalignment of policy, teacher identity, snapshot, classroom mandates.

- Some of these are mentioned SEVERAL times in the data! Some I think will need to be collapsed into each other (Journal entry, September 13, 2014).

I believe this practice of journaling the coding and data analysis process step by step helped me remember what I had done up to each specific point as well as guided my ‘where to go next’ path.

After this initial coding process and creating my memos and journal entries, I recorded all of the original codes onto index cards and sorted them in the floor into columns based on the ones I thought were similar in nature. For example, “data,” “documenting,” “evidence/proof,” and “response to numbers” were all placed in the same column. This process created nineteen columns, or categories; I then started to study each column and realized that some codes were applicable to more than one category and recreated those codes onto other index cards and added them to the appropriate columns. As I did this, I put stars on each code that could be found in multiple categories. For example, the code “guilt” applied to three columns (instructional time, personal time, and teacher identity), so it had three stars on each of the three cards. Next, I started to study the codes in each column to see which ones (if any) could be collapsed into other columns/categories based upon common concepts. I also went back to the transcripts to tease out something I had noticed the week before. While reading the transcripts for the second and third times, I started to notice a tone of what I considered *coping* in the voices and responses of the participants. When thinking about collapsing codes, I first planned to use my original research

question as a guide for organization. However, this pervasive notion of coping prompted me to add an additional research question that would speak to the issue of *why* coping was so prevalent in the data. What were the *causes* behind this climate of coping instead of navigating and negotiating? As a result, I added the following question: *What are some causes that necessitate the navigation and negotiation of policy context?* I then used this question as a guide as I started to merge codes together into categories. Using this process, I developed the following set of nine categories:

Table 1 Original Codes and Categories

<b>Category</b>	<b>Corresponding Codes</b>
1. Data	Evidence/proof, documenting, people respond to #'s, validation of testing & accountability
2. Negative Effects on Students	Developmentally inappropriate expectations of students, testing/assessment, student anxiety, snapshot, "covering" standards, class size, # of standards, burnout (teacher)
3. Evaluative (teachers)	Punishment/consequence, fear (teachers), lack of trust, validation of testing & accountability, conformity
4. Money/Budget	Lack of resources
5. Student Experiences (positive)	Meaningful learning experiences, meaningful connections made by students, experiential learning
6. Misalignment of policy	Classroom mandates, "covering" standards, class size, # of standards, outsiders do not understand, Policy Makers are not Educators

7. Teacher Individuality	Philosophical stance, agency, multiple social roles, personal school experience, guilt, making a difference for students, camaraderie (social relationships), discontent/anger, guilt
8. Personal Time	Teacher responsibility, stress, guilt, burn-out, overwhelmed, discontent/anger
9. Lack of Time	Testing/assessment, “covering standards”, class size, # of standards, guilt

At this point in the process, I again re-read the transcripts from the first six interviews and began to develop follow-up questions for the third and final set of interviews. As the notion of what I characterized as coping became more and more prevalent, I began to wonder how operating in this mode day after day was impacting the identity of each one of my participants. In light of this, I added questions to my third interview that surrounded the notion of teacher identity. A few of them are listed below:

1. What do you think about when you think of teacher identity in general, and of course, your own identity as a teacher?
2. Do you think teachers think of the same types of things as they think about teacher identity, or do you think identity means different things to different teachers?
3. What do you think happens to a teacher’s identity when they are asked or mandated to consistently go against things they feel are best...or maybe...not best for students?

After developing these and other follow-up questions, I began my final set of interviews. The first of this set was conducted during the fourth week of data collection/analysis and the last two were conducted the following week. After transcription, the same process used for the first six

interviews was used to identify 28 additional codes for the final three. All but one of these twenty-eight fit into the already existing nine categories. After listening to, transcribing and coding the final interviews, a persistent reflection of data collection enabled me to generate new questions and thus new categories to further examine.

Before applying Gee's (2011) building tasks to my categories, I went back to the final set of transcripts in an attempt to make a comparison with the other six (I now had a total of nine interview transcripts). I was looking to identify the most prominent codes and/or categories; so I created a frequency chart to identify the categories discussed most often in participant responses. This frequency chart was very effective in revealing the issues that were seemingly the most significant to participants. A table that shows the results of the frequency chart is located in Appendix D. The frequency chart helped me to narrow the scope of categories or themes to address in more detail. These themes were first labeled "negative effects on students," "teacher identity," "personal time," and "misalignment of policy." They were later labeled "negative effects on students," "policy makers are not educators," "schoolwork Sunday", and "standardization vs. individuality." After coding the final three interviews, individual codes were added to each of the four final categories previously developed. These four categories emanated from the codes found in responses from all three participants and took precedence over all others.

Gee's (2011) approach to discourse analysis focuses on the notion that "language has meaning only in and through social practices" (p. 12). In his pursuit of analyzing language via social practices, he utilizes seven areas of reality, which he identifies as the "seven building tasks" of language (p. 17-20). These tasks are the types of things being constructed as people make and interpret meanings and as the analyst(s) conduct inquiry as to how these meanings are

created and transformed over time (Rogers, 2011). The seven building tasks and the discourse analysis questions for which each gives rise are as follows:

- I. Significance: How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?
- II. Practices: What practice (activity) or practices is this piece of language being used to enact (i.e., get others to recognize as going on)?
- III. Identities: What identity or identities is this piece of language being used to enact (i.e., get others to recognize as operative)?
- IV. Relationships: what sort of relationship or relationships is this piece of language seeking to enact with others (present or not)?
- V. Politics (distribution of social goods): What perspective on social goods is this piece of language communicating (i.e., what is being communicated as to what is taken to be “normal,” “right,” “good,” “correct,” “proper,” “appropriate,” “valuable,” “the way things are,” “the way things ought to be,” “high or low status,” “like me or not like me,” and so forth)?
- VI. Connections: How does this piece of language connect or disconnect things; how does it make one thing relevant or irrelevant to another?
- VII. Sign systems and knowledge: How does this piece of language privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems (e.g., Spanish vs. English, technical, language vs. everyday language, words vs. images, words vs. equations, etc.) or different ways of knowing and believing or claims to knowledge and belief (e.g., science vs. the humanities, science vs. “common sense”, biology vs. creation science)?

My next step was to investigate how the above building tasks could be applied to each of the categories. Gee (2011) often asserts that language-in-use is about saying, doing, and being, and that we build the world around us and the meaning we make from it through language. It is through these seven building tasks and questions that I analyzed the data from my study as I investigated explicitly the ways in which teachers use language to ‘say’ their experiences as well as the ways they use language to communicate their ‘doing’ and way(s) of ‘being’ a teacher in a politically charged realm. The results from using each building task to analyze the four final categories can be found in chapter five.

### *Limitations*

Qualitative research has often been criticized for overusing interview as a means of inquiry at the expense of other methods such as observation, ethnography, and case studies. I chose interview for this study for a very specific reason; I wanted the participants’ voices to be heard. I wanted the reader(s) to “hear” exact reactions and emotions from participants, and not simply my interpretation. While this study certainly includes instances of my interpretations, it also includes a great deal of quotes from each of the three participants thereby allowing their personal responses and experiences to be heard. According to Seidman (2013), one limitation of an interview study is an idiosyncratic interview result. That is, “participants may have had a bad day, were sick, or were distracted in such a way that affected the quality of one interview”(p. 25). For this reason, I chose to follow the three-interview format that spanned a four week time period. Another positive about this particular format is that each participant has time in between each interview to reflect upon the questions and their responses, but not so long that they lose sight of the purpose behind the study. As stated, many are of the opinion that interview studies are overdone. I, however, having never conducted my own interview study, considered the

objective of this particular study and the voices of my participants as a means to guide my choice. As a qualitative researcher, I place great value upon the complex and poignant responses provided by my participants and have no regrets in my method of choice.

Another possible limitation of this study is the number of participants. A study with a larger sampling of participants would have provided either a broader capacity for sharing experiences with educational policy, thereby providing more variation in responses or would have made a broader statement that authenticated and corroborated Grace, Renee, and Bella's findings. While time limits and financial constraints prohibited a study on a grander scale, I recognize the potential value of a greater number of perspectives. I recognize the potential for the inclusion of additional participants to further validate the study's findings or perhaps provide a different point of view.

My relationship with Renee and Grace, two of the participants in this this study warrants discussion here. I have known both Renee and Grace since 2007 when I started teaching in the same school in which they both work. We have on separate occasions had conversations about teaching and shared thoughts on the state of our profession. While these dynamics come into play with any data analysis process, I maintain that our past relationship did not influence or slant their responses in any way. Before the first set of interviews, I made it explicitly clear to both Renee and Grace that I had no expectation of "desired" responses. On the contrary, I shared with them that one of the reasons they were chosen was because of the fidelity with which I felt they would respond to my questions and their ability to put our familiar relationship aside. Rather than view our past relationships as a negative, I felt as if it afforded both Renee and Grace a comfort to answer openly and honestly without the fear of retribution. Their already established trust in me allowed them to be more forthcoming than they may have been answering such deep

seeded questions with a stranger. While my research of other studies has indicated that prior relationships with participants can be construed as a limitation, the same research has demonstrated that such relationships can also create more sound, honest data. For these reasons, I stand by my decision to use Renee and Grace as viable participants in my study.

Finally, a qualitative researcher cannot with fidelity conduct a study and report on its findings without discussing their own biases as they pertain to said study. Every decision made from the choice of topic to the methods used to carry out and analyze data were based upon researcher bias (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Crotty, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln; 2011). Personal biases were one of the factors that concerned me the most at the onset of this study. The tenets of this study are such that as a veteran educator, I myself have been greatly affected by their ramifications. I am encouraged by the words and thoughts of Bogdan and Biklen (2007) as they discussed researcher bias:

Acknowledge that no matter how much you try, you cannot divorce your research and writing from your past experiences, who you are, what you believe, and what you value. Being a clean slate is neither possible nor desirable. The goal is to become more reflective and conscious of how and who you are may shape and enrich what you do, not to eliminate it (p. 38).

My experiences with educational policy have led me to possess sentiments about the tenets of this study that are unavoidable. In addition to experiences with educational policy, my political views, experiences with students in both the public and private sector, and philosophies about teaching and learning in general have led me to become the teacher, doctoral student and researcher that I am today. It is a combination of these factors that have brought this study to fruition, and I have recognized my responsibility as a researcher to keep those factors, which

create biases in check throughout the course of this study. In an attempt to circumvent my biases from entering into the data analysis process, I listened repeatedly to the audio transcripts and then considered and reconsidered the codes I had extracted. Throughout and after the data analysis process, I reflected upon my analytical notes and transcripts to ensure that I had represented the findings based on Grace, Renee, and Bella's responses with reliability. Finally, I sent electronic copies of each section of the findings to Grace, Renee, and Bella as I wrote them to ensure that each one of them felt as if they were being represented honorably. While I understand that my predispositions as an educator, daily affected by the policy for which this study is a focus sets a limitation, I believe I can say with trustworthiness that I have made every effort to keep these personal biases from affecting the results.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As the researcher, I understood that I must continuously be reflective of my own sociopolitical perceptions and philosophies as they pertain to the focus of this study. With 18 years teaching experience divided between the private and public sector, I felt as if I carried a unique viewpoint as it pertained to the political nature of education. Moreover, this contrast in experience has preempted a critical perspective of educational policy. While I recognized my experiences as creating potential bias, I also recognized them as being the catalyst for the passion behind conducting this study. As I found it impossible to isolate my experiences as a veteran educator from my role of researcher, I still made every effort possible to identify my perspectives as they related to both role of researcher and role of educator.

Another significant factor in the role of researcher is that of the relationship developed and fostered with participants. In addressing participant/researcher relationships and the ways in which researchers interpret participants' perspectives, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) argue that

researchers must be “self-conscious in regard to this theoretical and methodological issue” (p. 26). As a researcher, I considered the task of translating the lived experiences of others to be a significant commission. In this study, I have made it a priority to indeed be self-conscious as I worked to develop understandings and interpretations of my participants’ perspectives on their experiences as an educator and on that of the educational policy that has in the past and continues to play a role in the manifestation of these experiences. Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg (2011) affirm this alliance between teacher(s) and researcher when they suggest, “Teachers must join the culture of researchers if a new level of educational rigor and quality is ever to be achieved. In such a democratized culture, critical teachers are scholars who understand the power implications of various educational reforms” (p. 165-166). It is this unification I have sought to create amid myself as researcher and the educators with which I worked.

### ***Trustworthiness***

This study has established trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) in multiple ways. Seale (1999) says, “Trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability” (p. 266). Creswell (2009) maintains eight primary strategies for creating validity, or trustworthiness in a study, and in this study I have implemented the following to ensure that my research was conducted with a high level of trustworthiness: triangulation, member checking, thick descriptions, and reflectivity.

First, triangulation was implemented in this study through the use of interviews, artifacts such as lesson plans, a researcher’s journal, and researcher memos. By comparing these sources, I was able to understand the corresponding themes and in turn, create a reliable representation of the participants and their experiences via the data. Next, I used member checking to validate my interpretation of the interview data. Throughout the drafting of chapters four and five, I sent

each of the three participants versions of the write-ups that pertained to their particular interviews. Positive responses came from each of them and they were even excited to see their names and more importantly, their feelings and experiences in print. Using this method supported my suppositions and interpretations of the interview data in a way that portrayed the participants in an authentic way. In addition to triangulation and member checking, I included thick, rich description to convey my findings. Creswell (2009) says, thick, rich description “transports readers to the setting and gives the discussion an element of shared experiences” (p. 192). In this study, I have attempted to do as Creswell (2009) suggests, and transport the reader into the daily teaching lives of the participants by providing detailed descriptions of their communities, classrooms, and teaching experiences. Finally, I believe this study to be trustworthy because as the researcher, I included a self-reflection in which I made my biases known and worked to create an honest narrative with the reader as to the ways in which these biases were addresses throughout the analysis process. Reflectivity is essential to qualitative research and I believe I have made every effort to indicate my understanding that findings are “shaped by backgrounds” (Creswell, 2009).

### **Timeline and Conclusion**

Below is the timeline by which I originally planned to conduct interviews, data analysis, member checks, and write up my findings:

Table 2 Timeline

	6/2014	7/2014	8/2014	9/2014	10/2014	11/2014	12/2014	1&2/2015	3/2015
--	--------	--------	--------	--------	---------	---------	---------	----------	--------

Prospectus Defense	X								
Interviews		X	X						
Data Analysis		X	X	X	X				
Member Checks							X	X	
Write up findings					X	X	X		
Preliminary report							X		
Revisions								X	
Dissertation Defense									X

In this chapter, I explained why conducting an interview study is the most effective means by which to answer my research questions. In addition, I provided an argument for the use of discourse analysis for analyzing the data as well as why this data was analyzed with a critical stance. Finally, this chapter outlined specified the methods used to provide a level of trustworthiness to the analysis of data. Chapter four provides very specific context; first to present information on the participants' individual communities and school districts, and second, to help the reader glean a clear picture of the participants' educational backgrounds and an image

of the respective classrooms and schools in which each of them work. I believe the data are helpful as they provide a well-defined representation of the participants as individuals.

## CHAPTER 4

### SETTING AND CONTEXT OF STUDY

In this interview study, I sought to explore and share the experiences of three elementary teachers; all working in high-needs schools, and the means by which they managed the policy context in their respective classrooms. According to Crotty (2003), context is a critical factor in qualitative research, and therefore, this chapter includes a comprehensive description of the communities in which the schools are located, the schools where the participants teach, and the participants themselves.

#### Research Sites

##### *Overview of Morganton*

The population of Morganton was 133, 971 in 2012 with persons under the age of eighteen being 27.6%. The median household income was \$54, 526.00 with 13.4 % living below the poverty level. The top ranking ancestry groups include White (47.6%), African American (41.2%), and Latino (8.8) with 11.2 % speaking languages in the home other than English. Home ownership in Morganton is approximately 70% with the median value of the homes around \$146,000. Persons aged twenty-five or older with a bachelor's degree or higher is 24.8%.

Morganton has one local mall and movie theatre, three local parks and one state park where community events such as craft shows and sporting events are held. Second only to the school system that employs over 3,550 people, Morganton's biggest employer is Wal-Mart, employing over 750. Other large retailers in the area include stores such as Target, Academy Sports, Sam's Club, and Kohl's. Discount stores such as Goodwill, Big Lots, Value Village, and Ross can also be found. Central to the city is a historic plaza with a pyramid shaped brick fountain and a small venue for local events such as an annual Christmas tree lighting. Within this historic space

(considered the central business district) turn of the century buildings house multiple businesses including restaurants, real estate and attorney's offices, and a barbershop. Railroad tracks run through the center of town and a county museum created from the former courthouse is also there. While this historic site does not represent the city as a whole, it is clearly indicative of the city's culture and valued history. Other important landmarks in the community include the Cultural Arts Center where local artists are supported and events for schools across the county are held and an aquatic center where residents can go to swim, have birthday parties, and take swimming lessons. Morganton clearly offers its citizens many options in which they can participate as active members of the community as well as opportunities to use local services to enjoy family outings and events.

### ***Morganton County School System***

Morganton County School System, the first of two districts in which this study will be conducted is a sizeable district composed of approximately 25,000 students with twenty elementary schools, eight middle schools, and five high schools. Reflective of the town's demographics, Morganton County School System is racially and economically diverse with a student population that includes 48% African American, 35% Caucasian, 11% Hispanic, 4% Multi-racial, and 1% Asian. Students with disabilities comprise 10% of the student population and students with limited English proficiency 5% ([georgiastats.uga.edu](http://georgiastats.uga.edu)). 58% of the students in Morganton County are eligible for free/reduced meals. The teacher population consists of close to 1,700 PK – 12 teachers, 340 male and 1,379 female. The demographic break-down of teachers is 352 African American, 1,314 Caucasian, 26 Hispanic, 10 Asian, 2 Native American, and 15 multiracial ([www.gaosa.org](http://www.gaosa.org)). The average years experience of the teaching population is 11.91 years although there are 884 teachers with more than twelve years experience.

Even though Morganton County met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 18 out of 22 areas, overall, it did not meet AYP for the 2010-2011 school year as posted by the Georgia DOE (<http://www.doe.k12.ga.us>). After the 2010-2011 school year, the AYP process of school system assessment was replaced with the CCRPI (College & Career Ready Performance Index) accountability system. In 2012, Morganton County's CCRPI score was 67.8% and in 2013, 75.12%. Following is an explanation of the CCRPI system according the Georgia Department of Education: The CCRPI is Georgia's statewide accountability system, implemented in 2012 to replace the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) measurement, after the U.S. Department of Education granted Georgia's waiver from NCLB on Feb. 9, 2012. It measures schools and school districts on an easy-to-understand 100-point scale, helping parents and the public better understand how schools are performing in a more comprehensive manner than the pass/fail system previously in place under AYP ([communications@doe.k12.ga.us](mailto:communications@doe.k12.ga.us), April 27, 2014).

### ***Morganton County School System Practices and Policies.***

While state and national reforms abound, individual school districts are in many ways given latitude with the means by which they choose to comply with said reforms. Policies and practices such as standards-based classrooms employed in Morganton County consistently correspond to state policies. An example of this correlation is the district's strict commitment to the new Common Core State Standards. All classrooms are required to teach the Common Core State Standards in their entirety and to reflect this expectation in lesson plans. Upon impromptu evaluations by administrators, Common Core instruction is expected to be evident by what is happening at the time of the evaluation, in lesson plans, and in assessments. District leaders and administrators, with the help of elementary and middle school teachers developed Common

District Assessments (CDA's) for reading, English language arts, math, social studies, and science based on the Common Core State Standards. These assessments are administered at the end of each unit of instruction and school administrators as well as district leaders analyze the data. Units of instruction for math, social studies, and science can span two to five weeks, and the CDA's are typically 12 to 25 questions. The reading/ELA units on the other hand, are taught in nine-week increments and the CDA's have been as lengthy as 52 questions requiring teachers to use multiple instructional periods for assessment.

Morganton County has also shown its willingness to comply with state initiatives by the early piloting of the new TKES evaluation system (Teacher Keys Effectiveness System). Even though state law mandates that every district be in compliance with the implementation of the TKES system by the 2014-2015 school year, Morganton began to pilot the system during the 2013-2014 school year in an attempt to work out any "kinks" and/or deal with unexpected outcomes that may unknowingly occur. They called it a 'soft entry' into the new evaluation system. These proactive steps implemented by Morganton demonstrates their willingness to collaborate with state mandates whenever feasible to do so.

### ***Overview of Kenwood County***

Kenwood's population was 144,800 in 2012 with persons under the age of eighteen being 28.8%. The median household income was \$63,190.00 with 10.3 % living below the poverty level. The top ranking ancestry groups include White (74.8%), African American (17.5%), and Latino (5.2) with 6.3 % speaking languages in the home other than English. Home ownership in Kenwood is approximately 82% with the median value of the homes at \$142,000. Persons aged twenty-five or older with a bachelor's degree or higher is 23%. While many of the statistics between Morganton and Kenwood are very similar, other significant differences exist. These

include a difference in population of 10,829 persons, an \$8,664 difference in annual median income, an almost 12% difference in home ownership, and a 10.1% difference in the number of persons living in multi-unit structures.

The majority of shopping and entertainment in Kenwood is consolidated into an approximate 4-5 mile area on a busy, five-lane highway where one can find stores such as Wal-Mart, Target, Kohl's, and The School Box. A wide selection of restaurants is also present in this area. Locals in this space can visit a fairly small public library, a roller skating rink, and a community park with a play place for young children, tennis courts, and a picnic area. Finally, Kenwood has an airport for small, commuter planes, a technical college, and a walking/biking trail that runs throughout most of the county.

### ***Kenwood County School System***

Kenwood's school system, like Morganton, is the county's largest employer. The sizeable district is composed of approximately 28,000 students with 20 elementary schools, eight middle schools, and five high schools. The district is not as racially diverse as Morganton with a student population that includes 67% Caucasian 20% African American, 7% Hispanic, 4% Multi-racial, and 1% Asian. Students with disabilities comprise 9% of the student population and students with limited English proficiency 2%. Only 39% of the students in Kenwood County School System are eligible for free/reduced meals. The teacher population consists of close to 1,750 PK – 12 teachers, 366 male and 1,378 female. The demographic break-down of teachers is 112 African American, 1,578 Caucasian, 31 Hispanic, 5 Asian, 5 Native American, and 15 multiracial ([www.gaosa.org](http://www.gaosa.org)). The average years experience of the teaching population is 12.09 years although there are 879 teachers with more than twelve years experience. Even though Kenwood met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 18 out of 21 areas, as a district, it did not

meet AYP for the last year posted by the DOE, which was the 2010-2011 school year (<http://www.doe.k12.ga.us>). Its CCRPI report lists a score of 71.8% in 2012 and 76.7% in 2013.

### ***Kenwood County School System Practices and Policies***

Kenwood's school system hasn't always been known as a 'by the book' district, but over the past several years there has been a distinct change in how policy is both presented and followed (Bella, personal communication, April 2, 2014). The district has, over the past fifteen years intensified its relaxed attitude about how county policy is implemented. Principals who once had the ability to pick and choose what worked best for their staff (within reason) and implement "parts of the whole" as long as the end result was a positive impact for the students now have greater restrictions on such decision-making processes. Now, there are county wide initiatives such as the roll out and implementation of math workshop, district wide frameworks and curriculum calendars that are expected to be seen in the classroom on a regular basis with very little wiggle room for personal teacher choice or creativity. Teachers are expected to show evidence of higher order questioning, written commentary on student work displayed both inside and outside the classroom, have essential questions and three part lessons.

Kenwood administers District Benchmark Assessments (DBA) three times a year in all schools. Assessments are scored by teachers who submit results to school-level administrators. The data are then compared across the district and grade level classrooms by system-level coordinators. While these assessments are intended to "drive" the curriculum, teachers report there is rarely time to use said data and remediate students based on the curriculum calendar that has to move forward. Similar to Morganton, Kenwood has also begun implementing TKES (Teacher Keys Evaluation System) as a means of evaluation for both administrators and select teachers throughout the district. All involved have been provided several in-service sessions on

how the new process will be implemented and have been informed that evaluations will in some way or another be reflective of the idea that all teachers are “lacking in some area” (Bella, personal communication, 2014).

In comparing Kenwood’s policies and responses to recent reform with that of Morganton’s responses awareness of accountability is noted. Neither district boasts confidence in their methods of continuous student assessment and rigid liability for their teachers. Nevertheless, both districts see these implementations as part and parcel of keeping pace with the current standardization movement that position so much culpability on school systems. In light of this belief, a series of questions began to cycle through my mind as I wondered if other teachers felt the same. Do teachers in either of these districts have ideas and/or opinions about why their district(s) make the decisions that they do? Do they feel that local districts are under pressure to make decisions that may become unpopular with teachers? Is there a notion in existence amongst teachers that maybe districts go beyond the boundaries of what is possible for students and teachers in their efforts to achieve and maintain educational mandates? Are there limits to what teachers will do to keep pace with current reform? If so, what are they and how have said limits been set? It was my goal as I talked with each of my participants to determine their thoughts and experiences as they pertained to these questions. I felt it possible that in my endeavor to do so, I would discover more than simply answers to a set of defined questions, but also revelations about the ways teachers practice, live, think, manage, and be.

### **Participants**

The three participants for this study, Renee, Grace, and Bella (pseudonyms), were chosen by purposeful selection (LeCompte & Priessle, 1993; Merriam, 1998). My reasoning for choosing purposeful selection as a means to garner participants is because the *purpose* of this

study is to glean information-rich data from participants who have had a wide variety of experiences in teaching as educational policy continuously changes, but whose experiences may not be specifically generalizable to all teachers. Purposeful selection requires the researcher to establish a set of parameters by which participants will be selected (LeCompte & Priessle, 1993; Merriam, 1998). In this study, I interviewed three participants from the two school districts described earlier, one from Kenwood County and two from Morganton County. Three participants were chosen in order to provide a diverse perspective as well as a range of experiences from teachers who have taught across multiple eras of reform as well as multiple grade levels. The participants in this study meet the criteria as it is presented in chapter three. Their years of teaching experiences range from seventeen to thirty years. Grace, Bella, and Renee also share a collection of experiences that reach beyond traditional classroom duties that include ways each of them have served as leaders in their respective schools over the years. It is for these reasons as well as the number of reform movements that each of the three participants have taught through that each was chosen for this study.

### *Renee*

Linda: Give me some information about your experiences as a teacher in the classroom.

Renee: I wanted parents to know why I'm there is for their children. I hope that I've done that in my thirty years in the classroom.

Renee may possibly be the most easy-going, diplomatic person I know. No matter what happens, she always exudes a cool, calm and collected persona to those around her. I have known Renee since 2007 after I was transferred to her school two weeks into the school year from my own school. The school where I was teaching at that time lost three teachers shortly

after school began due to low student numbers, otherwise known as FTE (full time equivalent). I was extremely upset about having to leave my school (that was only three miles from my home), but Renee welcomed me to the new school and to her team and did her very best to make me feel as if I belonged. She has always been the teacher at our school with a smile on her face and an attitude of perseverance. She was selected as a participant in this study first and foremost because of the number of years she has been in the profession and secondly because of the professional and positive ways in which I have always observed her deal with adversity and challenge. For these reasons, I considered her a prime candidate to be a participant in a study about the ways in which teachers handle educational policy as her thirty-year career has endured a myriad of reforms.

**Renee's background.** The 2013-2014 school year was Renee's thirty-first year teaching in the public sector (she began teaching in 1983), and it was also her last year in the classroom. Renee has taught all elementary grade levels (K-5) in three different school districts, and has spent 22 of her 31 years in Morganton. She holds a bachelor's degree in elementary education (1983), a master's degree in early childhood education (1988), a specialist degree in instructional technology (2007), and has just completed (summer, 2014) her add-on in school library media. Some of the school-related activities for which she has been involved include team leader for kindergarten and third grade for 10 years, PTA teacher representative, Reading Bowl Coach, Safety Patrol Advisor, Student Council Advisor, Media Committee, Writing Representative, and CDA (common district assessment) writing team member. She also received the "Teacher of the Year" Award during the 2000-2001 and 2008-2009 school terms.

In the state for which this study is being conducted, teachers can retire with full retirement benefits after thirty years of teaching. During her thirtieth year, Renee spent a great

deal of time weighing her options that included retirement, continuing to teach, and seeking another position within the school system that would exist outside the classroom. She decided to pursue an add-on to her current teaching certificate that would allow her to become a media specialist. Renee spent the summers of 2013 and 2014 as well as the 2013-2014 school year working on this certification. She became the new media specialist at Morganton Elementary School for the 2014-2015 school year.

**Renee's classroom profile.** Renee no longer has a classroom of her own since she is the new media specialist in her school. However, I visited her classroom almost everyday for the seven years I knew her while she was teaching. Renee consistently made sure that students were placed in small groups so they could collaborate and work together on assignments. In addition, there was always a meeting place set aside in her classroom so that she could invite students to participate in lessons as a community and leave the confines of their desks on a regular basis. During the last few years she taught, her classroom had a theme of polka dots and monkeys that was used to decorate and make the space look fun and inviting. Anytime a person entered Renee's classroom during the school day, s/he would see right away that it was a place where children were made to feel welcome and that a variety of learning experiences were taking place.

### *Grace*

Linda: Did you always know that you wanted to be a teacher?

Grace: Yes, I never wanted to be anything else. I used to teach my stuffed animals. And torture my parents with "homework time" where I would make up worksheets and make them do it. When I was in 1<sup>st</sup> grade, I taught my next-door neighbor who was four, how to read. (Interview 1)

I have known Grace as a colleague for eight years as we both teach in the same school. She is one of the funniest people I know and I enjoy her ability to keep a sense of humor when it comes to the immense amount of responsibility placed upon the shoulders of teachers. Her positive and witty outlook on her role as a teacher and the profession is one of the reasons she was chosen to participate in this study. Other reasons for her selection include the following: First grade is where most students learn to read. Grace's wealth of experience as a first grade teacher and her advanced training in reading instruction makes her a viable candidate in a study in which educational policy has persistently changed the face of literacy instruction over the past ten years. Secondly, since I have known Grace, she has been a leader in our school and within her first grade team. She consistently demonstrates a desire to make the educational experience of *all* first-grade students, not just her own, as experiential, nurturing, and memorable as possible. Finally, her devotion to the profession of teaching has always been evident to not only myself, but to those who teach around and with her. She exhibits a zeal for making her classroom a place where students learn and love doing it all at the same time. It is for these reasons that I find Grace to be an ideal participant for my study.

**Grace's background.** Grace had been teaching thirteen years at the time of this study, one year in kindergarten and twelve years in first grade. She holds a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, a master's degree in reading instruction, and a specialist degree in teacher leadership. She has a passion for teaching first grade because of her love for teaching children to read. As mentioned, she has been a leader within her grade level as well as in many other capacities within her school. She serves as a lead mentor to other teachers in her school district.

**Grace's classroom profile.** This representation of Grace's classroom is based upon multiple visits I have made to her classroom over the eight years I have known her. A few years

ago, my principal set up a day for teachers to go into other colleagues' classrooms for formal observations in an attempt to help us understand the wonderful things going on in classrooms outside of our own. I chose to visit Grace's class that day and observed through several rotations of her reading/writing block. Since that time, I have been in and out of her classroom many times during my own planning period to observe a lesson, to observe a student who was the sibling of one of my own students, or just to talk with her about something happening in our school. These oftentimes unplanned, spur of the moment visits (not scheduled for the purpose of this study) have provided me with what I feel to be an accurate image of her classroom.

Based upon appearance alone, Grace's classroom is like no other in our school. It is extremely organized and decorated in such a way that makes those who enter want to smile. When talking about her classroom, she said:

Even though it's not in the curriculum (ha ha), I think it's part of my job to teach the kids to be responsible for their belongings and mine. I don't think some kids learn these kinds of skills at home and I think they're important" (e-mail correspondence, September 9, 2014).

Anyone can see that she takes great care to create a learning environment that makes children feel happy each morning as they walk into start a new school day. Everything is decorated to the tee; even the front of the filing cabinet drawers. The room has a color theme of black, turquoise, and grey polka dots and chevron. Everything on the bulletin boards, furniture, walls, cubbies, and teacher desk matches this theme in some way. Both of Grace's parents have been very involved in helping her create an inviting classroom. Her father built a large, sectioned bookcase so that books can be displayed in an organized, but accessible way for students. Her mom has sewn chair covers for all students' chairs and a matching polka-dotted cover for the chair in

which Grace sits when she gathers the class as a group. Matching crate seats serve as storage bins as well as seats for children who are away from their desks doing partner work or centers. Pom-poms hang from the ceiling to provide a fun splash of color to the room.

The classroom is organized into sections for varying purposes. First, there is a space created for group lessons. This is where Grace brings the students to sit together as a class on large area rug while they work on things such as calendar math and story time. There is a large easel in this space where anchor charts are utilized in lessons on a regular basis. In another part of the classroom, students find a large, independent reading area. This space is full of a wide variety of books that include multiple genres and levels for children to read. They are neatly organized into bins as well as the sectioned-off bookcase mentioned before. There are two child-sized chairs tied with ribbon that matches the classroom color scheme. Next, all student desks in Grace's class are organized in groups of four to five so that students can work together collaboratively. Each student has a 'book-pocket' (chair cover) hanging on the back of their chair that is open at the top and serves as an additional place for them to keep things such as library books, writings, and unfinished work folders. This keeps these things easily accessible and helps students keep their desks more organized.

Needless to say, Grace's classroom is a space where everything is organized and has its place. She says, "I spend more time in my classroom than I do at my house...and I think children deserve to spend most of their time in a nice space as well" (E-mail correspondence, September 9, 2014).

***Spring Creek Elementary: Grace and Renee's School***

Grace and Renee both work at Spring Creek Elementary (pseudonym); Grace for ten years and Renee for fourteen. They both spoke fondly of their school in their respective interviews. One of the things they both mentioned was the camaraderie amongst the faculty. Multiple teachers have worked at Spring Creek Elementary for twenty plus years, and the teachers have a sense of pulling together for the greater good of the students and each other. The school is proud of their many after school programs that are organized and operated strictly by teachers who volunteer their time. Some of these programs include chorus, art club, roadrunners, drama club, family fit nights, ESOL information nights, and Reading Bowl for which Renee is in charge. The PTA is also very active in working with the faculty to develop programs and activities for students and their families and often donate funds to students unable to participate in events such as the book fair and Santa shop.

Spring Creek Elementary had a sudden change in administration for the 2014-15 school year and this has been an adjustment for the entire staff. The previous assistant principal did however, remain and this provided some continuity to the students, faculty, and parents. The new principal had served in another capacity in the school approximately seven years before and was very excited to return. Another issue both Grace and Renee mentioned was the change in student transiency at Spring Creek. In the past, student enrollment has been stable, but in recent years, transiency has become more prominent. This fluctuation of students moving in and out has created some hardships for which this particular staff has not been accustomed to dealing. According to Grace and Renee, students coming in from other districts have missed large parts of the curriculum having already been taught and/or previous schools have not been diligent in keeping up with paperwork on students served by special resources. These situations have proved detrimental to the ongoing learning process of many students at Spring Creek.

Spring Creek is rich in technology. Every classroom has a Promethean board, three desktop computers, a laptop computer for each teacher, a television (most with DVD players), and ladybug document cameras. In addition, the media center has two laptop carts that teachers can check out to use with their class. The majority of these technology advancements have been added within the past two school years. While technology is abundant, other resources are lacking. Teachers receive very little funding to fund the basic needs of their classrooms each year. The teachers purchase items such as paper, pencils, staplers, crayons, markers, and glue personally. Many students bring in their own supplies at the beginning of the year, but once these have been depleted, it is often difficult to get them replenished. Teachers also fund any special projects they do with their students such as rewards/incentives, science project supplies, and any special activity they include in lessons. While funding is an issue (as is true of many schools), overall, Spring Creek Elementary has a positive following in the community and the students and teachers are proud of their school.

### ***Bella***

Linda: Because you work in the same school without any of those things (resources) for most of your career, why do you keep doing it?

Bella: Because I love my kids, it's home. Not just the kids, but their parents that come back and say just thank you, you made a difference in my child's life. Despite the struggles, you have to remember and honestly, that's how I get up and come to school every day...because it's not for anybody else but the kids.

I first met Bella when another mutual friend invited me to her house (Bella's house) for a holiday party. As I spent time talking with her and discovered that we were not only both

educators, but also that she had recently completed a doctorate while continuing to teach, I knew she would be a perfect candidate for my study. Even though we had just met, I felt an immediate connection had been made. Her warm smile and friendly nature drew me to want to talk with her more and more about the notions that I felt passionate about.

**Bella's background.** Bella has been teaching for 17 years; 15 years in kindergarten and this will be her third year in third grade. She has an extensive list of service to her school that includes serving on the leadership team for eight years, serving as grade-level leader for four years, heading up the committee that writes the school improvement plan, and supervising a number of student teachers over the years. In addition, she has served as the after school program's director for the past ten years. Bella has a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, a master's degree and a specialist degree in leadership and supervision, and a doctorate in school improvement. Finally, she holds an add-on as a teacher support specialist. Her years spent in teaching in a foundational grade and her extensive educational background makes Bella a viable candidate to be a participant in this study.

**Bella's classroom profile.** Bella described her kindergarten classroom as "cute and comfy" (e-mail correspondence, September 12, 2014), but says her third grade classroom is "more no nonsense" (e-mail correspondence, September 12, 2014). At the beginning of the school year, she begins with mostly bare walls and uses this space as the year progresses to hang anchor charts created with students during lessons as reminders of what has been studied. She also uses the space to post student work. She arranges student desks in groups of four to six so they can collaborate on assignments. When I went to visit her classroom, I noticed that she had the desks set up so that students could work together. There are also places on the floor that are kept clear for students who choose to leave their desks and work in what they deem a more

comfortable place. Bella noted that she herself often works in the floor with groups of students. Another thing I noticed when I visited Bella was a lack of technology for student and teacher use. In my school, all teachers have Promethean boards, ladybug document cameras, three desktop computers for students, and a laptop for teachers to use. We also have two mobile laptop carts that can be checked out and brought to classrooms for lessons. Bella's classroom had one teacher computer and one student computer that was not in working order at the time of my visit. Her school has one mobile laptop unit for all classes to share. Even with this clear lack of resources, Bella tries to set up an environment that is conducive to collaboration and group learning.

### ***Carruth Elementary: Bella's School***

Even though Bella works in a different district than Grace and Renee, their schools share similar dynamics. First, and most importantly to Bella is the camaraderie within the staff (also mentioned by Renee and Grace). Here is what she said about her colleagues:

The majority of the staff have been there many years and are pretty tight knit group. We have love and respect for each other that goes beyond the normal co-worker tolerance.

Without many of them, it would be much easier to throw in the towel! (personal communication, December 31, 2014)

However, unlike Spring Creek Elementary, Bella's school, Carruth Elementary has no after school clubs and activities for students. Bella attributes partly to the administration for which she did not speak highly. The principal has served at Carruth Elementary for five years. Bella reported that before her tenure as principal, there was "a more positive following in the

community and a much more welcoming atmosphere in our building” (personal communication, December 31, 2014).

Carruth Elementary is also grossly lacking in technology. When I went to Bella’s classroom to visit, I was shocked to see this deficiency firsthand. There was only one working computer for students to share, no Promethean/Smart board and no document camera. The media center houses one laptop cart for the entire school to share. Even though these things were missing, Bella said that if she had her way, she would prefer that basic supplies be made available to the students. Since Carruth Elementary is a Title I school, many students come with no supplies and teachers are left to purchase them personally. Bella even reported that on many occasions, teachers in her school fed students out of their personal lunch accounts. Even though resources are clearly lacking at Carruth Elementary, Bella still says that she loves her school because it is where she has spent her entire career and her love and respect for the other teachers make the things that are missing worthwhile.

This chapter has served to provide the reader with a well-defined representation of the participants in this study and the schools and communities in which they work. This is beneficial in understanding the participants and their shared experiences within the interview data. The next chapter presents the findings as interpreted and analyzed from said interview data and includes the overarching themes derived as well as a microanalysis of each using Gee’s (2011) building tasks for discourse analysis.



## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS

Teaching always takes place in relation to a particular regime of truth or dominating logic. Acquiring knowledge does not provide students with a reflection of the world; it creates a specific rendering of the world that is only intelligible within particular ideological configurations, social formations, or systems of mediation. Teaching itself functions to produce students and teachers as social and cultural subjects. How we, as subjects are positioned by various pedagogical discourses and classroom practices constitutes an ideological process that often provides us with an illusion of autonomy and self-determination and helps us to misrecognize ourselves as free agents (McLaren, 1989, p. 241).

As McLaren (1989) so effectively indicates in the above quote, educational policy has for some time given teachers the illusion of autonomy as they think about and implement classroom practices. Grace, Renee, and Bella however, have separated illusion from reality in the dialogue generated within this study. I begin this chapter with my original research question: What are the ways in which teachers navigate and negotiate the policy context in which they teach? While writing and meditating over this question for many weeks, I unremittingly reflected upon the terms navigate and negotiate. As a part of this reflection, I wondered by what means my participants would share their navigation and negotiation strategies. Would they really share their secrets and expose the ways in which they choose *not* to follow policy (if this were the case)? Would I find out what someone other than myself actually does when they close the classroom door? As it turns out, the results reported here are not indicative of the ways in which my participants Renee, Grace, and Bella have *navigated* the policy context in which they have

worked for many years as I had originally supposed when beginning this study, but instead, how they have *endured* the policy context in which they have worked. Their interview responses focus on teaching experiences that have emanated as a result of a wide range of educational policies passed down over the past 17 to 30 years (the range of years my participants have been teaching). These include federal policies such as the implementation of Common Core standards, state policies such as the single statewide accountability systems policy (SSAS), and district policies that vary from district to district. These experiences are representative of endurances and not management strategies. Analysis of the data suggests that teachers are faced with the proverbial crossroad between compliance and negotiation; between what is mandated and what they feel is the right thing to do for students. The findings reveal that this intersection, or crossroad, has been the driving force behind both classroom and individual experiences created by and for my participants and therefore, bear to disclose the voices behind said experiences. In this study, critical pedagogy has helped me view these experiences with a wide lens of power while symbolic interactionism has caused me to reflect and deliberate upon them through the lens of the individual. These experiences, both micro and macro, are the light that now serves as the guide for this study's path. This chapter discusses the themes that emerged during the process of analyzing the participants' experiences as they originated from the interview data.

When contemplating a topic as debated as educational policy, it is typical to immediately consider the ways in which said policies affect students, which of course, is critical. For the purposes of this study however, I reframe this line of contemplation not necessarily *away* from students but more heavily upon educators. I went so far as to ask my participants to answer one question without using the word 'student' and all three of them had a difficult time doing so.

According to Renee, Grace, and Bella, when thinking about teaching, the notion of teacher and student become inextricably intertwined, “hard to separate one from the other” (Grace, interview 3). Of particular importance in this study is the way that policy affects teachers creates direct impact on the way it affects students (noted through Gee’s building tasks of discourse analysis). This study set out to identify the ways in which teachers manage themselves and their teaching in light of the current policy context. In this process, affording teachers the voice so rarely heard became an essential component. My burning query became, what exactly is it that teachers do to comply with school, district, state, and federal mandates and still comply with their own moral compass as educators who know from within what is right and wrong for students? I began with an expectation, or maybe hope is a better term, that my participants would share all of their ‘secret strategies’ for managing the policy world of teaching with me. While sitting through one interview after another, witnessing two of my three participants being brought to tears (in two of their three interviews) as they discussed the personal, daily struggle that accompanies their lives as teachers, I began to sense a path quite different from what I had originally expected. As I began to analyze the data, I was taken down a road completely *unexpected*. My imagined, tidy list of strategies became a distant ideal in short order. Instead of participants providing me with an atmosphere of navigating and negotiating, a characteristic of what I consider to be coping quickly became prevalent. Grace demonstrates this position when she says, “It’s just a bombardment of things to do, things to update, things to change, things to monitor, things to check off, things to write down, things to report, things to assess, it has become trying to cope with that” (interview 3). Bella expounds on this concept in the following response:

Linda: What do you think will happen if recent history that seems to show an exponential increase in expectations of students and teachers continues to move in that direction?

Bella: I think you're going to have a lot of educators who, despite their hearts, throw up their hands. I think that as teachers, we're only human and we can only take so much.

There comes a point when you say enough is enough, and I think a lot of teachers are just going to throw in the towel and they're going to say it's just not worth it...that the pay and the stress level and everything is just not worth it.

This quote from Bella is indicative of the sense of despondency that set the tone for a large portion of the nine interviews conducted. My analysis from quotes such as the one above established a pervasive concept of survival, thus turning my vision from that of educators working behind the scenes to find ways to defy *and* comply into an image of these same teachers simply coping from one day to the next. Their strategies were not such that they were strategically seeking out ways to teach according to their moral compass as an educator, but strategies for getting through the week or maybe even a day.

After conducting extensive interviews with my participants, repeatedly listening to the audio versions of each interview, coding and sorting their responses, and reflecting on and refining impressions, four significant themes emerged. These themes were generated from a constant comparative approach to data analysis along with Gee's (2011) framework for critical discourse analysis. Each of the four themes is linked to the theoretical framework described in chapter one, symbolic interactionism and critical pedagogy. The combination of these themes aids the reader in his/her endeavor to understand the position in which teachers have been placed as a result of ongoing reform. Each theme reveals individual, collaborative, personal, and professional struggles. The data will indicate these themes as being inclusive of:

- Policy makers are not educators
- School work Sundays

- Negative effects on students
- Standardization vs. uniqueness

Included in each theme is a macro representation of the ways in which all three participants experienced that particular concept. Following this macro description is a micro representation of each theme as it resonated with one participant in particular. The excerpts selected for each microanalysis were chosen based upon my overall reflection of the data as to which statement by which participant resonated most with the essence of each theme. After identifying each theme, I returned to the interview data to re-read and reflect upon first, which participant and then which excerpt(s) from that participant's discussions closely echoed the concept of the corresponding theme. After choosing one or more excerpts that I found to be most fitting to the theme, I compared them to Gee's building tasks (described below) to determine which most closely corresponded to the relevance of each task. Each microanalysis was performed using Gee's (2011) seven building tasks. As noted in chapter three, Gee suggests researchers utilize seven areas of reality, which he identifies as the "seven building tasks" of language (p. 17-20). The building tasks are listed and defined as a reminder to what each entails:

- Significance: How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?
- Practices: What practice (activity) or practices is this piece of language being used to enact (i.e., get others to recognize as going on)?
- Identities: What identity or identities is this piece of language being used to enact (i.e., get others to recognize as operative)?

- Relationships: what sort of relationship or relationships is this piece of language seeking to enact with others (present or not)?
- Politics (distribution of social goods): What perspective on social goods is this piece of language communicating (i.e., what is being communicated as to what is taken to be “normal,” “right,” “good,” “correct,” “proper,” “appropriate,” “valuable,” “the way things are,” “the way things ought to be,” “high or low status,” “like me or not like me,” and so forth)?
- Connections: How does this piece of language connect or disconnect things; how does it make one thing relevant or irrelevant to another?
- Sign systems and knowledge: How does this piece of language privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems (e.g., Spanish vs. English, technical, language vs. everyday language, words vs. images, words vs. equations, etc.) or different ways of knowing and believing or claims to knowledge and belief (e.g., science vs. the humanities, science vs. “common sense”, biology vs. creation science)?

All of the tasks were not used in correspondence with each of the four themes. Based upon my own interpretation of the language chosen appropriate for each theme, I selected the tasks that I felt were most suited as certain tasks were not relevant to selected uses of language. For each theme, this analysis contributes to the reader’s understanding of how Grace, Renee, and Bella use language to position themselves in a political realm and how they view their personal realities in the social worlds, cultures, and institutions in which they work. These analyses are critical to the global question in the study that seeks to determine the ways in which teachers negotiate policy context because they divulge the meaning making process of each participant’s experiences as they relate to policy.



### **Theme 1: Policy Makers are Not Educators**

This theme originated as a result of the numerous times Grace, Renee, and Bella made reference to the concept of a policy maker being unaware of what happens in classrooms; what *really* happens. Grace made this feeling evident when she said, “Decisions are being made by people who have never done this job” (interview 2). Codes that brought this theme to fruition include classroom mandates, change, misalignment of policy, perception, judgment, and eradication of teachable moments.

#### ***Far Removed From the Classroom***

The central reason associated with the participants’ recognition that policy makers are not educators includes the idea that most of those making educational policy decisions fit either one of two bills. First, they used to work in a classroom or school system, but that was so long ago that the landscape of school is now unknowingly foreign to them. Second, they have never worked in a school and have no personal experience as to what it’s like to work with students and/or teachers and are therefore, unable to relate to the day-to-day operations of teaching and learning. Policy makers often have no concept of what its like to simply move 25 kids from one place to another inside a school building and still less about trying to teach those same 25 students, all from differing backgrounds and possessing a wide variety of academic abilities, to master the same exact skill set on a limited time table. Given this lack of recognition, I was surprised as I combed through the data and realized that not once across nine interviews did the data reveal direct hostility towards policy makers on the part of any of the three participants. The teachers did however; allude time and time again to the first notion that policy makers are

not educators. They feel that policy makers are far removed from the reality of what happens in classrooms on a daily basis and that this unconsciousness may be the rationale behind a majority of the policies created and set forth in recent years. For example, Renee discusses how policy makers do want students to be the best but are not sensitive to the context, while Grace and Bella comment on how they think policy makers have a business orientation.

Renee: I think the policy makers strive and want our students to be the best but they're overlooking what is best for them to get there. The policy makers need to be in classrooms (Interview 2).

Grace: I think because the people that are running education are not educators; they're numbers people, they're business people. They want numbers. That's what speaks to them. I would love to believe that their intentions are good and I truly believe that most of them do have good intentions. I don't think they are sitting in a room twisting their mustaches trying to come up with an evil plan to make people hate school, I just think that they are so far removed. They're far removed from children, from teachers, from what a real-life classroom looks like; and not on a movie or some instructional video (Interview 1).

Bella: I think policy is often created by individuals who are far removed and who don't see the every day trials and struggles and successes of the classroom. A lot of policy makers are more business oriented and children are not business oriented (Interview 1).

Grace's comments are indicative of the fact that some teachers still have faith that policy makers have good intentions for students. The teachers suggested that since policy makers spend little to no time in tiny, overcrowded classrooms, their decisions are often misguided. As a result, I asked each participant if there was a personal story or an experience that would help a policy maker develop a more accurate representation of what it is like in the classroom on a daily basis. Grace's response was thought provoking to say the least:

Linda: If you could sit down with a policy maker or one of the people that, according to you, don't know what it's like to do your job, and you felt like you had a story that might move them or help them understand your position, what story or situation would that be?

Grace: They'd have to do the job. I can tell a million stories, but if you don't have a vested interest in *those* children, that's not going to move you. In order for a policy maker or politician to ever truly be touched by a story from an educator, they would have to live it. So, if I was to give one of those policy makers my job for four weeks...until I make you live it, I don't think you'll ever understand it. I think things matter when it affects them...*their* paychecks, *their* families, *their* children. That's when I think they would listen...it's not until something affects you personally, do you take notice of it. Until you put in 60-80 hours a week for work, but get paid the same would that bother you. Until it affects you on the inside, I don't think you do anything about it on the outside.

Grace's response poignantly expresses a natural truth; none of us, policy makers included, are affected by far removed words as much as we are by authentic, observable influences. In order

for policy makers to be exposed to authentic, observable influences they must be willing to go where those truths are the most discernable.

### ***Policy Makers Are Visiting the Wrong Schools***

Sometimes as a teacher, I think of policy makers in much the same way that the people of Oz must have felt about the “Great and Powerful Oz,” mysterious and dominant, but never actually seen. The discernable truths mentioned above will only be realized when policy makers are willing to visit schools inclusive of *all* students and teachers. Never, on one occasion during the hours and hours spent talking with Grace, Renee, and Bella, did one of them talk about a policy maker walking into their classrooms to see what was happening there. Not one time did one of them talk about a time when she had been asked if a potential policy could feasibly be carried out with 25 students on a daily basis or how a particular policy would effect a low-performing or low socioeconomic school. In both schools, more than 50% of the students are on free and reduced lunch and many of them live in foster home situations, resulting in a high transient rate. Both Grace and Bella reported that many students in their schools do not do their homework because they are too busy watching younger siblings during the evening while their parents are working at a soda factory, the all-night drive thru at the local Wendy’s, or cleaning offices. It dawned on me as I was talking with Grace in one of our interviews that maybe policy makers really *do* visit schools – just not schools like hers. Policy makers are indeed visiting schools, but perhaps the schools they are visiting are their own children’s schools or schools in their neighboring communities; schools where children do not worry about having the basic

supplies they need for school or whether there will be dinner on the table that night. At schools such as the ones in which Grace, Bella, and Renee work, the counselor and social worker are always at arm's length to ensure students are being fed or are going home to safe, nonviolent environments. During the course of this study, the drug store down the street from Grace and Renee's school was robbed and the school placed on lock-down. In addition, an elderly woman was murdered in her home a few miles from the school. Quite a contrast exists between the schools in which policy makers' children attend and schools such as the ones in which Grace, Bella, and Renee work. As Grace problematized the fact that policy makers were not present in her school, she began to imagine herself talking directly *to* a policy maker:

Grace: I think that you've (policy makers) got to spend some time inside real schools and not the ones located around your office. You're going to have to drive out and go to some places that might not look like that one where your co-worker's kids go...in your fancy buildings. You're going to need to take a little detour, take a back road, go into a 'sketchy' area of town, walk the school, have a sit. You're not visiting *those* schools.

Linda: And there are a lot of those schools out there. (Interview 2)

Grace: There are more of those schools than the others. (Interview 2)

On more than one occasion, Grace used this discourse pattern of speaking directly to a policy maker instead of having a conversation with me. I found this to be noteworthy as I thought about the position Grace was taking as she 'talked to' policy makers using our interview as a venue. Gee (2011) characterizes this use of language as socially situated identity. When

Grace addresses her personal reality and grounded claims to a policy maker who is not actually listening, she is situating herself and her experiences in a dramatic, social way. She utilizes her teacher discourse in an attempt to convey a message that perhaps policy makers should consider the environments in which all students and teachers work and not just a select few. Grace never made it clear to me that she thought this selection of certain schools over others was intentional on the part of policy makers. She spoke about the intentions of policy makers on several occasions in such a way that indicates her desire to believe they had students' and teachers' best interests at heart. Responses such as the following one by Grace lent themselves to the notion and belief that if policy makers really knew what life was like in *all* schools, things would certainly be different:

But I think their policies are designed for how they would want school to be at 50 years old. They're so far removed from children, from teachers, from what a real life classroom looks like and not on a movie or some instructional video. (Interview 3)

Another indication that policy makers are far removed from the classrooms of these teachers is in the limited and/or non-existent resources required to implement the policies. For example, Bella's classroom seems to be devoid of technology. There was no ladybug (projection device), Promethean/Smart board, laptops, or tablets. She had only one computer for twenty-two students to use. When asked about her dream classroom, she mentioned a Smart Board and additional technology, but she also listed simple things such as crayons, pencils, and markers; items her students could not afford to replace once used. In essence, Bella simply wanted crayons and markers; items most view as basic staples of operating a classroom full of nine year olds. Grace echoed the lack of resources by stating:

In some schools, whatever the children are learning, they're learning from 8:00-2:45. There's no resources, they've got books from years ago, it's really hard to make those policies work when you don't have the stuff to make it work. (Interview 1)

### ***Teacher Voice***

The final premise that supports the theme, policy makers are not educators, has to do with teacher voice, or a lack thereof. The participants in this study view this concept in a number of ways, but the idea recognized most in the process of analysis was that of respect. As she reflected on thirty years of teaching, Renee said:

I think since my first day of teaching that the first and foremost thing that has changed is the respect I am given as a professional. (Interview 2)

On multiple occasions the participants in this study disclosed this sentiment and in doing so, also included a sense of confusion as they seem bewildered by the fact that rarely does any policy maker conduct inquiry with those who are actually *doing* the teaching, actually working with students every day. Grace offers her feelings about the existent need for teachers' voices to be heard. Her language suggests that she continues to hold out hope that in one way or another this remains a possibility.

I think there needs to be a call to action to pay attention to teachers. Somebody has to start listening to teachers and taking the time to hear them. Teachers are going to have to either be given a voice or they're going to have to take it (Interview 1).

Bella and Renee on the other hand, seemingly feel as if the possibility for teachers' voices to be heard has long passed as indicated by their responses: (Bella is speaking to teachers as if she were a policy maker):

Bella: We'll, handle our business, you'll handle your business, and while you're handling your business, we are going to tell you *how* to handle your business (Interview 3).

Renee: I was going to say teachers need a voice. The spectrum has come so far from allowing teachers to give input as to what works best in those classrooms. They work with children day in and day out, and have the experiences. They are no longer given the opportunity to use what they know (Interview 3).

***Microanalysis: Policy Makers Are Not Educators***

To further examine the theme, policy makers are not educators; I conducted a microanalysis of an excerpt from Grace's second interview using Gee's (2011) building tasks. As Grace shares her experiences, it becomes clear that she feels marginalized in the system, with no voice to argue for change. In this excerpt Grace is talking about suggestions she has for shifting policy makers' understandings of what happens in classrooms. It is in response to my request for her to share a story she thought would help a policy maker understand her position on the ways in which policies have negative effects on students and teachers. Before this statement, she told a story about how one of her students had been adversely affected by testing anxiety and how her worry over the student had kept her up nights. Her intent in this quote is to convey the message that there is no story a policy maker can hear that will move them to change; real experience with real students such as the one she told me about is in her mind, what is necessary for true understanding on the part of a policy maker.

1. Joe Bob up there, making these decisions, is like, "Man, that really stinks...on to my lunch break." I don't think that it has the capacity to hurt somebody like it hurts the teacher that lived it. That's why I often think teachers feel powerless.
2. If you're out there, when you're making a decision, I need you to understand what a six-year-old knows, what their brain is capable of learning ... not what sounds good, because no matter how much you push, you have to take into consideration that they're still children. They're not robots. They are children; they are little people. Somewhere, when you're making up your policy, you need to remember that they're still children.

**Building task: Significance.** The significance of the first excerpt is the personification of insensitivity Grace places upon the policy maker. She speaks as if she *is* a policy maker when she suggests that while they may listen to what some consider touching stories about isolated students, policy makers soon thereafter move on to more important affairs...such as their lunch break. Grace uses her ‘I’m a policy maker’ voice to continue with her theory that unless policy makers *see* what are otherwise just stories for themselves, the stories remain meaningless. Another noteworthy point in this excerpt is when she uses the word ‘powerless’ to describe teachers. This term demonstrates the critical position in which teachers find themselves living and working. Grace desperately wants to make the plight of teachers and students made known to policy makers, but views them as a privileged group to whom she has no access and no power to gain access.

Important in the second excerpt is the way Grace speaks “to” a policy maker when she is actually speaking with me. She uses the term “I need you to understand” as she implores the policy maker to whom she is speaking to do whatever they need to do to understand how their policies affect students who in her words are ‘not robots.’ This is significant because she is momentarily taking on the role of a beseeching teacher and leaving her actual role of interviewee behind.

**Building task: Identities.** In the first excerpt when Grace speaks as if she is a policy maker, she is attributing a certain identity to the policy maker himself or herself. She even gives the policy maker a faceless, generic name when she says “Joe Bob.” Gee (2011) says, “We build identities for others as a way to build ones for ourselves” (p. 18). In this piece of language, Grace is building and attributing an identity onto another (a policy maker) based on her opinions and experiences in an attempt to understand her own identity as it pertains to this concept. In

addition, she enacts her own identity as troubled teacher when she solicits policy makers to do what they must to understand the genuine needs of students.

**Building task: Relationships.** The relationship portrayed in this piece of language represents a teacher who feels distanced from those making the decisions that affect the way in which she performs her teaching duties. This is evidenced first, when Grace says, “teachers often feel powerless” and again when she describes a policy maker as “Joe Bob up there” suggesting that she really has no idea where ‘up there’ may be, but she’s sure it’s pretty far removed from her classroom and the struggles that go on there. Another way to view her description of policy makers working ‘up there’ includes the concept of hierarchy. Her choice of the word ‘up’ instead of ‘over’ is noteworthy because it represents her perception that policy makers are positioned in a place of power above her, a place she views as out of her reach. This distanced relationship aids Grace in contrasting herself and a policy maker as one who understands and one who doesn’t.

**Building task: Politics.** The implications for the distribution of social goods here includes Grace’s believed powerlessness to use the talents she considers herself to possess as an experienced teacher as she spends a majority of her time laboring to teach students skills she feels many of them will not master to expectation. This perception of power or lack thereof, is again an issue as politics is considered in these two excerpts. Grace’s use of the term “up there” indicates her recognition of the politics in play when it comes to the development of policy. The use of this term indicates her awareness that in the end, it is the dominant decision of those that operate ‘up there’ in which she must abide. Her application of the expression “up there” signifies her perception of a hierarchical establishment for which she is far removed. Additionally, in the second excerpt, she begins by saying “if you’re out there,” once again

demonstrating her perception that policy makers exist in a place undiscovered and unreachable to teachers.

Another social good in question here is that of knowledge. Grace believes herself in most instances to be more knowledgeable about the capabilities and developmental level of a six year old than a policy maker based on her seventeen years of teaching experience. However, she also recognizes it is only the policy maker permitted to make influential decisions that greatly affect her six year old students. She demonstrates this again in the second excerpt when she reminds the policy maker three times (as she is once again speaking as if she is talking directly to him/her) that their policies are being created for children, not robots. This language sounds as if Grace is petitioning the policy maker to listen to her appeal. Unmistakably, using a critical lens allows the reader to see how the politics of power, hierarchy, and position come into play as one considers the way Grace uses language to petition policy makers for what she believes to be best for students.

**Building task: Connections.** These excerpts contain a connection as well as a disconnect, and the two are linked one with the other. Grace views policy makers as being disconnected from the reality that is every day school. This is made evident when she insists that policy makers are not moved by stories in which they cannot see for themselves. She views this disconnect as the reason students are regarded more like robots instead of “little people.” In her mind, it is easier for policy makers to make no connection with the kids they never see. She places relevancy upon the notion that students are not viewed with the human understanding that should accompany the decision making process when children are involved as she connects this lack of consideration to the dilemmas currently being faced by both students and teachers.

**Grace's Situated Identity.** These two excerpts are examples of Grace employing situated identity (Gee, 2011) as she temporarily takes on a different role as if she were present in a different setting and changes her tone from that of one participating in a friendly conversation to that of a teacher making a case for something that is critically important to her. Here, Grace enacts situated identity and her baser instincts to appeal to the hopefully human characteristic of the policy maker. Gee (2011) claims that the *who* you are, is associated with the *what* you are doing. In this case, Grace changes her *who* persona midstream from a colleague participating in dialogue about her profession to a teacher entreating a policy maker to think more pervasively about the decisions s/he makes for children. Grace positions herself as an inferior to policy makers. The way in which she repeatedly carries on imaginary conversations with policy makers also helps the reader recognize Grace's underlying belief that if she and/or other educators were able to hold tangible conversations with them, change could very well be conceivable.

The theme policy makers are not educators, pervasively reminds us of the disengagement that exists between policy makers and the teachers who carry out their often times misaligned policies. It also helps us to recognize the need for a coming together of forces in order to serve the needs of students with a more personal and effective approach. The intimations of Grace, Renee, and Bella in regard to their perceptions of policy makers all indicate a desire for such a change from the current status quo. Using the dedication and allegiance of teachers such as these to promote the welfare of students in the policy making process would go along way in changing what is currently the norm to a new level of corroboration on the parts of all who hold a vested interest in students.

Using the building tasks to analyze Grace's language on a micro level has provided support for the tenets of the theme policy makers are not educators. Each task served to provide

very specific details about the ways in which teachers view or interpret the actions or sometimes inaction of policy makers. The tasks have also revealed a feeling of powerlessness felt by teachers as they express a desire to have policy makers truly understand the ramifications that follow their decision making process.

### **Theme 2: School Work Sundays**

My personal time? I do a little on Saturday, but Sunday around my house is called schoolwork Sunday. That's the nickname, and it's an all-day event. Saturday is fun day, Friday night is date night, and Sunday is school day. I do nothing on Sunday but schoolwork...even when I'm out of town. I'll even go to visit others and I'm taking my school stuff with me. My job takes up the majority of my personal time. (Grace, Interview 2)

I know that I go to my school very, very early. Sometimes I'm in the building 12, 13 hours, sometimes more. I think on those days that you describe, we call them my grumpy days that I just try to have a heart to heart talk with myself and ask myself how can I possibly work more or longer or harder? Sometimes I come at 5:30 in the morning, stay until 6 and 7:00 on Friday nights, spend tons of personal money and it's still not enough. Why can't that be enough? (Bella, Interview 3)

One idea during the interview process came up more than any other and that was the notion of time. As the above quotes denote, participants mentioned time as an issue that affects their daily teaching lives, in and out of school 121 times across the nine interviews. This theme emanated from codes such as stress, burnout, overwhelmed, guilt, and robotic. For these

teachers, time wasn't something they didn't have, but rather the concern was how time was spent thinking about and acting upon the policies and mandates that were designed to track accountability. They impressed upon me repeatedly that they are always thinking about school whether they are actually in the school building or not. For all three of them, the boundary between personal life and school life had become so blurred that it was almost nonexistent.

Bella: You never stop teacher mode. It continues no matter where you are...even on vacation. (Interview 1)

Grace: Unless you do this job, I don't think you could ever understand how much blood, sweat and tears it is...just how much of yourself is invested. (Interview 1)

Grace: I spend more time here than I spend at my house. (Interview 1)

Grace: I'm usually here ten hours and then I do a minimum of four more hours when I get home before even thinking about going to bed. The majority of this time is spent on things that are mandated for me to do...spending four hours' time to put a grade book entry in, spending hours upon hours making data charts and stuff for those things, or trying to do a book study so that I can implement a writing program that's new while trying to plan a writing lesson that meets the requirement, reviewing data to know what to teach and then looking at the calendar to make sure there is enough time to teach it.  
(Interview 2)

The quotes in the beginning of this section from Grace and Bella are examples of how this boundary is blurred as they discuss how at least half of every weekend is spent preparing for school in some way. Neither Grace nor Renee have small children, which in no way whatsoever makes their personal time less valuable than Bella's. However, I noted time and time again in Bella's responses a great sense of guilt as she regrettably discussed how she spends more and more of her weekends on school-related activities and less and less of them with her family. The following excerpts give credence to this notion of guilt on her part:

Bella: Instead of spending time going and watching my son's football practice, I sit with papers in my lap and I'll glance up and see what he's doing, but I'm focused on lessons or RTI files or data collection and things that I really just wanted to leave on my desk, but I'm afraid I can't because if I did, they would pile up and eventually consume the desk.

(Interview 3)

Bella: My children come to the school with me. I feel like I cheat them of a lot because they get in the car and they're here when it's dark outside and when we go to get in the car to go home, it's dark again. They've spent their entire day in the school building because Mom's at work. (Interview 3)

In Renee's case, she was in a graduate program during her last year of teaching working on adding a media endorsement to her teaching certificate. In addition to the responsibilities of being a teacher, she attended classes for this program two times per week and had additional readings and course related assignments to complete. Renee is one of the most even-tempered teachers I know, able to remain calm in almost any situation, and even she often talked with me

about the pressure she felt to keep pace with the daily responsibilities to which she found herself tied. While her steady nature was always evident to me in her responses, the fact that she, like Grace and Bella, spent most days in survival mode was also just as evident as she related the following:

I would say I spent two to three hours a day of my personal time working on school-related activities, assignments, and requirements. Every night I worked on something. Most of my weekends were spent on some type of school-related requirement. (Interview 2)

You have to learn to manage your time. Unfortunately, it's *out* of the classroom that you prepare. I see myself as a very conscientious teacher. I will always make sure everything is done no matter what...and I had to sacrifice my personal life.

You feel like you are sinking and drowning sometimes. (Interview 3)

### ***Microanalysis: School Work Sundays***

Using Gee's (2011) building tasks to further exemplify this theme, I conduct a micro-analysis of how Bella's language positions her within this idea that the boundary between home life and school life has become nonexistent. As already noted, the schoolwork Sunday theme emanated from the idea that in addition to working 50 to 60 hours per week in the school building, the majority of teachers' personal time during evenings and on weekends is also spent doing school related work. The excerpts were taken from the second interview with Bella. I had asked how much of her personal time she devoted to keeping up with district initiatives and/or implementing reforms. Her responses demonstrated a high level of bitterness in regard to the

amount of time she felt is taken from her family on a regular basis in her attempts to keep pace with the responsibilities of being a teacher in today's environment of persistent change and mandates.

Excerpts from Bella's second interview:

1. What I call too much
2. I grade papers at home. I take rubrics with me. I take lesson plans. I'm constantly pouring over manuals, teacher's manuals, new initiatives, things that we're expected to do, things that we're asked to change.
3. Instead of going and sitting and enjoying my son's football practice, I sit with papers in my lap and constantly, I'll glance up and see what he's doing, but I'm focused on lessons or RTI files or data collection and things that I really just wanted to leave on my desk, but I'm afraid I can't because if I did they would pile up and eventually consume my desk.
4. My planning was taken up with the meeting, my afterschool was taken up with a meeting, and so now I'm taking all of that home in my school bag so that my family can watch me work.
5. My children too, they come in to school with me. I feel like I cheat them of a lot because they get in the car and they're here when it's dark outside and then especially when the time changes again. When we go to get in the car to go home, it's dark again. They've spent their entire day in the school building because mom's at work and mom has to work and we just don't have that situation where anyone can come and get them and rescue them from here.

**Building task: Significance.** The significance established in this data set is the amount of time Bella feels policy and/or mandates are requiring her to be away from her family. She made no hesitation in comment #1 when she says “what I call too much”...nor did she delay as she rattled off the list of things she spends her time at home doing in comment #2. In this same comment, when she uses the term “things we’re asked to change,” she places blame for the time she is absent from her family upon the shoulders of those requiring her to consistently make changes to things that have, in her mind, already been accomplished. In comment #3, Bella gives a very specific example of the types of things for which she is missing out when she talks about missing her son’s football practice because her attention is focused on the pile of papers in her lap instead of on her son. I also note the word “consume” in this comment as significant as she expresses a note of fear when says her desk would become consumed if she did as she wanted and left the piles of papers on her desk every weekend. Her emphasis on the word consume led me to believe that the term consumed related to more than just a pile of papers, but to the ever-present feeling that she is being consumed by the policies and mandates.

Bella’s expression of bitterness continues in the last two comments (#4 and #5) as she expresses anger about how the time she is allotted during the school hours for planning is occupied with unnecessary meetings, therefore, requiring her to do the work that should be done at school at home. Finally, in comment #5, Bella exhibits a sense of guilt as she lends significance to the word “cheat” when referring to her children and how they often arrive to school in the dark and leave the school in the dark.

Bella’s emphasis on negative terms such as consume, cheat, and “watch me work” are indicative of how she feels the effects of educational policy are taking their toll on her family. These comments represent significance because they indicate her resentment of the ways in

which the demands of teaching brought on by policy not only take her away from her family at times when she wants to be there, but also causes her children to suffer since they have to remain at school for whatever length of time she is there.

**Building task: Identities and Relationships.** These excerpts lend themselves both to the identities and relationships tasks. In many of Bella's responses, she talked about teachers as a group, as a team, but in this particular set of comments, she only does this one time (in comment #2) when she says, "things we're expected to do, things we're expected to change." In these particular excerpts however, she addresses her identity as a mother and positions that identity as being in competition with her identity as teacher. The time she spends away from her family either at home working on school related activities or extra long hours in the school building are all working towards building her reputation as a 'good' or dedicated teacher. In all comments, 1-5, she uses pronouns such as "I", "my," and "me" 25 times which indicates this is a very personal subject for her. When she says "instead of watching my son's football practice" or "so that my family can watch me work," Bella demonstrates how she perceives her identity as a mom and her identity as a teacher as competing with each other and she struggles with the idea of the one taking precedence over the other. She further exacerbates this struggle when she describes the way her children suffer because "mom has to work" in comment #5. These comments are applicable to both the identities and the relationships tasks because the struggle with identity demonstrated here corresponds to the push and pull between Bella's family and what she perceives as her duties as a teacher.

**Building task: Politics.** Politics has to do with social goods, and Bella's reputation as a teacher is one such social good. While being a dedicated teacher is certainly important to Bella, so is her personal time. These particular excerpts represent the power that Bella feels is wielded

over her, consuming most of her personal time. All five comments in this data set demonstrate the idea that Bella believes she is being forced by those in positions above her to give up time she would otherwise choose to spend with her children. This notion of force is specifically established in comment two when she says, “we’re expected to do” and in comment #4 when she says, my planning was taken.” In Bella’s mind, she would do things differently if she were given more choices. These sentiments of power will more than likely come up in each theme’s section on politics as power and politics go hand in hand.

**Building task: Connections.** In comment #4, Bella connects the fact that she was forced to attend meetings when she should/could have been planning to the reasons for having to carry home a bag full of papers so that her family can “watch her work.” She directly connects the reality that she has no authority or say in how she spends her personal time to the policies that have mandated her to do more work than is possible to attend to during her regular working hours. In addition, she connects the reality that she keeps her children in the school building from when it’s dark in the morning to when it’s dark in the late evening to the duties placed upon her by policies and mandates. These connections have invoked resentment within Bella each time she has to pull out her bag of papers at the ball field or in the living room while her children are vying for her attention.

**Bella’s Situated Identity.** Gee (2011) describes the way Bella uses so many first person pronouns in the above excerpts as “I-Statements” (p. 153). When language represents the speaker either being able or having to do things, it is considered ability and/or constraint statements and when the same language represents the speaker thinking and/or knowing, it is considered a cognitive statement (p. 153). Of the “I-Statements” made in Bella’s comments, 71% are ability and constraint statements. “I take rubrics with me,” “I’m constantly pouring

over manuals,” and “I sit with papers in my lap” are all examples of ability and constraint statements. The situated identity this microanalysis has enabled the to reader to recognize in Bella is once again, an identity of powerlessness. Like Grace, Bella demonstrates through her language that she has been positioned as subordinate to those in control of making the policies that not only determine many of her teaching practices, but the amount of time she is able to spend with her family. In Bella’s case, the building tasks have made it evident that she not only views policy makers as controlling her within the classroom, but outside of it as well.

Comments in this theme reveal the extent to which teachers have lost sight of the boundary that should and once upon a time, did exist between school life and home life. Teachers are giving their all to schools, classrooms, and students at the expense of their own families. The demands placed upon them are such that they feel as if this is no longer a choice but a necessity as they attempt to keep pace with the current policy in which they work.

### **Theme 3: Negative Effects on Students**

The next theme that evolved throughout the interview process demonstrates how teachers are not alone in their attempt to cope with the steady stream of educational policies continually being filtered into classrooms. Developmentally inappropriateness of expectations, student anxiety, class size, and the eradication of teachable moments are just a few of the codes extracted from the data. Across all nine interviews, Renee, Grace, and Bella characterized the negative effects that have trickled down to students as a result of various educational policies. Using critical pedagogy helped to identify this theme as I considered the notion of power

involved that has made a negative impact on students in a variety of ways. Although the distinction has been made that the focus of this study is on teachers and not students, the participants made it clear that the students have been and always will be their main priority, and that thinking about teaching and being a teacher without thinking about students is simply impossible. Participant responses made me feel as if in their minds, the two were indistinguishably intertwined. There were four different occasions where two of my three participants cried in the middle of an interview. During these moments of emotion, it was not their own plight, but that of the students that brought on these demonstrative responses. All three participants spoke of student anxiety concerning testing being so prevalent. Grace and Bella even reported having many students taking anxiety medication. As Bella and I were discussing what her ideal classroom would look and sound like, she explained how the things she would implement, given the choice, would work to meet student needs:

My ideal classroom would probably change from day to day honestly because the children dictate a lot of what I do. I would have less than 20 students. My ideal number would be 15. I think you can work so much closer with a smaller number of kids than you can the masses. I think technology would be... we are very technology poor here at this school. I have no smart board; I have one non-working student computer now. We just got Wi-Fi this year but we have nothing to use Wi-Fi with. I would have technology, I would have E-readers and I would have computers and I would have my smart board. I would get rid of my desk and have tables again because I love the group effort and the group work. I would like to have more resources. Since we are a Title I school, our kids don't come to school with a lot of their own things, so I would like to have things that I haven't bought. I would like to have more crayons and pencils and markers and things

that the kids love that get used up. I would even love to share a classroom with somebody so you can really get to those kids and be on their level. (Interview 1)

When I told Bella I would love to be in such a classroom, she smiled and responded with the following:

Bella: Well, you can really just have those conversations and teach to what they need. I would like to have a schedule that wasn't dictated to me and I would like to have the flexibility to follow the teachable moment and not have to stop it because it's time for science or it's time for social studies or we need to move on and we are going to stop that conversation or maybe we'll pick it up tomorrow... but maybe not.

Linda: Because you have or do not have most or all of those things that you just talked about and you have worked in the same school without any of those things for your entire career, why do you keep doing that?

Bella: Because I love my kids, it's my home. I get emotional talking about it. Families that come back to me year after year and search for me even though I may not be in the same room and run to me and call me momma or Mrs. Johnson or Dr. Johnson or whatever. Not just the kids, but also their parents that come back and say just "thank you, you made a difference in my child's life". Despite the struggles, you have to remember and honestly that's how I get up and come to school every day because it's not for anybody else but the kids. (Interview 1)

There was a pervasive presence of anguish throughout all nine interviews in which the participants expressed repeatedly their concern for the ways in which policy has negatively

affected students. Participants' devotion to students and a persistent desire to deliver what is best for them seemed at constant odds with the how policies and mandates were enacted. In the following exchange with Grace, she poignantly shares the ways in which she has experienced change in her profession and clearly indicates her discontent. However, she also leaves nothing to the imagination when she explains her motive for remaining in the profession.

Linda: Tell me what you think has changed the most since your first day of teaching and then tell me what has not changed.

Grace: Expectations placed upon the teachers. What we are expected to do in our jobs has changed to me drastically. To me, teaching is teaching. If you are effective, it's going to show. Your kids are going to grow; they are going to be a happy class. That hasn't changed, but the way that teachers are judged, the expectations, the guidelines that we are given has gone from ... In my eyes we were trusted more as individuals to now everything is mandated in such a way that while we need to be educated to do our jobs somebody who was not educated could perhaps come in and run my classroom. What hasn't changed is the kids, my love for the babies and the reason why we get up at the crack of dawn and think about lesson plans while we are on vacation. It's because the babies, they haven't changed and our love for those kids is still there. (Interview 1)

### ***Developmentally Inappropriate Expectations Create Conflict for Teachers***

Along with time, another prevalent concern emanating from all three participants had to do with the developmental appropriateness of what students are required to do. This notion that so many aspects of school are developmentally inappropriate cultivated itself independent of my

questions. The following excerpts demonstrate the stress emanating from all three participants as they think about what their students go through in the name of policy every day. The desire for the policies they are forced to implement to match the developmental needs of students was evident in their language and tone. Their perceptions are that policy makers do not take into account the developmental levels of students when developing policy that is to be implemented and met by all students. These quotes indicate desperation on the part of teachers for policy makers to understand what students' capabilities are and create policy for them accordingly. This laundry list of comments about the tensions between policies and developmentally appropriate practices suggests that each participant could continue on with a litany of stories to demonstrate ways in which they have worked with students struggling to do what curricular policy mandates.

Renee: The last few years have been a lot more stressful for the kids as well (Interview 3)

Bella: I think sometimes people forget these are kids (Interview 1)

Renee: Policy dictates what units you have to cover in a certain length of time whether the children are ready to move on...when you have to always think, "How can I get this done?" (Interview 1)

Renee: For the negative part, I've also learned how to try to push kids even further and not have them cry because they're stressed out about something, and how to encourage them to continue to work harder and harder even though they feel as if they can't.  
(Interview 3)

Renee: It's becoming an expectation that you perform in a certain way, at a certain time, in a certain length of time, and the children are not always developmentally ready.

(Interview 3)

Renee: Not only just visit classrooms, I think policymakers need to be reminded of research, what research has shown us in the developmental levels expected of children.

(Interview 2)

Renee: We are forcing them to do things that they're not quite ready for...learning needs to occur more in a natural way. (Interview 2)

Grace: I think that we have pushed accountability to the point that we've stopped focusing on what's developmentally appropriate for children. (Interview 3)

Renee: I think those making the decisions, the policy makers... are not looking at the developmental levels of students. (Interview 1)

By analyzing these statements in light of a critical lens, it is possible to see the conflicts or push-pull reactions that these teachers experience. Based on years of experience and education, these teachers know the developmental trajectory of students and what they are capable of doing. And at the same time, they are bound by reforms. All three participants disclosed their struggle with endeavoring to establish ways to resist, or at least redefine policies they felt were harmful to students. On multiple occasions, participants alluded to the fact that it is commonplace to be expected to keep up with a pacing guide or a curriculum map that dictates how long teachers have to teach a specific set of skills and when it is time to move on to the next set whether students are ready to move forward or not. They also discussed the standards themselves and

how so many of them are developmentally inappropriate for many students. In the following excerpt, Grace once again responds to a question about the appropriateness of curriculum and talks as if she is speaking directly to a policy maker:

Grace: You continue to push curriculum that's not developmentally appropriate for learners and then you get frustrated when they don't learn it. Then you have a higher frustration level amongst students and you have a higher frustration level among teachers and especially when it's linked to their accountability. I think that it is counterintuitive. It's not productive to learning. (Interview 1)

While talking with Bella about Grace and Renee's responses about developmentally inappropriate expectations of students, I asked her the following question:

Linda: Do you think that it's fair to say that children are not always able to achieve the standard to mastery, A, because it may not be appropriate for their developmental level, and B, because of the time that they're given to learn and master so many standards, or both?

Bella: I think it has a lot to do with both, because developmentally, they may be more immature than some of their classmates or they may be more mature than some of their classmates, but their right of learning is different. To hold everybody to the same accountability standard and expect everybody to progress at the same level, to me, it doesn't make any sense. I think that it's detrimental to

push so many standards at children and not be able to spend time on them until they master them. (Interview 1)

Renee, Grace, nor Bella failed to point out what many educators may consider ironic. Many policies now exist, including within the new TKES (Teacher Keys Effectiveness System) platform, to ensure teachers are differentiating instruction in such a way that students are receiving information in a way in which they can understand. In other words, teachers are expected to take skill sets not appropriate for certain students and single-handedly develop a way to make those same unprepared students a master of that/those skill(s). Grace explained how she felt she had to find ways to become more and more “creative” in the ways she taught her first graders.

Much of the content...it's developmentally inappropriate and it doesn't make any sense. I'm trying to cram information that will never make sense to a six year old's brain. Not only is the content developmentally inappropriate, your assessment methods are not developmentally appropriate. The more rigorous the standards get and the more difficult I would say... or sometimes developmentally inappropriate in my opinion that our standards get, the more creative the ways to make a connection to a six year old brain we have to get. I need you to understand what a six-year-old knows, what their brain is capable of learning ... not what sounds good, because no matter how much you push, you have to take into consideration that they're still children. They're not robots. They are children; they are little people. (Interview 1)

### ***Testing***

In addition to the serious concerns over the appropriateness of the curriculum teachers are being asked to teach, another factor that seemed steadfastly distressing to participants was that of testing/assessment. Their responses are indicative of how students and teachers spend the school day consumed by testing:

Renee: When you mentioned school, that's what kids think of, having to take a test.

(Interview 3)

Renee: Testing drives what we do now unfortunately. (Interview 1)

According to Renee, Grace, and Bella, the emergence and continuation of relentless testing has had a number of effects on students, none of which appear to be positive. First, there is an expectation for so much testing across every subject that it takes away from the actual instructional time in which teachers could be teaching and students could be learning or applying what they have learned.

Grace: I think we over test children...pre-test, post-test, cumulative assessment, formative assessment, summative assessment. We test these children to death and with the limited amount of instructional time that's left in the classroom and the increasing amount of time we are spending testing, we do not have enough time in our classrooms to teach the content. (Interview 1)

Renee: I assess students more than I ever thought possible. Teachers now assess students as a part of being assessed themselves. (Interview 2)

Another obstacle to the current trends of endless testing is that it often masks what those students who are not effective test takers can do.

Bella: I saw assessments as a way of me being able to know what my kids knew and teach from that. Now, I view assessments as just another way that they're measured regardless of what I see in the classroom and that's ... I don't like it. (Interview 3)

Renee: There is no one test that can be reflective of everything a student knows and/or can do. There are so many factors that affect that one week of testing that are out of our control. It does not always give a true picture or reflect what the student does know. (Interview 1)

Bella: It's looked at on one assessment and it's frustrating because what we do is so much more than one assessment. I think particularly of children who can't transfer what they are thinking on to paper and those children on paper look like they are not achieving. They can be some of our highest achieving kids but when it comes to testing they are not going to do well because of the format. (Interview 1)

Test anxiety was another key concern as participants discussed the amount of time they each spend testing in their classrooms. Each participant had stories to tell about specific students, as they reflected over the last several years dominated by standardized testing. It was evident not only through verbal responses, but through the body language used as these stories were told, that the memory of each was distressing. One concept that caused these stories to be so upsetting was the knowledge that more stories with the same theme were being created with each day they

walked back into their respective classrooms. The very policies that initiated these reflections were not only still in place, but seemingly being magnified with the passing of each new school year. First, Bella told about one of her students who spent more and more time sick in the bathroom than in the classroom as the time for the end of year standardized test (CRCT) approached.

Bella: They're children. They don't need to have that stress level. During the test, I had one particular boy... he's a teacher's kid... brilliant child... every day, the closer testing got, he would have upset stomach after upset stomach. He spent more time out of the classroom dealing with his upset stomach than he did in the classroom. When I asked, 'What's going on with you? What is it' He says, 'The CRCT is almost here and what if I don't do well?' I try not to put pressure on my kids. I tell them, 'It's a test. You do as best as you can. It is one snapshot of you. I know you as a learner. I know what you're capable of, but we have to show something.' It's amazing the pressure that these kids put on themselves. They'll come in and say, 'I've got to pass this test. I've got to pass this test. If I don't pass this test, I don't get out of third grade.' They start with that from day one in third grade and it continues.

Linda: You haven't told them that.

Bella: I haven't told them that, but their parents have told them that and the fact that third grade is a gateway year has told them that. 'If I don't pass this test, will you really hold me back, Dr. Johnson? Will you really not let me go to fourth grade?' 'Baby, we're just here to teach you as much as we can. We will visit that path if we go down it later

towards the end of the year, but right now, I just want you to learn.’ The pressure that their parents... and that they put on each other too, is just ... There's no reason for it. It's sad. (Interview 2)

Grace also spoke extensively about student anxiety as it pertains to testing and the increase in student achievement that policy makers seem to think will happen as a result of continual assessment and data analysis:

In regard to student achievement I don't think it's making the difference that they want it to make, "They" being the policy makers or whoever. Again going back to that common sense question you asked earlier like no matter how much you want them to learn something, ignoring the fact that they're still children is not having a positive effect on their learning. I do think it's having a negative affect on their perceptions of school, wanting to be at school, their test anxiety, just anxiety in general. My first ten years of teaching, I didn't have kids that didn't love school in first grade. They loved school. Over the years, a lot of kids are getting tested in the first grade. You've got kids having panic attacks about tests in first grade. I don't think that that was present before No Child Left Behind was in place. Ten years ago I never had a child that had already been to the doctor because they were scared of not doing well at school. In the last two years I've had three kids that have gone to the doctor to be put on medication because of anxiety, test anxiety. In first grade... medicated because they're worried about a test! (Interview 2)

In addition to her concerns about the anxiety she has seen students suffer as a result of testing, Grace also shared her disillusionment with the reality that teachers are teaching to tests.

I think that the shift has caused teachers to focus more on testing, more on teaching to the test, which any teacher can deny that they do, but everybody has to, because they know...versus doing exactly what's best for children in the classroom. For instance, if you've got 180 standards to teach over a school year, and you know that that is going to be tested April 1st on a standardized test to be monitored, looked at, assessed through No Child Left Behind, then you know that you have got a shorter amount of time in the school year ... by two months ... to teach the content. So you are teaching to that test.

(Interview 2)

Again, honestly, I think that teachers spend more time teaching to the test than saying, "Well, my kids really didn't understand plural nouns. We're really going to need to take a couple steps back and do plural nouns again next week." Teachers have to say, "Well, we know enough about plural nouns. Maybe we can review it later, but we've got to move on and do verbs. We've got to move on and do this, because I have so much content to cover, and these kids are going to be tested. That test reflects on me and it reflects on the students." (Interview 2)

Even though all three participants were reluctant to admit that they had at some point directed or created instruction towards the purpose of a test score, they did concede to doing it at some point. This is a perfect example of the ways in which these teachers have felt pressured to perform. Even though they often recognize that students are not ready for particular concepts, they succumb to the pressure of staying on target with various curricular mandates and testing regimes. Being forced to negotiate tensions such as this came up throughout the course of this study repeatedly. While the teachers all noted the tensions with testing, they also provided

validation for using testing as a part of instruction. They all support various modes of assessment to drive instruction and to create data that helps teachers understand students as learners. Their objection lies in how the data and scores from the various tests are used exclusively to measure and evaluate students and teachers. When asked if they thought testing was an important part of instruction, each responded in the following ways:

Renee: There's not one test that could possibly encompass everything that we do. I think the assessment of students needs to be progressive and reflect the curriculum that you are teaching. It affects the motivation of my students. I'm not giving them the opportunity to learn in a more developmental, natural way. They can only perform at a level they are capable. (Interview 1)

Linda: Just to clarify something that you said, you do or do not think there is a place for testing for students and accountability for teachers?

Bella: There is a place for it. I 100% agree that there is a place for it. However the method in which it is conducted is what I have a problem with, what I have a disagreement with. (Interview 1)

Grace: I think that testing is important. I think accountability is important, but I don't believe that those two things exist anymore with common sense. I think that testing has become the only focus. You want me to differentiate my instruction, but you want to standardize my assessment and you want to hold me accountable for the standardized assessment for children of various levels. (Interview 1)

Neither Grace, Renee, nor Bella left room for question when it came to their sentiments pertaining to the negative impact that testing routines have had on the learning experiences and attitudes of students. All three were disheartened and disillusioned with the ways in which they daily mediate how they will manage the top down characteristics of mandates such as persistent testing in their classrooms. This daily decision-making process was an ongoing dilemma for all three participants and one that brought Bella and Renee to tears on more than one occasion. Of the three participants in this study, Bella seemed to have the most nonconformist spirit. She told me about times in which she would do things in the classroom that she knew students needed, but that she knew would cause her to be reprimanded if an administrator were to walk in. As we discussed the notion of teachers going against what they feel to be right when working with students, this story came up:

Bella: I think there are more days than not. For instance, even just today, it's an early release day. Our plans...there were some things where we have to give an assessment, when we had this discussion at lunch, I graded mine at lunch and I said, "You know, I really want to go over this. I really want to go back while it's fresh on their mind and do these." My teammates just reminded me, "Don't forget, though, you haven't had your TKES walkthrough and they're probably coming around today." In my heart of hearts, while they agreed that we needed to go over it, it's not what's on my lesson plans, it's not what's expected when they walk in my classroom. When they walk in my classroom, if I'm not doing what they're expecting, then that's reflective upon me no matter if it's good teaching or not.

Linda: Did you go over it?

Bella: Yes, very quickly.

Linda: You chose to go over it even though you know they might walk in and catch you.

Why did you do that?

Bella: Because at that point, I wanted what was best for my children and you just have that little fear inside of when they open the door, how are you going to explain it in a way that you're not going to get in trouble for it. That's one of those things where sometimes I close my door and pray...not because I'm doing something bad, but because I've looked at what they're doing and I've decided to be flexible which is what they preach and just bite the bullet and do what I knew was best for my kids and take the hit when they come around. But I do know that two others on my team said, "No. I'm not going to chance that because I know they're coming." I guess I got lucky. (Interview 2)

Grace falls somewhere in the middle of being a conformist and closing the door and doing what she thinks is best. She tries to push the proverbial envelope and seems to have a good understanding of just how far she can go before stepping over the invisible, but ever-present boundary. Finally, Renee is the most compliant of the three. While her passion for the plight of students is no less than that of Bella and Grace, she is less willing to step outside the bounds of what is expected. This was one of the many reasons she finally decided to step outside the classroom and into another, less stressful and demanding role this past year. The next theme will discuss the ways in which these unique and exclusive qualities are becoming harder and harder to recognize.

***Microanalysis: Negative Effects on Students***

A microanalysis was conducted using Gee's (2001) building tasks to further explore the theme, negative effects on students. The following is an excerpt from Renee's first interview when I asked her to discuss the changes she had experienced from the times she had started teaching.

1. I think my professional judgment in the classroom has been taken away. I don't feel like I have the opportunity to decide always what's best for my students and how they learn and when they learn it.
2. I do believe in having expectations and I understand that they want a consistency but every child does not learn the same way or at the same time and in the same way, they need to be exposed to different learning opportunities.
3. I feel when I first started teaching, I had that opportunity to change the schedule and focus more on something if they needed more time. I didn't feel like I was set on a certain schedule. I've got to teach this at a certain time. I was given that freedom and I just think how I feel respected as a professional has changed.
4. With that being said, it affects the motivation of my students. I'm not giving them the opportunity to learn in a more developmental, natural way.

**Building task: Significance.** In comment #2, Renee validates expectation on the part of school and district leaders when she uses positive language such as 'I do believe' and 'I understand'. I believe this demonstrates significance because it establishes the notion that she recognizes the need for expectation. She is not working under the guide that teachers and students should be trusted to do as they please. Conversely, the terms "taken away" and "don't feel like I have the opportunity to decide" in comment #1 lends significance to the notion that

Renee believes her rudimentary decision making rights as a teacher have been removed since she began teaching thirty years ago. This is significant because she believes herself to be a skilled, effective teacher with years of experience to back up her claim, and the reality that now exists exhibits a persistent questioning of her skill and effectiveness by close scrutiny of everything that happens in her classroom and a micro-management style of evaluation. This, according to Renee in comment #4, has negative impact on her students, which in my mind, demonstrates the most significance of all.

**Building task: Identities.** As noted under significance, Renee uses the terms “taken away” and “don’t feel like I have the opportunity to decide” in comment #1 to demonstrate how her basic freedoms to make wise decisions for the betterment of students have been removed. This language speaks to the heart of the identity of a teacher. Teachers combine their professional judgment and past experiences to make instructional decisions for students daily, and now that this basic right has in so many ways been removed, many teachers just like Renee have begun to question their identity as an educator.

Another way Renee used language to address identity can be found in comment #3 when she uses the term “was given freedom.” This phrase signifies that once upon a time, teachers were viewed as professionals who were able to make good choices for students. “Was” clearly indicates her belief that this level of respect for her professionalism is a thing of the past.

**Building task: Relationships.** The relationship represented in this piece of language is oppositional. Much the same way Bella blamed the systemic establishment for the time she is forced to spend away from her family, Renee too, positions indirect culpability upon the establishment for the negative effects that policy causes to trickle down to teachers and ultimately to students. In comments #2 and #4, she indicates her desire to create relationships

with students that promote a healthy learning environment for students of all ability levels, but instead spends a great deal of time considering ways to skirt around the requirements that keep this from being a reality.

**Building task: Politics.** When considering how politics involves the distribution of social goods, an ever-present perception of the way things are versus the way things ought to be (Gee, 2011) are evident in this piece of language. Renee reminds us of the way things used to be in comment #3 when she uses past tense expressions such as “when I first started”, “I had”, “I didn’t feel”, and “was given” to describe how she used to use her knowledge as a teacher to make decisions about just about everything that involved her students. She equivocates these past tense happenings to the way things ought to be...still. She acknowledges in comment one however, the reality of the ways things are and then shares how this “the ways things are” concept negatively impacts her students.

**Building task: Connections.** Renee makes an important connection in this piece of language when she links the loss of her own agency as an educator to the lack of motivation on the part of students to learn. She uses terms such as motivation, opportunity, developmental, and natural to describe the ways in which students are being divested of optimal learning environments due to the deskilling of their teachers. When she says, “every child does not learn the same way or at the same time” she directly connects this deskilling and micro-management to the concept that every student has great need for a wide variety of learning experiences for which they are not being privy. To be able to connect student deficiency to the arduous position in which teachers find themselves in today’s policy context, makes the argument of my participants even stronger.

**Renee's Situated Identity.** People have access to multiple social identities at any given time. According to Gee (2011), these different social identities may at times conflict with one another. In the excerpts from Renee, her language indicates that her teacher identity, that identity that intrinsically wants to do what is best for students, is in conflict with the person who must implement what she deems to be developmentally inappropriate policies even though she is in stark disagreement with said policies. Renee enacts her teacher identity when she says that she is not giving students an opportunity to learn in a more developmental, natural way. In this statement, she places the blame upon herself, although she clearly indicates that if she had the choice, she would create a more natural learning environment. In addition to her teacher identity, Renee, just as Bella, demonstrates her notion of being powerless to change the things that cause her teacher identity frustration. In excerpts one, two, and three, she indicates how policy has removed her professional judgment, taken away the ability to provide appropriate learning experiences for students, and even her professionalism in general. Renee's conflicting identities exhibited in these excerpts demonstrates her perception of the ways in which policies are created represent a social inequality for teachers.

While many policies certainly cause the responsibility of the teacher to become exponentially more difficult, the theme negative effects on students demonstrates the distress these misguided policies bear upon students as well. As teachers do all that is within their power to relieve at least a portion of this distress from students, it does not eliminate, but instead, places the stress directly upon their own heads. Instead of forcing teachers to dance around the differentiation pole, policies should be in place so that the skill set is effectively differentiated for students in the beginning. Teachers should be able to expect differentiation to be provided for themselves as well as students.

#### **Theme 4: Standardization vs. Individuality**

As far as your life experience shaping your identity...I want to say in all honesty, I think that my teacher identity probably shapes more of my life experience than my life experiences shape my identity. I think I view the world differently because I'm a teacher, I respond differently because I'm a teacher and that has a greater effect on my experiences in life than the other way around. (Grace, interview 3)

When I consider the individuality behind the notion of a teacher, I could ruminate over all the intriguing literature I've read, but instead, I would rather think about it in relation to the experiences of my participants. I see the characterization of teacher as two opposing forces, a systemic sphere and a personification sphere. The characterization that encompasses the systemic sphere is inclusive of things such as administrative tasks, mandates, rules, data collection, carefully formatted lesson plans, meetings, and meaningless paperwork. The personification sphere is the essence of what teachers want to do, who they are, why they teach, and how they choose to go about doing it as well as the embodiment they place behind the *why*. During my many hours of conversation with Grace, Renee, and Bella, they all provided me with a wide variety of stories to help me understand how they as teachers, all unique individuals, have experienced both the systemic and the personification sphere. Their introspection of the ways in which their individuality as teachers have been affected as a consequence of educational policy provided me with a new consciousness beyond that of my own and moved me to an enhanced perception of what is truly behind the pretense most see only as a "teacher." In the quote below, Bella demonstrates an example of the systemic sphere as she laments over the position in which she and her co-workers currently find themselves due to the overwhelming number of responsibilities placed upon them by the current policy regime.

There are limits to what people can continue to take on, and unfortunately, more and more, I see stress, frustration, and tears amongst my co-workers and tears because...how are we going to do it all? We want our kids to be successful. We want our kids to perform well. There are only so many hours in a day, there are only so many days in a week and we're human. We can't be at it 24/7. However, to reach some of the expectations, I think that that would be necessary. (Interview 2)

While the participants in this study serve multiple roles in their lives such as wife, friend, mother, and colleague for example, the data demonstrate the primary way in which they seem to recognize themselves is that of educator. As the author of their own individuality, they have come directly as well as indirectly through personal and social experiences to inhabit this space called teacher. The time I spent talking with Grace, Renee, and Bella about their unique qualities as teachers indicates that school is so much more than a place where children come to learn and teachers go to teach; it is a means by which teachers identify themselves as people, as educators, as humans, as the very core of who they think themselves to be. Each one of them made admissions to doing things differently when they closed the classroom door and knew no one would be watching than they would do if an administrator were sitting in the room (even Renee). This “closing of the classroom door” was sometimes their only saving grace as it pertains to not only maintaining their persona, or individuality as a teacher, but also sharing it with their students. All three of them positioned themselves as fighting against (albeit in different ways) the status quo of an “assembly line”, robotic-like learning environment. In the second interview with Grace, she shared her position on this notion when she said, “Education as a whole has turned into more about outcomes and we've forgotten that children...not we as teachers, but

policymakers have forgotten that teachers and children are human and they are not going to all perform like robots”. (Interview 2)

After examining the data multiple times, I went back once again to explore responses through a very specific lens, that of the individuality that makes each teacher who they are. What did Renee, Grace, and Bella say about their uniqueness as teachers and how did their responses compare *and* contrast with each other? Prior to this analysis, I only saw their similarities; the ways in which they responded to questions about the ways in which they view themselves as individuals in the same ways. However, after carefully considering their responses with individuality in mind, I began to see the diversity in the ways they explicated their sentiments, beliefs, and attitudes towards the position in which each of them currently find themselves working and managing. All three of them either alluded to the notion that policy makers viewed them as robotic beings or actually used the term robot or robotic to describe themselves.

### ***Teacher as robot: Grace***

Based upon the time I have spent with Grace, she is the embodiment of her job. She typically works fourteen hours per day; approximately ten at the school and another three to four at home in the evenings. She is a lead teacher mentor for her school district, serves as the team leader for her grade-level, serves on the leadership team, has been voted teacher of the year by her colleagues, and keeps up her own teacher blog in an attempt to share her ideas and self-created materials with other teachers around the country. She undoubtedly lives her work and allows it to infiltrate every aspect of her life. Grace explicates how, in her mind, compartmentalizing, or separating the teacher role from all the other roles existent in her life is not really possible. Grace was the first to bring up the notion a “robotic teacher.” Many of her

responses included the term “robot” and/or “robotic.” The term was coded under three categories; schoolwork Sunday, negative effects on students, and standardization vs. individuality. In the following excerpt, Grace implied that the standardization movement was not only standardizing students, but teachers as well. She suggested that policy makers make attempts to create a workforce of teachers in which they all appear in similar fashion; doing the same things, moving towards the same goals, using the same types of measures in which to judge teaching success.

You can't prepare these children, students, upper grades, whatever for adulthood to be creative thinkers and have robotic teachers. I'm just saying I think that you continue to strip teachers' identity by trying to fit everybody into the same box. Yeah, I think sometimes they're 'done' because they're not a teacher anymore...they're a robot.

(Interview 3)

Another concept that was discussed on multiple occasions in our interviews had to do with a philosophical stance by which most teachers teach. This philosophical stance includes the notions and ideas developed as a result of experiences teachers have had that lead them to feel strongly about certain beliefs as they pertain to teaching and learning. For example, Grace expressed strong sentiments about following pacing guides that forced teachers to keep up with a certain timeframe of lessons and assessments whether students were ready to move forward or not. Another example would be her antipathy towards scripted lessons in which teachers literally read verbatim from a pre-planned text without taking into consideration the geographical, socioeconomic, or cultural backgrounds of students receiving the lessons. Grace is creative and innovative and longs to share these talents with her students. Scripted lessons eliminate any

autonomy or independent thinking on the part of the teacher, thereby eliminating any consideration for differences on the part of the students.

In the following excerpt, I asked Grace what she thought happened to teachers who are consistently asked to go against the grain of their philosophical stance for teaching:

It tears it apart. I think that, like going back to what I said before about producing robotic teachers...that it eventually finishes it off. That part of you that comes to work every day and that internal gut feeling of wanting to do what's best for your children and wanting them to be better and wanting to teach a great lesson and wanting them to understand and to be excited about learning; that eventually fades away and you're just left with somebody that does the job. I think when a teacher begins working outside of that code and outside of their identity, that's when the identity fades away. When you stop working outside what you believe in, I think that it goes away. Your convictions go away, not maybe by choice but it just eventually fades. (Interview 3)

Grace indicates in this quote the consequences that manifest themselves as mechanistic reactions by teachers as a result of stick wielding policy makers manufacturing arbitrary, "let's see if this will work" mandates. In this complex space of principles versus directives, teachers become lost as they navigate which part of being a teacher they are able to apply to which situation; can they abide by the systemic, but still live by personification?

### ***Teacher as robot: Renee***

Of the three participants, Renee seemed to struggle the most with the tension between compliance (doing what she was asked/required to do by administration) and doing what she, as a teacher knew was (or was not) best for her students. Her responses made it unmistakable that

she had an expressed desire to serve her students in a capacity that had long lasting effects on their academic progress. And yet, while she ideologically disagreed with policies that undermine student learning and promote homogeneity, she was not one to blatantly challenge administration. This divergent position caused her a great deal of anxiety on an almost daily basis. This quote is an example of this angst.

Fear causes teachers to conform to what they want you to be. That individual personality that you are as a teacher is squelched. You just do what they ask you to do. (Interview 3)

Grace was seemingly able to hold out a small amount of hope that if teachers were able to have their voices heard, change may still be possible. Renee on the other hand, has had thirty years to watch the ways in which policy has shaped her profession and she believes there to be no going back from the current state of standardization, endless evaluation, and elimination of agency. Her responses and sometimes-emotional reactions to my questions led me to recognize her sense of despondency and empathy for today's teachers. Even though she was an exceptionally dedicated teacher, she made the decision to leave the classroom based on this belief. When I asked her about teacher individuality and how she felt teachers thought about this concept, she provided me with a response that prompted me to reflect back on Grace's notion of standardization.

I think as a teacher, we are becoming less of an individual if that makes sense. We are all... We're not given as much professional judgment opportunities as we had in the past... that it's more of a standardized expectation where we are all ... We're all expected to teach the same, cover the same material, get to the same place. I feel our individuality is often compromised. Does that make sense? (Interview 3)

Renee's reality that external forces are ever-present in schools today as they endeavor to obtain more and more conformity from teachers exacerbates her belief that the uniqueness of teachers will only be suppressed and concealed even further.

***Teacher as robot: Bella***

Bella is perhaps the most defiant of the three participants in this study. She demonstrated on more than one occasion that she was willing to challenge the system and take the risk involved later. She used the term cynical to describe herself when we were discussing her overall sentiments about educational policy. In addition, she expressed concern on more than one occasion that she felt as if policies were not always established with the basis of a clear understanding of teaching, learning, developmental levels of students, or what happens in classrooms on a day-to-day basis. This lack of knowledge, in her opinion, flies in the face of teacher uniqueness as others with little to no experience with students or teaching seemingly pass along their 'expert' judgment on a regular basis. This quote is a mild demonstration of her cynicism:

No longer is it just what you think and feel. It's what you're being told to think and feel. It's simple. To me, let me do what I love doing in a way that I feel is appropriate for my kids ...or tell me goodbye and let me walk away. (Interview 3)

Just like Renee and Grace,, Bella is steadfastly devoted to her students. She serves as a teacher leader in a variety of capacities in her building, it is oftentimes dark upon her arrival and departure to and from the school building, and she can often be found at the ball field with a pile of school papers as she tries to watch her children play ball in the evenings and on weekends. Even though she admittedly will risk consequences on certain occasions, Bella tries to sustain a

façade of being in compliance. While she does not work as hard to oblige every, what she considers, arbitrary obligation as does Grace and Renee, she understands that there is a boundary for which even she cannot cross. It is during these times and upon such realizations that she has become a little more hardened as time goes by. This understanding was made evident as she discussed her feelings about being mandated to work against her teaching philosophy on an almost daily basis:

It's not just that you're asked to do things that are against your teaching philosophy but just your personal, what's a good teacher mentality ... which, I mean, I guess they could be interchanged one and the same ... but it also hardens you in some ways. It makes things that you would normally care about and want to pay more attention to just one more thing on your desk that you've got to get to and it's just one more thing on the list.

(Interview 3)

Bella admits to being hardened by the dogmatic, unforgiving mandates that are unabashedly disseminated by those she feels not knowledgeable enough to be making such significant decisions. She admits also to being hardened by the fact that she is consistently assessed through standardization and not the merits of her own work and talents as an educator. She often experiences some of the robotic, mechanistic reactions mentioned by Grace as she responds to mandates pertaining to curriculum, data collection, lesson planning, time allowances, assessment procedures, and the like.

Both Renee and Grace reframed my thinking about standardization in light of teachers and not just students. When I think about the 'standardization movement', I've always considered it in light of students and the ways in which they are measured, but Renee and Grace

broadened this view to recognize that students *and* teachers are in the same proverbial boat of walking the standardization plank. The way in which teachers position themselves stems from their lived experiences and as such, the decisions made in classrooms, with and for students, also stem from these lived experiences.

### **Microanalysis: Standardization vs. Individuality**

The microanalysis for the theme standardization vs. uniqueness comes from Bella. The excerpts come from the third interview in which teacher identity was a focus. I asked Bella to share her thoughts on teacher identity and to respond to another participants' idea that policy has compromised teacher identity.

These are excerpts from her response (words spoken with emphasis are in italics):

1. I was thinking stripped
2. We had that conversation the other day about standardizing teachers
3. Where do *I* fit in anymore?
4. No longer is it just what *you* think and feel, it's what you're being *told* to think and feel.

**Building task: Significance.** The first note of significance in this piece of language is the way in which Bella replaces the term compromise with the more abrasive term “stripped.” She took no time in thinking of a different word – “stripped” came out immediately. This is significant because it suggests that she perceives her identity as a teacher as being far beyond that of being compromised, but instead, of being unwillingly removed. She indicates that identity is significant not only to her, but also to her fellow teachers when she uses the word ‘we’

to denote that she had recently participated in a discussion about this very notion. When Bella places emphasis on the word *I* instead of *we* on the next line, she lends significance to the fact that she is troubled by the prospect of being placed in a position of standardized conformity instead of allowing her own identity to be present in the classroom.

In the last part of this response, she reiterates her view that teacher identity has pervasively been stripped when she places emphasis on the word *you* as if she is speaking about teachers in general instead of using the word *I*. In this statement, she also places emphasis on the word *told* to represent the idea that instead of teachers using their identity as an educator to make decisions, mandates are now in place in such a way that individual identity is no longer integral in the instructional process. Finally, Bella demonstrates a perception that in addition to altering instructional practices, policy has now infiltrated the thoughts and feelings of teachers. This is significant because it reifies her resolution that her identity as a teacher no longer exists if her thinking and feeling have been replaced by the thinking and feelings of more powerful others.

**Building task: Identities.** Bella refers to multiple identities in this piece of data as she uses a variety of pronouns in excerpts #2, #3, and #4 to represent these identities. The use of the pronoun ‘we’ in excerpt #2 represents herself and her personal colleagues. This indicates that she recognizes that other teachers also use their personal identities to make sound instructional decisions. The situated meaning she applies to the term ‘standardization’ in this same line, aligns with the ways in which teachers think about standardizing students; expecting the same set of results from a diverse group of people with a diverse set of experiences. She is suggesting that the policies currently being set forth are positioning teachers to do, think, act, and perform in identical respects; therefore eliminating the need for teachers to employ practices emanating from their personal identity as an educator.

In excerpt #3, Bella is literally begging the question as to how and where her personal identity as a teacher can be utilized in the current context of policy driven instruction when she uses the pronoun *I*. She goes on in line #4 to highlight the view that multiple teachers are no longer permitted to act based upon their own thoughts and feelings when she uses the pronoun *you*. The language used in this data indicates that Bella sees her identity as a teacher being removed from her and replaced by more powerful others who seek to regiment and systematize teachers in the same way standardized testing has systematized students.

**Building task: Relationships.** This data reflects multiple relationships as perceived by Bella. First, she represents a relationship with her colleagues when she reveals that she has been communicating with them about they ways in which *they* feel teachers are being standardized. This notion of camaraderie surfaced many times in other parts of her interview data. She also represents a relationship with a general population of teachers when she uses the word “you” to describe not only herself as a teacher but others as well. Finally, she portrays an undesirable relationship with those she sees as responsible for the slow and steady removal of her personal identity as a teacher when she says she is being *told* what to think and feel.

**Building task: Politics.** In this particular data set, Bella represents a principle of wielding power as well as a desire for acceptance, both social goods according to Gee (2011). Her desire for acceptance is demonstrated in excerpt #3 as she asks herself where in the indirect process of eliminating teachers’ personal identities does she still ‘fit it’? Her emphasis on the word *I* indicates that she desires to hold on to the teacher identity that has created the person she currently sees as herself.

Bella illustrates the use of power in line one when she characterizes her identity as being ‘stripped’ by the implementation and enforcement of certain policies. Again in line two, she

represents the notion of power as she explains how her colleagues were describing the fate of their identities as ‘standardized’. The notion of power is applicable in this case because teachers have no control over this ensuing standardization movement. Finally, in excerpt #4, Bella describes teachers’ thoughts and feelings as being negated and replaced with those in positions of power *telling* teachers what to think and feel. While we may not go so far as to say that those in positions of power are literally directing teachers thoughts and feelings, Bella’s perception and use of language that represents this concept is what makes it a genuine consideration for her and for this study. Gee’s (2011) notion of social goods are, according to Bella, clearly at stake for a wide spectrum of teachers.

**Building task: Connections.** I find the connection in this data to be an *attempted* connection. When Bella questions where she fits in to the complex world that she considers educational policy to have created, she is trying to make a connection between herself and the current situation in which she finds herself working. She knows her teacher identity is still there, but seems to no longer know its place. She has also created a juxtaposition between what her teacher identity thinks and feels about her instructional practices and what policy has mandated (in her perception) that she thinks and feels about them.

**Bella’s Situated Identity.** In these four excerpts, Bella uses language to enact a mechanistic identity; one that acts based upon what she is told to do and not what she chooses to do. This goes back to the notion of robot already discussed on many occasions. “I was thinking stripped (excerpt 1)”, “Where do *I* fit in anymore (excerpt 3)”, and “No longer what *you* think and feel, what you’re being *told* to think and feel (excerpt 4)” are all illustrations of Bella using language to demonstrate her current humanless state of being as a teacher. Excerpt 4 especially emphasizes the fact that she perceives herself as moving about in a robotic fashion as she has no

control over the choices she feels she now has to make in the name of policy. As with Renee, the teacher identity that Bella desires to enact is in conflict and seemingly overtaken by the one that must, like it or not, abide by what she knows to be wrong for students. Gee's (2011) building tasks have shown in both cases, standardization vs. individuality and schoolwork Sunday, how Bella uses language to represent herself as having no control over her role as a teacher.

The theme standardization vs. individuality validates the ways in which teachers such as Grace, Renee, and Bella are diminished in their capability to carry out their jobs with any degree of individualism or autonomy. These three participants have established themselves in multiple ways as devoted to their profession and more so, the students in which they serve. Even so, their capacity to use their judgment, experiences, and moral servitude as a teacher is pervasively devalued and considered unnecessary. Their talent, ideas, and commitment to their craft are ever present and increasingly ignored. This theme indicates a great need for less homogeneity and more innovation.

### **Conclusion**

The theme policy makers are not educators has shown the ways in which policy makers are disconnected from the real teaching lives of teachers and the realities of what happens in everyday classrooms. School work Sundays demonstrated the lengths in which teachers are going (sometimes willingly, sometimes not) to accommodate policies that are continuously rolling out. This includes the sacrifice of their own families as they work more and more hours to keep pace with the demand policy has placed upon them and their students. Negative effects on students clearly indicates that many policies contain harmful effects for students and their learning and that future policy should be written to meet the developmental needs of students instead of setting forth an expectation that students from all economic, academic, and cultural

backgrounds will master them. Finally, the theme standardization vs. individuality is indicative of the reality that a great need exists to support teachers in the current world of standardization and shifting reform. Policy should recognize the multi-faced talents of the teaching force and use those talents to their benefit.

These themes demonstrate the divide that exists between those developing the policies that affect the educational lives of students and those mandated to carry them out. This divide has created an environment in which misguided policy continues to be created and teachers' resentment towards them continues to grow. As I thought more and more about this divide and its emanating resentment, I sought to understand what kept teachers like Bella, Grace, and Renee going back into classrooms year after year. After revisiting the data, I recognized more than the despondency that has been defined in the four themes noted. All three participants expressed feelings of despair throughout our discussions. Underneath this notion of despair, I came to recognize a concept of endurance. Grace, Bella, and Renee have endured an overabundance of new policies or policy change during their respective careers. After a great deal of reflection, I made a distinguishable delineation between their endurance of policy application(s) and their endurance for and commitment to students. Endurance of a constant barrage of one new policy after another could be considered as simply 'putting up with' what is happening in their work environment. Conversely, their endurance for the sake of students shows the true strength and grit of these three educators. This sense of resolution to act as a final barrier between misguided policy and students is what I found to be the overarching perspective of what it is to *be* Grace, Renee, and/or Bella. The fortitude with which they passionately safeguard students in every way possible is a testimonial to the very words they have provided in this study.

Clearly, a need exists for educators such as the ones presented in this study and policy makers to come together as one for the betterment of students and teachers alike. The following chapter is representative of the conclusions made from the findings addressed here and serves to provide implications for the current state of policy in which teachers now work.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION

“I’m hopeful, but I’m scared that if things continues to go in the way they’ve gone, eventually, it will be a lost cause.”

(Grace, Interview 3)

The above quote is indicative of the parallel sentiments of the participants in this study as they relate to the current attitude and imminent vision of their profession. Grace, Renee, and Bella all demonstrated a notion of despondency when speaking about the current state of affairs in teaching and a feeling of apprehension when discussing what they anticipated the future to hold for the profession. Their words and experiences have brought me to a multifaceted understanding that a critical need exists for relationship building between those creating educational policies and those implementing them.

The research questions that served to guide this study were: (a) What are the ways in which teachers navigate and negotiate the policy context in which they teach? and (b) What are the potential causes that necessitate the navigation and negotiation of policy context? Chapter one framed the problem and objective of the study and presented the theoretical context behind the study. Chapter two provided pertinent literature to provide the reader with a contextual understanding of the ways in which educational policy has been researched, experienced, and viewed by others in past studies. Chapter three provided details as to the methodology that would be utilized in the analysis of the study data. Chapter four served as a context chapter in which the participants and their respective schools and communities are introduced to the reader in great detail. In chapter five, a description of the data analysis procedures was provided. In addition, detailed information including a macro and a microanalysis on each theme developed in

the analysis process was presented. Chapter six serves as a means to discuss each of the four themes and the conclusions gleaned from each as well as to provide implications for future research in regard to educational policy and reform.

When I decided to conduct a qualitative interview study, the final decision was made based upon a poignant desire to give teachers a voice; a notion rarely experienced in today's educational climate of power. This voice emanated from three semi-structured interviews with each participant, for a total of nine interviews. The interviews were conducted across a span of four weeks. Each interview was recorded and transcribed within two days of the meeting. After each transcription, I began an open-coding process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) of the data by first extracting the ideas that were recurring. As I transcribed, coded, and analyzed the interview data, I was determined, even if myself, my participants, and my committee were to be the only ones to read it, that somewhere...in indelible print, I would put Grace, Renee, and Bella's words forever "out there." When Bella made the following statement in an interview, I knew I made the right decision about my topic of choice.

Education as a whole has turned into more about outcomes and policy makers have forgotten that teachers and children are human (Interview 2).

Bella, Renee, and Grace all three demonstrated throughout their interview responses a recognition of the ways in which policies dehumanize students and teachers. This dehumanization element was not what I expected when in the planning stages of this study, nor as I sat down to think about the questions I would ask each participant. As I sat down to my first interview with Grace, I expected her to provide me with an inventory of strategies she had developed over the years to help her navigate the current policy environment in which she had worked. While this was not the case, I had not lost hope; I still had eight interviews to go. After

first meeting with Grace, I met with Renee and then Bella. Even though I was unable to garner my inventoried list of strategies during the first three interviews...I still held out hope. After interview four, my plan for receiving such a list began to fade, and in its place I was left with what I considered a bleak reality. My participants did not possess a catalogue of strategies by which they navigated the policy context in which they worked. As it turned out, the three of them were seeking their own list - a list of coping strategies. They sought answers to questions such as these: How could they get 25 students to be able to check off the same exact set of goals on a standardized writing rubric when some students couldn't even write a complete sentence? How would they make it to their son's football game and still create a lesson plan formatted by someone else that included the ways in which they would differentiate the lesson for students working on all different levels, when they planned to re-teach un-mastered skills, how they grouped for all five subjects, and how they planned to implement the new writing program for which they have had no training? When in their teaching day would they prepare for uploading a myriad of documents to the TKES (Teacher Keys Evaluation System) platform to prove that they have indeed been doing their job, not to the best of their ability, but to indicate that all 25 students were on target to pass the new Milestones test? Would they skip a planned family outing, studying for an exam for a class they are taking, or a son's football game so they could work on school related activities? Which of their favorite novels would they not read with their students this year in order to get in more standardized test practice? It became clear to me in short order that I was not the only one trying to create a list.

The first question guiding this study, "What are the ways in which teachers navigate and negotiate the policy context in which they teach?" has been attended by means of Grace, Renee, and Bella's disheartening replies to my questions about their experiences with policy. As I

completed the nine interviews and began to code the data, the notion of coping became prevalent. I realized that teachers were not industriously sitting around figuring out ways to navigate or negotiate the system; they were simply trying to cope with the day-to-day influences that educational policy has now made known as school. They expressed the ways in which they were coping with the demands placed upon them by policy makers to perform what oftentimes seemed like impossible feats, coping with the fact that their respective administrations seemed to recognize no boundary when it came to their personal time, coping with the idea that their professional judgment was no longer a desired commodity, and finally, coping with anxiety riddled students who were literally praying and quoting Bible verses as they sat down to one standardized test after another.

The second question, “What are potential causes that necessitate the navigation and negotiation of policy context?” led me to recognize the perhaps unintended consequences, but consequences all the same, upon the teaching and personal lives of teachers. The fact that Grace, Renee, and Bella have for years been forced to teach alongside the policies that have placed them in direct opposition to what their past teaching experiences informed them was best for students has taken its toll on their lives in multiple ways. All three shared the conviction that policy makers devalue them as professionals by coercing them to abide by mandates they believe to be detrimental to their students and by placing them in a position of powerlessness to do anything about it. The dichotomy they each have found themselves in on an almost daily basis has required them to answer the same question continuously: Am I a conformist today or am I a teacher today? More times than not, they find themselves walking a tightrope; making determinations as to how they can be both.

## Themes

Four dominant themes emerged from the data analysis process, including (a) policy makers are not educators; (b) schoolwork Sundays; (c) standardization vs. individuality, and (d) negative effects on students. Each theme represents the ways in which Grace, Renee, and Bella communicated their experiences with policy over the course of their respective careers. In chapter one, I articulated a desire to use symbolic interactionism as a means to determine if teachers' practices are implemented based upon social expectation to abide by mandated policies or if other motivations may be present. Data in this study have suggested that yes; it is unquestionably the social expectation that stands behind policies that endorses teachers to base their practices upon the shoulders of reform. Because the premise of symbolic interactionism serves to define and interpret the actions of people around us (Prawatt, 1996), using this lens through which to analyze the actions of teachers based on the actions of policy makers has served this study well. Considering the reality, that as this study has so often indicated, policy makers and teachers have very little interaction with each other, each group is left to interpret the actions or potential actions of each other independently. The results of this study indicate this unspoken "interaction" has created unnecessary antipathy on the part of teachers towards policy makers. Since symbolic interactionism also provides allowance for the autonomy of the individual, it has allowed me to view the ways in which the participants in this study view the actions of policy makers as not only affecting them as a collective group, but also as an individual teacher. Based upon their responses, they definitively consider their individualism and autonomy as professionals as having been removed. The following quote from Renee explicates this very idea: "It causes them (teachers) to conform to what they (policy makers)

want you to be...that individual personality that you are as a teacher is squelched. You just do what they ask you to do” (Interview 3).

In addition to symbolic interactionism, critical pedagogy has served as the other primary theoretical lens through which I have viewed the experiences of Grace, Renee, and Bella. Critical pedagogy has enabled me to attend to the oppressive nature of teaching reported by all three participants. It has also served to provide a balance between the social nature of policy and the ways in which participants view said policies. Giroux (2011) asserts that pedagogy in the *critical* sense should illuminate the relationship between knowledge, authority, and power in a way that includes all who contribute to the teaching and learning process and as Wink (2000) suggested, engaging in this critical perspective has helped me discover new ways of recognizing the ways teachers are exploited. McLaren (1989) makes the claim that some constructions of reality are legitimated and celebrated by the dominant culture while others are not, and that critical pedagogy serves to conduct inquiry into this impasse. In this study, critical pedagogy has affirmed McLaren’s (1989) claim as the data have indicated the ways in which dominant policy makers’ constructions are legitimated while teachers, the ones executing the actual work, are discounted as inconsequential to the decision making process.

As I considered the role played by both symbolic interactionism and critical pedagogy, the subsequent four conclusions began to stem from the themes noted above. They provide a synthesis of the ways in which critical pedagogy rendered support to identify how years of imposed, standardized policies have created an attitude of defeat and a survival mode within the participants of this study as well as the ways symbolic interactionism demonstrated the difference between the teacher as individual and the teacher as social entity. Emerging from these themes, then are the following conclusions:

- The nonexistent relationship between policy makers and teachers has resulted in a disconnect that has created unintended animosity towards educational policy.
- The current trends in educational policy have removed the once present boundary that existed to provide balance between the home life and the school life of a teacher thereby creating a guilt complex as the decision making process of choosing family or work becomes a continuous circumstance.
- The long-running standardization movement of students has infiltrated the teaching lives of teachers.
- There is a lack of humanness present in the current teaching environment.

### **Explanation of Conclusions**

#### ***Conclusion 1: Relationship Between Policy Makers and Educators***

The first conclusion of this study is that the nonexistent link between policy makers and educators has resulted in a disconnect that has created unintended animosity on the part of many teachers towards educational policy. Research has suggested that teachers playing an active role in not only the implementation, but also the creation of reform is critical to making the reform long-lasting (Hargreaves, 1998, Maskit, 2007). On numerous occasions, Grace, Renee, and Bella alluded to the supposition if only policy makers could take their place, walk in their shoes for a time, or at the very least spend time in schools such as theirs; the policies they create would be different, more appropriate for their students. Because none of these allusions have yet to become reality, Grace, Renee, and Bella have recognized the probability that developmentally inappropriate policies, policies that require teachers to sacrifice even more of their personal time, and policies that continue to exchange teacher individuality for teacher sameness will continue to

be crafted and advanced. These deductions endorse the findings of the literature presented in chapter two. First, Grace, Renee, and Bella's reflections on past, current, and potential future policy highlight Edmondson's (2004) argument that policy makers' opinions are oftentimes highly valued while at the same time uninformed. Edmondson's (2004) notion of uninformed decision-making aligns with the conclusion that the nonexistent relationship between teachers and policy makers create animosity towards the policies created. Woodside-Jiron (2003) views this dichotomy as an exercise of power and McLaren (1989) validates the position when he makes the argument that those who matter most in education (teachers, parents, and students) are the ones most often excluded at the hands of politicians. Valli and Buese's (2007) study endorses this theme as they identified an ever "increasing, intensifying, and expanding" (p. 523) level of responsibility on the part of teachers. Some of the externally imposed mandates mentioned by the participants in their study included curriculum pacing, innumerable data-related tasks such as analyzing for re-teaching, tutoring, responses to intervention, and differentiating across multiple levels and subjects. These topics correspond with those discussed by Grace, Renee, and Bella as they also provided a seemingly never-ending list of things they could never seem to accomplish in full. Valli and Buese (2007) described the teachers in their study as being "swept up in a flow of mandates that consumed their thinking, their energy, and for some, even their love of teaching" (p. 545). This flow of mandates and consumption of thinking and energy are the very things Grace, Renee, and Bella intimated were key hindrances in their daily teaching lives, and served as the basis for their own lost passion for their once beloved profession.

It is the faith in the humanness of others that keeps my participants and myself believing that if policymakers either once were educators, remember what it was like to be an educator,

welcomed dialogue with educators, or held a vested interest in educators by making concerted efforts to go into schools of *all* kinds and create relationships with teachers working in said schools, our policies would reflect a different value. Grace, Renee, and Bella's discussions indicate their belief that because policy makers do very little to form alliances with those responsible for implementing their policies, teachers have been positioned in situations that, in their minds, require them to meet goal that are oftentimes unattainable; for both students and teachers.

### ***Conclusion 2: Nonexistent Boundaries***

Stress, cynical, anxiety, breaking point, overwhelmed, frustrating, burn-out, guilt...these are all codes pulled from interview responses surrounding the notion of personal time or lack thereof. The once present boundary that existed as a means to delineate between the person as teacher and the person as mom or wife, for example, has disintegrated into a blur. Teachers now live and work under a "whatever it takes" assumption made by policy makers and sometimes their own administrators. Hargreaves (2004) illustrated how often teachers are asked to make policy implementation with "unreasonable timetables" (p. 298). According to Valli and Buese (2007), in recent years, teachers' work has increased in relation to the sheer number of tasks they are asked to perform, their responsibilities have expanded in scope, and have intensified exponentially as each year new policy has created an even deeper climate of high stakes accountability. Similarly in this study, nonexistent boundaries stemmed from responses such as the one made by Grace when she said, "I spend more time at school than I do at home" (interview 1) and by Bella when she said, "I'm taking all of that home in my school bag so my family can watch me work" (interview 3). At first thought, a reader may take up the view that working more than a typical forty hour work week is to be expected when one decides to become

a teacher and simply comes along with the profession. Indeed, two of my three participants have been told they chose this profession and now must live with the ramifications that go along with it; i.e., working an endless number of hours week in and week out. I have no doubt that Grace, Renee, and Bella would agree a certainty exists that teachers will work past their contracted number of hours most every week. This conclusion however, reaches far beyond that of an expectation of working a few extra hours to get the job done. Teachers' contracted work hours at Bella, Grace and Renee's schools are set from 7:45-3:15, Monday through Friday. While none of the three participants remember a time when they were able to fulfill their duties in such a timeframe, they do remember a time when they were able to arrive and depart the school building at a reasonable hour without taking home an additional three to four hours worth of work. Based on the reflections of Grace, Renee, and Bella, it is evident they all share undesirable sentiments in regard to the amount of time they each spend working ineffectually on school related activities and a deluge of paperwork that have no bearing on the success of their students.

When Grace, Renee, and Bella consider the amount of personal time they sacrifice in the name of policy, they at least hope this sacrifice would benefit students. If only they could safeguard students from the harmful effects of bad policy, the sting of personal time lost would not be so palpable. One of the main complications that arise when teachers are forced to leave their own teaching practices behind in exchange for those that are more suited to policies that foster standardization is a concept of guilt. Assaf (2006), Hargreaves (2004), and others (Macdonald & Shirley, 2009; Nieto, 2005) discuss conceptions of guilt on the part of the teachers they interviewed and/or observed. In Hargreaves' (2004) study, he discussed the ways in which participants (middle grades teachers) also sacrificed their time and "diverged from the

conventional teaching norm” (p. 842) as they sought to safeguard students in multiple ways. In this study, Grace points out that she and her colleagues oftentimes sacrifice their personal time out of what she called a guilt complex (interview 2). Teachers operate on the conception that it is their duty to do what is best for kids. The social aspect of symbolic interactionism aided me in identifying the perception that spending hours upon hours doing their best to be an effective teacher *must* be necessary; after all, how could working hours of overtime in the name of students every week not be considered best for kids? Grace also poignantly called attention to the fact that when she considers the overwhelming number of hours she puts in before school, after school, in the evenings and even on weekends, the majority of things she spends her time doing has nothing to do with the betterment of her students or their achievement. Some of these things included keeping pace with an electronic grade book, creating and/or updating data charts and assessment reports, and/or viewing fifteen-year-old videos on differentiation. Teachers are finding it more and more difficult to smile, nod, close the door and do what they will; what they feel creates student-centered learning experiences for children for many of the reasons already mentioned here, thereby, exacerbating the feelings of guilt on the part of the teacher. Hargreaves (1998) reminds us in his study on teacher emotions to keep the context of such work in mind in an attempt to avoid adding “to the intolerable guilt and burnout that many members of the teaching force already experience (p. 836).

The sentiment of guilt was present in all nine interviews as each participant discussed the harmful effects that certain policies have had on learning, policies from which they could do nothing to protect their own students. While neither Grace, Renee, or Bella could indicate specifically what they felt they could do to shield students from policies that render undesirable results, all three emotionally discussed the feelings of guilt they have experienced because they

are so often unable to do so. Bella reiterated this notion as she used the term “robots” to prove her point. She felt that because of policy, education had become more about outcomes than students and that policy makers have seemingly forgotten that they are dealing with children and not robotic beings. She again echoed her argument that teachers are humans with defined limitations when she said, “There are limits to what people can continue to take on” (interview 2) and “We’re human. We can’t be at it 24/7. However, to reach some of the expectations, I think that would be necessary” (interview 2). In these statements, Bella demonstrates the perception that neither her humanness nor that of students is taken into consideration in the development and roll out of new policy.

As both a researcher and a teacher, the development of this conclusion has affected me more than any other part of this study. As I sat on four different occasions witnessing both Renee and Bella bring themselves to tears as they discussed the ways in which both their students and themselves have been emotionally affected by misplaced policy, I wondered what bearing this emotional toll would take over a long period of time for both teachers and students. After spending hours listening to interview audio, poring over transcripts, and reflecting upon what I’ve heard and experienced, I came to the realization that the endless checklists and paperwork, the persistent pursuit of objectives outside the boundaries of my own and those of my participants, and the pervasive endeavors to reach goals so often unattainable had created in my participants and myself a world-weary, dispiriting manner of thinking about what we now do in schools every day.

As noted, the other three conclusions in this study allude to the conception of humanness, or lack thereof. First, the nonexistent relationship between teachers and policy makers suggests that policy makers do not view teachers as a vital component to the policy making process.

Considering the fact that teachers are the very people to whom policy makers count on to implement their policies, this major disconnect seems significant and even nonsensical, neglecting to recognize their humanness and the potential contributions it could make. Next, the blurred line separating teacher life from personal life would suggest that those in power see teachers as entities or something that can simply be put on automatic pilot until the work is done. There is no recognition that rolling out and implementing new policies takes time, no recognition that teachers have lives outside the confines of the school building, and no recognition that teachers are simply humans with a limit to the exploits they can accomplish. The negation to acknowledge any or all of these once again sustains the idea that the notion of humanness is absent in teaching lives. Finally, the infiltration of standardization in teaching lives demonstrates the ways in which policy makers view teachers as a uniformed set of troops in which all should give the appearance of semblance. No longer is it appreciated for teachers to bring to the classroom their own unique style of teaching, pedagogical skills, or moral compass for doing the right things by children as they pertain to learning experiences. Instead, a more mechanistic, follow the program mindset is the new order of the day. Sameness and not creativity is now what brings appreciation for a job well done.

The more I thought about this concept of humanness, the more I longed to prove to my participants and myself its significance. Why *should* those making decisions about educational reform acknowledge the humanness in teachers? According to Hargreaves, (1998) behind the humanness of a teacher lies emotions; emotions about the plight of students, the loss of autonomy and respect experienced in recent years, the notion that even the most valiant efforts are seemingly never enough, and finally, emotions about the future of the profession. He calls attention to the idea that even though teacher emotion plays a significant role in the lives of

teachers and therefore students, very few analyses have been conducted to investigate the ways in which reform has reorganized, sometimes forcefully, these emotions. In an attempt to make this point more apparent, he states,

In so much reform-centered and change-centered writing about teaching and leading, it is as if educators only ever think, manage and plan in coldly calculative ways. It is as if teachers (and indeed students) think and act but never really feel (p. 837).

This quote lends itself back to the notion of the robotic teacher so often discussed by the participants in this study and affirms a need to investigate further the ways in which teacher emotions impact instruction, teaching practices, and teaching lives overall. Hargreaves' (1998) concept of emotion has to do with how teachers cope with educational reform and what strategies they use to make sense of it. When he says, "Teaching cannot be reduced to technical competence or clinical standards" (p. 850), he highlights the ways in which positive emotions are charged with more than efficiency, teaching technique, or competency; and emphasizes their role in the creativity, passion, and relationship building process with students and the profession. Finally, he administers the following warning, "Without attention to emotions, educational reform efforts may ignore and even damage some of the most fundamental aspects of what teachers do" (p. 850).

The understanding that policy makers pervasively fail to recognize the humanness in the very people they know work face to face with students has been a most disillusioning finding. It prompts me to think about my participants as faceless essences, there to serve one purpose; the expansion of assessment scores...no matter the cost to students or themselves. As teacher *and* researcher, I have come to understand the policy making process as cold and far removed from the embodiment of what and who it is intended to benefit. The conclusions policy makers are

not educators, the standardization of teachers, and nonexistent boundaries all point to this end. Until teachers are recognized as the vital, quintessence, human face and heart behind the success or failure of educational policy, things may very well roll on according to the current status quo.

### **Implications for Research, Teaching, and Policy Makers**

#### ***Questions for Research***

Undoubtedly, this study has generated some disheartening realities as they pertain to the ways teachers view the current conditions in which they teach and their feelings about the impending future of their profession. Upon the inception of the study, it was my plan to use my participants as support to other teachers in need of advice on how to manage the current policy context affecting classrooms across the country. I imagined how their stories about the ways they navigated and negotiated this regime of policy context would inspire other teachers to acknowledge that even through adverse conditions, there was a way to make it work for themselves as teachers and for their students. The data emanating from Grace, Renee, and Bella's responses about policy did not however, yield results that would make this imagined outcome feasible. Instead of this illusory list of helpful strategies I had envisioned, I have been entrusted with the emotional lamentations of three teachers, all having dedicated themselves from the core of their being to the profession of teaching. While the reader may find these lamentations a bleak ending to a study about the teaching lives of teachers, these unwelcome findings incite a number of questions that any researcher, educator, or policy maker with a vested interest in education or the future of students should want to elicit answers. Are these convictions a general consensus among the vast majority of teachers? If so, are policy makers aware that these deep seeded feelings of contention exist? If they are unaware, why are they so shielded from the realities of the lives for which they make daily decisions? If they are aware,

why are they unmoved? How and why is policy being constructed in such a way that shuts teachers out and legitimates the opinions of so many who have never stepped foot in a classroom? What can teachers do to help policy makers recognize the benefit they could bring in the reform process? Questions such as these are critical for future research as they tap into the core of what has created sentiments such the ones shared in this study by Grace, Renee, and Bella.

In addition to important questions such as those mentioned, other inquiries that deserve attention include ways that research can be used to empower teacher voices. Grace, Renee, and Bella all mentioned the absence of teacher voice in their discussions on policy. They all stated unequivocally that policy makers must make concerted efforts to listen to those working with students every day and who are able to bring valid discussions to the table about what works in classrooms and what doesn't, what is feasible in certain situations and what requires other considerations. In addition, a close examination is in order of the loss of teacher individuality to the standardization movement. How does this loss of individuality effect teaching practices and as a consequence, student learning? How does the standardization of teachers affect other parts of teachers' lives, and finally, what implications does this standardization of teachers bear on the future teaching force?

The most important question I raise concerns a potential solution to the current barrier existing between teachers and policy makers. How can teachers and policy makers come together as a collaborative force for the betterment of teaching and learning and how can policy makers be made aware that such a collaboration is necessary? I uncovered skepticism with Renee and Bella as to whether or not the above supposition will ever come to fruition. For the sake of my profession and teachers who are the embodiment of what it means to be a teacher, I,

along with Grace hold out hope that collaboration remains a possibility when social groups join forces for the right reasons. There have been many instances in history when one person or a small alliance has made significant differences in the lives of those needing it the most. I consider one of the most important outcomes from this study to be the realization that a desperate need exists for research that will render an outcome in which policy makers recognize the current methods for development of educational policy are giving an opposite result of the ones for which they were intended. Moreover, this recognition could result in a coming together of themselves and teachers as future policy is developed with all parties in mind and not an elite few.

Finally, I make specific recommendations for policy makers. Hargreaves (1998) suggests policy makers acknowledge the centrality of teacher emotions to the reform process (p. 850). I encourage policy makers to recognize the daunting work teachers are doing and make more concerted efforts to acknowledge it instead of continually calling to attention their inadequacies. Most importantly, I suggest policy makers develop an appreciation for the fact that a humanness exists behind the statistical lists they view as students and teachers. Teaching and learning are human endeavors that involve people with emotions, valuable opinions, expansive *and* limited capabilities, and lives separate from the teaching and learning forum. When and if the human side of policy making could be considered, policy makers may be surprised at the potential for progress.

### ***What are teachers to do?***

Finally, one may ask, what is it that teachers should do in light of the oppressive policy context in which they are working? Should they maintain the status quo and press forward as always? Do they follow Renee's lead and leave the classroom in pursuit of a less stressful

endeavor? Bella's prediction that teachers may "throw in the towel and say it's just not worth it" (interview 2) seems a viable possibility for some. How can we encourage teachers to stay the course...and should we? The truth is that I have no pearls of wisdom that would be fitting for all teachers. I am however; encouraged by a number of movements taking place across the country as parents, teachers, and community members have united in certain spaces to articulate their dissatisfaction and fight against the false narrative that public education in general is failing and is therefore in need of restructuring by those seeking to standardize schools in a multitude of ways.

First, the United Opt Out Movement ([unitedoptout.com](http://unitedoptout.com)) stands in strong opposition of high-stakes testing as a means to exclusively judge students, teachers, and schools across the United States and believe this process to be in direct opposition to the fundamental principles upon which our education system was once upon a time based. The goal of the United Opt Out Movement is to work towards an expanding community base that will form a resistance against corporate educational reform and ultimately terminate high-stakes testing and the evaluative practices that accompany them.

Another movement working to support the efforts of educators is the Save Our Schools March and National Call to Action Group ([saveourschoolsmarch.org](http://saveourschoolsmarch.org)). Save Our Schools is a grassroots movement committed to reestablishing teacher, parent, and school influence over the development of educational policy. Placing concerted stakeholders at the center of educational policy dialogue is their main objective. Some educational organizations that support Save Our Schools include the Communities for Public Education Reform, the Parent Leadership Project, and the Coalition of Essential Schools. Education authors and policy experts endorsing Save Our Schools include Peter McLaren, Linda Darling-Hammond, Ken and Yetta Goodman, and

Diane Ravitch. Save Our Schools is working diligently by holding forums on topics such as educational accountability, lobbying Congress, persistently writing government officials about their cause, and building an overall community base to spread the message about the importance of taking educational policy and reform back into the hands of those with the greatest vested interest.

These movements serve as an indication that there are many willing to engage in the struggle for the rights of students and teachers. As I discussed such possibilities with Bella, she shared her feeling that teachers who are passionate about what they do and feel as if they possess the stamina to keep going should certainly do so (e-mail communication, November 20, 2014). In the very same post, she noted that if it were financially feasible for her, she would leave the classroom. Upon reflection, I have come to embrace a deep appreciation for those campaigning for the educational cause in movements such as the ones noted. These champions continue to further the cause for teachers such as those represented in this study that may be too disillusioned to continue the fight. In the end, teachers must listen to the part of themselves that Grace, Renee, and Bella cited as inseparable from the rest of the person, follow their hearts, and do what they find best as they continue the struggle in compliance vs. conviction.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Cum...docemus, discimus; Latin for 'to teach is to learn' is an adage printed on a button pinned to a basket full of books in my home office. Dr. Davis, a professor who taught a religion class during my undergraduate degree at Mercer University gave it to me on the day I graduated. He was close to retiring, and the two of us had developed a special bond during the time I was taking his class. On the day he gave it to me, he explained how one of his old and dearest professors had given the button to him on his own graduation day and went on to say that he

hoped I would never forget its message. For fifteen months, I have been sitting at the desk where this button is pinned, looking at it in the foreground while writing about the trials that encompass the lives of teachers. As I have thought so many times about the words of the button, to teach is to learn, I have thought about the things I have learned as a teacher. On the upside, I have learned that the vast majority of students love their teacher no matter what. I have learned that when teachers intervene in the life of a seemingly “unreachable” student, they become indelibly imprinted in the mind of that student’s parent forever. I have learned that students all want the same thing, for their teacher to care about them more than any other aspect of their job. I have learned that teaching takes over the mind, body, and spirit in ways that only a teacher can understand, and I have learned that the teachers who work in the schools policy makers visit the least often find their work more difficult and at the same time more rewarding than others for reasons policy makers will never understand.

As a doctoral student, I have shifted the way I view the educational enterprise, policy especially. I have also learned about the way in which teachers and policy makers position themselves according to their own needs and experiences through the use of language. Cazden (2001) and Gee (2005) say that language is an integral part of our identity and I have found this to be true time and time again from the inception of this study. In addition to learning new things, I have been *reminded* of others as I have interviewed, participated in discourse, analyzed language, and conducted research on the teaching lives of teachers. This process has reminded me that learning is not always new, but often times serves as a reminder of the paths through which our past experiences have taken us. The commitment exhibited by teachers such as Grace, Renee, and Bella have reminded me that most teachers, like Shel Silverstein’s (1964) *Giving Tree*, will give until there is nothing left but a stump. My participants have also reminded me

that teaching dwells within the core being of a person and the act of walking away does not represent a true separation from the power it wields.

While many learning experiences bring us more pleasure than others, they all serve to teach us life lessons. The button's message, to teach is to learn has also taught me that I am viewed by many as a vessel through which the purpose of policy is served and that my humanness plays no role in the tasks I am mandated to execute in the name of progression. The concept that teachers possess a set of boundaries that limit the potential success for the things they are commissioned to do has time and time again been lost in the melee of what is and is not best for teaching and learning. Moreover, critical pedagogy in this study has aided me in learning that while a great deal of power exists in education, I do not happen to be one of those in possession of it even though I know more about it than those that are. Finally, I have learned that my experiences nor the experiences of my participants with students over a vast number of years has any bearing on the creation of policies since all teachers are now perceived with uniformity.

While I know without a doubt these are not the ideas Dr. Davis had in mind on the day he told me to never forget the adage of the button, I am thankful for the gift as it reminds me that learning experiences of many sorts abound, but only serve as learning experiences when allowed to do so. While this study has left me cautious at best about the future for teachers, there is one thing in which I am confident; I live with certainty and conviction that Grace, Renee, Bella, and myself will all one day take our leave on the other side of the experiences shared in this study as empowered educators who left an indelible imprint on the face of teaching and most importantly, students.

## REFERENCES

- AimswEB (2014). Pearson, Inc. Retrieved from: <http://www.aimsweb.com>
- Apple, M. (1996). *Cultural politics in education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Archbald, D. (1997). Curriculum control policies and curriculum standardization: Teachers' reports of policy effects. *International Journal of Education Reform*, 6(2), 155-173.
- Assaf, L. (2006). One reading specialist's response to high-stakes testing pressures. *The Reading Teacher*, 60(2), 158-167.
- Atwell, N. (1987). *In the middle: Writing, reading, and learning with adolescents*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Au, W. (2007). High-stakes testing and curricular control: A qualitative metasynthesis. *Educational Researcher*, 36(5), 258-267.
- Barrentine, S.J. (1999). *Reading assessment: Principles and practices for elementary teachers*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. (2010). Working with teachers to develop fair and reliable measures of effective teaching. Retrieved from <http://www.metproject.org/downloads/met-framing-paper.pdf>
- Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. (2012). Gathering feedback for teaching. Retrieved from [http://metproject.org/downloads/MET\\_Gathering\\_Feedback\\_Research\\_Paper.pdf](http://metproject.org/downloads/MET_Gathering_Feedback_Research_Paper.pdf)
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods*, (5th ed.). Boston, Mass: Pearson.

- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Borko, H. (2004). Professional development and teacher learning: Mapping the Terrain. *Educational Researcher*, 33(8), 3-15.
- Cazden, C. B. (2001). *Classroom discourse: The language of teaching and learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Civic Impulse. (2015). H.R. 1804-103<sup>rd</sup> Congress: Goals 2000: Educate America Act. Retrieved from <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/103/hr1804>
- Cohen, D. K., & Ball, D. L. (1990). Relations between policy and practice: A commentary. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 12(3), 249–56.
- Cooper, J., & Kiger, N. (2003). *Literacy: Helping children construct literacy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Crotty, M. (2003). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Cuban, L. (2009). *Hugging the middle: How teachers teach in an era of testing and accountability*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Datnow, A. (2000). Power and politics in the adoption of school reform models. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*. 22(4), 357-374.
- Denzin, N.K. (2004) Symbolic interactionism. In U. Flick, I. Steinke, & E. von Kardoff (Eds.), *A companion to qualitative research*. (pp. 81-87). London: Sage.

- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). *The sage handbook of qualitative research*, (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Denzin, N. K. & Halliday, M. K. (2011). *Literacy research methodologies*, (2nd Edition). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). *The handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Dewey, J. (1997). *Education and experience*. New York, NY: Macmillan. (Original work published 1938)
- Dewey, J. (1998). *Democracy and education*. Indianapolis, IN: Kappa Delta Pi. (Original work published 1916)
- Diamond, J.B. (2007). Where the rubber meets the road: Rethinking the connection between high-stakes testing policy and classroom instruction. *American Sociological Association*, 80(4), 285-313.
- Edmondson, J. (2004). Reading policies: Ideologies and strategies for political engagement. *The Reading Teacher*. 57(5), 418-428.
- Ezzy, D. (2002). *Qualitative analysis*. London: Routledge.
- Fairclough, N. (1989) *Language and power*. London: Longman.
- Finnigan, K.S. & Gross, B. (2007). Do accountability policy sanctions influence teacher motivation? Lessons from Chicago's low-performing schools. *American Educational Research Association*, 44(3), 594-629.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

- Friedman, A.A., Galligan, H.T., Caitlyn, M.A., O'Connor, K. (2009). Teacher subcultures of democratic practice amidst the oppression of educational reform. *Journal of Educational Change*, 10(4), 249-276.
- Gee, J. P. (1996). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourse* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Princeton, NJ: Routledge.
- Gee, J. P. (2000-2001). Identity as an analytic lens for research in education. *Review of research in education*, 25(3), 99-125.
- Gee, J. P. (2011). *An introduction to discourse analysis*. London: Routledge.
- Giroux, H. A. (2011). *On critical pedagogy*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Giroux, H. (2004). Critical pedagogy and the postmodern divide: Towards a pedagogy of democratization. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 31(1), 31-47.
- Goertz, M. E. (2005). Implementing the no child left behind act: Challenges for the states. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 80(2), 73-89.
- Goldstein, L. S. (1996). "If you have a Ph.D., then why are you teaching kindergarten?": A teacher research work in progress. *American Educational Research Association*
- Goldstein, L.S. (2008). Kindergarten teachers making "street level" education policy in the wake of no child left behind. *Early Education and Development*, 19(3), 448-478.
- Graves, D. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and children at work*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). *Spoken and written language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Halliday, M.A.K. (2004). The place of dialogue in children's construction of meaning. In R. Ruddell ,& N. Unrau (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of reading*. (133-144). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (2004). *An introduction to functional grammar* (3rd ed.). London:
- Hankins, K. H. (2003). *Teaching through the storm: A journal of hope*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Hargreaves, A. (1998). The emotional practice of teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 14(8), 835-854.
- Hargreaves, A. (2003). *Teaching in knowledge society: Education in the age of insecurity*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Hargreaves, A. (2004). Inclusive and exclusive educational change: Emotional responses to teachers and implications for leadership. *School Leadership and Management*, 24(2), 287-309.
- Hargreaves, A. (2005). Educational change takes ages: Life, career and generational factors in teachers' emotional responses to educational change. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(8), 967-983.
- Higgins, B., Miller, M., Wegmann, S. (2006). Teaching to the test...Not! Balancing best practice and testing requirements in writing. *The Reading Teacher*, 60(4), 310-319.
- hooks, bell. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- Hopkins, D. (2001). *School improvement for real*. New York: Routledge Falmer.

- Hochberg, E. D., & Desimone, L. M. (2010). Professional development in the accountability context: Building capacity to achieve standards. *Educational Psychologist, 45*(2), 89–106.
- Kincheloe, J. L. (2008). *Critical pedagogy primer*. New York: P. Lang.
- Kincheloe, J. L., McLaren, P., & Steinberg, S. (2011). Critical pedagogy and qualitative research: Moving to the bricolage. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed., 163-178). Thousand Oaks, CA.
- LeCompte, M.D., Priessle, J. (1993). *The handbook of qualitative research in education*. New York: Academic Press.
- Leistyna, P., Lavandez, M., Nelson, T. (2004). Critical pedagogy: Revitalizing and democratizing teacher education. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 31*(1), 3-15.
- Leistyna, P. & Woodrum, A. (1996). Context and culture: What is critical pedagogy? In P. Leistyna, A. Woodrum, and S.A. Sherblom (Eds.), *Breaking free: The transformative power of critical pedagogy*. (pp. 1-7). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Publishing Group.
- Little, J. W. (1993). Teachers' professional development in a climate of educational reform. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 15*(2), 129–51.
- Lortie, D. C. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McLaren, P., & Kincheloe, J. L. (2007). *Critical pedagogy: Where are we now?* New York: Peter Lang.
- McLaren, P. (1989). *Life in schools: An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). NY: Longman.

MacDonald, E., & Shirley, D. (2009). *The mindful teacher*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Mallette, M. H. & Onwuegbuzie, A.J. (2011). Mixed research techniques in literacy research. In N.K. Duke & M.H. Mallette (Eds.), *Literacy Research Methodologies*. (pp. 301-330). New York: Guilford Press.

Maskit, D. (2007). Teachers' attitudes toward pedagogical changes during various stages of professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(3), 851-860.

Mead, G.H. (1934). *Mind, self, and society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Merriam, S.B. (1998). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. New York: Jossey-Bass.

Moe, T.M. (2003). Politics, control, and the future of school accountability. In P.E. Peterson, & M.R. West (Eds.), *No child left behind? The politics and practice of school accountability*. (pp. 80-106). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE). *America's Choice* (1998): Program overview. Retrieved September 16, 2014 from <http://www.ncee.org/acsd>.

National Commission of Excellence in Education. (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform: a report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education, United States Department of Education*. Washington, D.C.: The Commission.

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). *Common Core State Standards*. Washington, DC: Authors.

Newkirk, T. (2009). *Holding on to good ideas in a time of bad ones: Six literacy principles worth fighting for*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

- Nikolakaki, M., Giroux, H. A., & Freire, A.M. (2012). *Critical pedagogy in the new dark ages: Challenges and possibilities*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Nieto, S. (2005). *Why we teach*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- No Child Left Behind Act, 20 U.S.C. § 6301 *et seq.* C.F.R. (2001).
- Olson, K. (2009). Systemic reform and superficial compliance: Teacher loyalty to lived experience. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 3(2), 72-89.
- Prawat, R. (1996). Constructivisms, modern and postmodern. *Educational Psychologist*, 31 (3-4), 215-225.
- Rogers, R., Malancharuvil-Berkes, E., Mosley, M., Hui, D., and O'Garro Joseph, G. (2005). Critical discourse analysis in education: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 75(3), 365-416.
- Rogers, R. (2011). *An introduction to critical discourse analysis in education* (2 ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Seale, C. (1999). Quality in qualitative research. *Qualitative inquiry*, 5(4), 465-478.
- Silverstein, Shel. (1964). *The giving tree*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Sloan, K. (2006). Teacher identity and agency in school-worlds: Beyond the all-good/all-bad discourse on accountability-explicit curriculum policies. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 36(2), 119-152.
- Smith, J.M., & Kovacs, P.E. (2011). The impact of standards-based reform on teachers: The case of no child left behind. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 17(2), 201-225.
- Taylor, S. (2013). *What is discourse analysis?* New York: Routledge.

- Van Dijk, T.A. (1997). *Discourse as social interaction*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Thinkgate LLC (2014). Retrieved from <http://thinkgate.com>
- Thompson, M., Thompson, J. (2000). *The learning-focused notebook*. Learning-Focused Solutions, Inc. Boone, NC: Learning Concepts.
- Tyack, D. B., & Cuban, L. (1995). *Tinkering toward utopia: A century of public school reform*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Valli, L. & Buese, D. (2007). The changing roles of teachers in an era of high-stakes accountability. *American Educational Research Association*. 44(3), 519-558.
- Valli, L., & Chambliss, M. (2007). Creating classroom cultures: One teacher, two lessons, and a high-stakes test. *Anthropology and Education*. 38(1), 57-75.
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1962). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Wertsch, J.V (1997). *Vygotsky and the formation of the mind*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press..
- Weiler, J. (1998). Success for all: A summary of evaluations. ERIC/CUE Digest #139. New York: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education.
- Wink, J. (2000). *Critical pedagogy: Notes from real world* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Allyn & Bacon. Wixson, K. & Yochum, N. (2004). Research on literacy policy and professional development: National, state, district, and teacher contexts. *The Elementary School Journal*. 105(2), 219-240.

Woodside-Jiron, H. (2003). Critical policy analysis: Researching the roles of cultural models, power, and expertise in reading policy. *Reading Research Quarterly*. 38 (4), 530-536.

**APPENDICES****APPENDIX A: QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW 1**

- I. Tell me about your educational background experiences.
- II. Is there anything that stands out about your educational experiences when you were young?
- III. If you were to describe to someone what it means to be a teacher, what would you say?
- IV. Do you think that the way others think about what it means to be a teacher differs from your own meaning? If so, in what way(s)?
- V. Define what testing and accountability mean to you.
- VI. How does accountability pertain to you as an educator?
- VII. Do you think there is test that could be reflective of all that teachers do?
- VIII. How would you define educational policy and/or reform?
- IX. What do you think about those in charge of creating policy?
- X. Describe your teaching style. Include the types of learning activities/lessons that you prefer to implement in your classroom.
- XI. Describe your ideal classroom.
- XII. Are you asked to follow the Georgia DOE framework?
- XIII. Tell me about your classroom ten years ago...five years ago...
- XIV. What are some of the ways you have handled policy mandates? Do you handle them differently now than you did early in your career?

- XV. Describe a day in your current daily teaching life.
- XVI. What has changed the most since you first started teaching?

### **APPENDIX B: QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW 2**

- I. How has NCLB (if at all) affected the way you teach and assess students?
- II. How (if at all) has the work around Common Core changed the way you teach?
- III. When you see students struggling with the rigor of the standards, how does it make you feel as a teacher?
- IV. How does your school provide training for new initiatives in your district?
- V. Is it common that one person receives initial training and then re-delivers it to the rest of the faculty?
- VI. How much of your personal/family time is devoted to keeping up with or implementing reforms and district initiatives?
- VII. Do you feel as an educator that some personal time is to be expected as a part of the job?
- VIII. Can you tell me about a specific time that you feel policy has affected you as a teacher?
- IX. Can you tell me about a specific time when you feel that policy has affected your students?
- X. Do you think recent policy changes have made you a better teacher? Why or why not?
- XI. Has recent policy changes or reform implementation made a difference in student achievement?

- XII. Tell me about a story that you think would be beneficial for a policy maker to hear...may move them?
- XIII. What recommendations would you make if you could sit down face-to-face with a body of people responsible for creating educational policy?
- XIV. What do you think will happen if recent history that shows an exponential increase in teacher and student expectation continues to move in that direction?

### **APPENDIX C: QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW 3**

- I. After analyzing our previous interviews, I have identified a tone of coping more so than that of navigation. What do you think about this finding or interpretation?
- II. What do you think is different now than it was...say 20 years ago?
- III. Another participant said the following: "I'm a stronger teacher, but not in a good way because of my newfound coping strategies". What do you think about this statement?
- IV. In what ways do you feel you have evolved as a teacher over the years...positive or negative?
- V. Are you doing things today that you thought you'd be doing when you made the decision to become a teacher?
- VI. What do you say to people who tell you that *you* chose this profession?
- VII. What does the term teacher identity mean to you...without using the word 'student' in your response?
- VIII. Another participant introduced me to the idea that teachers are now just as standardized as students...what do you think about that idea?
- IX. Do you think your personal life experiences have a bearing on your identity as a teacher?

- X. Most teachers work by some type of philosophical stance. Would you agree or disagree?  
Do you have a philosophical stance of your own?
- XI. What do you think happens to a teacher's identity when they are persistently asked to go again this 'code'?
- XII. What bearing, if any, do you think a construct of fear has on a teacher's identity?
- XIII. If you were to write a reflection about your teaching career thus far, what types of things would you include in this reflection?
- XIV. How do you feel about the future of your profession?
- XV. Is there anything else you would like to add that speaks to something I have not asked or just something you would like to say as it pertains to policy or the teaching lives of teachers?

**APPENDIX D: FREQUENCY TABLE**

Code	Frequency	Code	Frequency
Personal school experience	#### III	Fear (teachers)	#### ####
Positive vs. negative	I	Evaluative (teachers)	#### ####
Outsiders do not understand	####	Reflective of what teachers do	III
Overwhelmed	IIII	Inadequate	III
Multiple social roles	####	Burn out	#### II
Validates testing	#### I	Guilt	#### III

Validates accountability	###	Data	### ##
Evidence/proof		Family	### ##
Differentiate		Class size	###
Standardization	### ##	Meaningful learning experiences	### ##
Unfair		Love for teaching	###
Frustrating		Play	
Stress	### ##	Philosophical stance	###
Trust (lack of)		Teacher responsibility	### ##
Documenting		Individuality	### ## ##
Loss of instructional time	###	# of standards	###
Student experiences	###	Covering standards	###
Mastery		Misalignment of policy	###
Meaningful connections		Protecting students	### ##
Lack of resources	###	Snapshots	
Not allowed to be children		Classroom mandates	### ## ##

Student achievement	###	Personal time	### ### ### ### ###
Student perceptions of school		Robotic	### ###
Student anxiety	### ### ###	Coping	###
Other negative effects on students	### ###	Survival	