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"Illegitimi non carborundum": Resilience in the face of factory school reform

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"ILLEGITIMI NON CARBORUNDUM"—RESILIENCE IN

THE FACE OF FACTORY SCHOOL REFORM

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by

Jennifer Nicole Brooks

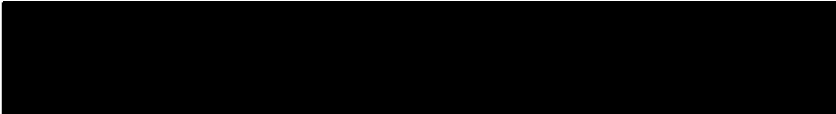March 2012

"ILLEGITIMI NON CARBORUNDUM"—RESILIENCE IN

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March 2012

Approved by:

Dr. Barbara Flores, First Reader   2/29/12
                                                      Date

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores how teachers interpret and negotiate top-down mandates and the effects of such mandates on self-efficacy, professional autonomy, and stress. Finally, it investigates what sources of inspiration and/or support are perceived by teachers as helpful in cultivating resilience. Resilience in the face of factory school reform is imperative for sustaining teachers in a high-stakes policy climate.

Semi-structured interviews with seven public elementary school teachers in a Southern California district served as the primary source of data. All interviews were audio taped, transcribed, and subsequently analyzed and coded for emerging themes. Data was also collected via several ranking or checklist exercises and one open-ended free written response question.

Results indicated that mandates were perceived as detrimental to processes of teaching and learning. Furthermore, support of colleagues (both to interpret, mediate, and accomplish external expecations, as well as for general moral support); perspective; and finding inspiration were instrumental in helping these educators achieve resilience.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background

The following overview frames the problem within
historical and political context, and includes a synopsis
of the evolution of "Factory School Reform." In addition,
it contains a discussion of the notorious No Child Left
Behind Act (NCLB), and a description of the current
political climate with regards to educators and
educational reform.

Factory School Reform

"Factory School Reform" is a term used to describe
the phenomena of prescribing market-based solutions for
our so-called "failing" public school system. High-profile
proponents, such as billionaire Bill Gates and a cohort of
well-meaning yet misguided celebrities, back the belief
that our schools are failing and that bad teachers are
chiefly to blame—effectively ignoring the socio-economic
inequalities that do contribute to the achievement gap.
The voices of educators have been excluded from this
debate, as those self-proclaimed education experts, with
little-to-no classroom experience, call for the
centralization, standardization, and privatization of

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public education (Willett & Rosenberger, 2005, p. 192). We should be wary of entrusting the education of our children to those who may be motivated by political expediency or economic profit. Consider, for example, the fact that a few mega-publishing companies control the curricula throughout this country. Should we really allow there to be a monopoly on the molding of minds (Nichols & Berliner, 2007)?

Kozol (2007) points out that:

Childhood does not exist to serve the national economy. In a healthy nation, it should be the other way around. We have a major battle now ahead of us, not just about the tone and style of a child's education but about the purposes it should espouse and whether we, as teachers, need to go down on our knees before a brittle business-driven ethos that is not our own. (p. 109)

McNeil (2000) writes that the myth of standardized reform is that centralized, administrative controls are necessary to expose those lazy and/or incompetent teachers that are impeding the academic success of (esp. low-income) students. Teachers are dissuaded from speaking out against such "reforms," for fear that they be perceived as opposed to improving education or lacking

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high expectations for their students. The reality is the "factory school reform" movement has made exceptional teaching exceptionally difficult. Teachers are forced to either put their ideals and expertise on the back-burner and succumb to delivering narrow, prescriptive curriculum, "designed by bureaucrats seeking expedient (easily implemented, noncontroversial) curricular formats"; or to shoulder the burden of an even heavier work load, simultaneously "taking on the dual tasks of compliance (or working to create the appearance of compliance)...and attempting to hold on to authentic, substantive teaching" (McNeil, 2000, p. 192). This puts teachers in the uncomfortable situation of prioritizing either their sanity or their students' opportunities (McNeil, 2000, pp. 6, 157, & 192).

Taylorism. Au (2011) critically analyzes current education policies, and suggests that the prescriptive curriculum and high-stakes testing under which public school teachers work today constitute a "New Taylorism," a resurgence of the principles of scientific management that prevailed at the turn of the 20th century. The modern factory production model of school reform treats student test scores as a product. In an effort to increase efficiency, top-down mandates, such as scripted curriculum

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and objectives-driven education alienate teachers from
their work. Au (2011) cites the widespread phenomena of
de-skilling teachers, narrowed curriculum/ "teaching to
the test," and the creeping privatization of education as
consequences of high-stakes testing. Having high-stakes
tests as the hallmark of American public education is
problematic since, "Our ability to infer meaningful
comparisons of individuals across different contexts using
standardized tests...rests on our assumption of the
universal objectivity of the test itself" (Au, 2011,
p. 36). Universal objectivity denies context, objectifying
students in an effort to distill learning into a numerical
abstraction.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

     The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) rallied
bipartisan support with its promise that all students
could achieve, if only we insisted on high enough
expectations for them. While, "...NCLB offered a powerful
social justice narrative, one that promised to address the
inequalities in school achievement," it has failed to do
so (Gerstl-Pepin & Woodside-Jiron, 2005, p. 234). In fact,
according to Nichols and Berliner (2007), English Learner
(EL) students are especially vulnerable to being
disenfranchised from a quality education under NCLB, as

they suffer from narrowed, culturally irrelevant curriculum and are hidden away, in an effort to preserve test scores (p. 70).

Gerstl-Pepin et al. (2005) critique NCLB, supposedly driven by "scientific" research, for failing to consider the context and complexity involved in school reform. For this qualitative case study, policy makers on Capitol Hill were interviewed. Later the researchers sought to understand how the policies of NCLB affected an impoverished school (100% of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch) in the same region of the United States. Such reforms haven't actually been scientifically proven to be effective, but are merely based on underlying assumptions. The teachers of Laurel Ridge, together with their principal, thought professional development and a love of learning should be central to their attempts to improve student achievement and that the rigid federal mandates did not honor individual student needs or the professional discretion of teachers (Gerstl-Pepin & Woodside-Jiron, 2005, pp. 232-234).

Teachers as Scapegoats

Ingersoll (2003) notes the lack of regard for teachers by the American public, who commonly disparage teachers as being overpaid, having an easy job, being

responsible for a multitude of social concerns—everything from dropout rates to the weakening of the American economy (pp. 1-3) (See Appendix C). Interestingly, we are not alone; teachers are caught up in the current war being waged on the public sector.

Goldman (2011) examines this attack on government workers and argues that it is due to a society-wide failure to recognize just who it is that makes up the public sector. In the current economic crisis, people are quick to demand that pensions be slashed and the right to collective bargaining be abolished--viewing all government as wasteful bureaucracy. These public servants: nurses, teachers, firefighters...are dehumanized and devalued to the point that we no longer recognize the hardworking individuals who deserve dignity in their work. They suffer blame at the hands our country's misguided frustration, which has led to a manic mob mentality, demanding the head of this amorphous, lazy, greedy, incompetent boogie-man be lopped off.

Politics and Ideology in Education

School reform is politically-motivated (Gitlin & Margonis, 1995, pp. 377-378). The private sector has been very influential in lobbying for their corporate agenda of standardized accountability, "school choice" (vouchers),

and the privatization of public education (Gerstl-Pepin &
Woodside-Jiron, 2005). Therefore, teachers simply cannot
remain a-political.

Bartolome (1994) reminds us that political clarity is
a necessity, for there are forces at work that seek to
advance a conservative agenda—foisting market-place
remedies on the public school system which is supposed to
guarantee equal opportunity for all. Teachers are
scapegoats for policy makers, who are removed from the
realities of the classroom. There is a war on the public
sector at large, and we've witnessed attempts to weaken
the integrity of our profession by undermining our right
to collectively bargain and by arresting our
agency/autonomy.

Research Questions

Modern school reform efforts have ushered in a new
educational policy climate. In light of this:

1) How do public school educators, charged with
raising student achievement in the current high-stakes
policy climate, interpret and negotiate top-down mandates?
Specifically, how does their own educational philosophy,
sense of vocation, and professional expertise inform their
instructional decision-making?

2) What are the effects of curricular/pedagogical mandates and standardized accountability measures on teachers' sense of self-efficacy, professional autonomy, and stress level?

3) Finally, how is resillience cultivated and a commitment to the vocation preserved—that is, what sources of inspiration and/or support do teachers percieve as helpful in coping?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore, through semi-structured interviews, public school educators' perspectives on how they interpret and cope/deal with the current high-stakes educational climate. By interviewing fellow teachers in a district classified as "Program Improvement," I will seek to gain insight into their perceptions of the effects of curricular/pedagogical mandates and standardized accountability measures on their sense of self-efficacy, professional autonomy, and stress levels. Finally, my objective is to examine where they draw the inspiration/support to persevere—how is resilience cultivated and a commitment to the vocation preserved?

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This study is significant in that it is imperative that we preserve best practices in the interest of our students. Furthermore, if the most reflective, creative, and principled teachers are driven away from the profession due to damaged self-efficacy and stress, what is our public school system left with? We need highly skilled, highly committed educators for the good of our society.

In reviewing the literature I found a vast body of knowledge on the negative consequences that various components of "factory school reform" have on teaching and learning. However there is limited contemporary research on self-efficacy and resilience.

Two such studies explore the relationship between self-efficacy and stress. Klassen and Chiu (2010) studied the negative impact that stress has on self-efficacy, which is instrumental in a teacher's overall job satisfaction. An alternative take on this relationship was presented by Prati, Pietrantoni, and Cicognani (2010), whose results from a study performed on emergency rescue workers suggest that self-efficacy fortifies the individual, enabling them to better cope with stress or adversity.

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Related to the concept of rising above adversity is resilience, which Bobek (2002) has identified as crucial to a teacher's success over the life of their career. Muller, Gorrow, and Fiala (2011) identified several protective factors which contribute to the cultivation of resilience, including a sense of purpose, positive connections, and meaningful participation. I seek to further investigate the role that self-efficacy and resilience play in teachers' success and satisfaction.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is informed by the works of Freire (1998), Giroux (2010), Apple (1982), hooks (1994) and other critical theorists, which critique the pervasive hegemonic assumptions and power dynamics that exist in education. Deficit and transmission models of education are not consistent with this philosophy, whereas recognizing the value of critical reflection and social context are.

As such, my conceptual framework is comprised of several stances. The first pertains to the belief that teachers should be respected as highly qualified professionals. They have the knowledge and expertise to know how to best reach their students. Teachers

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demonstrate commitment to their students, routinely going above-and-beyond in the time and effort they devote to them. Unfortunately, teachers are experiencing a crisis in self-efficacy as their educational values are in direct conflict with the unrealistic instructional and accountability expectations perpetuated by high-stakes school reform.

The second conceptual stance held by this author is that education is a human enterprise, the value of which cannot be quantified. I do not believe standardized test scores to be authentic measures of academic achievement for, as Macedo (1998) so eloquently explains:

> ...quantitative evaluation results, can never escape the social construction that generated these models of analysis. The theoretical concepts are always shaped by the pragmatic of the society that devised these evaluation models in the first place. That is, if the results are presented as facts that were originally determined by a particular ideology, these facts cannot in themselves illuminate issues that lie outside of the ideological construction of these facts to begin with...Thus an empirical study will produce conclusions without truth if it is

disarticulated from the socio-cultural reality...
(p. xxii)

Finally, I believe in the power of story. We all have a need to develop a personal narrative by which to orient ourselves, so that we may tread through our life's journey with grace. It is my hope that, through the sharing of personal narratives, participants will be able to highlight their successful strategies. But there is more than just insight to be gained.

Willet and Rosenberger (2005) work from a theoretical framework of "critical dialogue as transformative practice," arguing that dialogue is more than just collaborative discussion—it is action (p. 193). Through conversation and shared conceptualization, human beings effectively shape the collective world, fostering relationships with one another, and forming or transforming our identities and ideologies.

A related concept would be narrative policy analysis, employed by Gerstl-Pepin and Woodside-Jiron (2005) to question the dominant narrative (that schools are failing and public school educators are primarily at fault), which has been used to justify the current wave of "factory school reform" and high-stakes accountability measures (pp. 232-234).

Limitations of the Study

For practicality's sake, seven participants were interviewed for this study. However, I believe that the methods employed generated a wealth of data from this sample size. "Purposeful sampling" is often employed in qualitative research and is an effective technique for discovering relevant findings from a relatively small sample (Maxwell, 1996, p. 70). While the participants were chosen for possessing certain qualities, they were diverse enough to represent the "typical" teacher in this district fairly well.

From a practical standpoint, there were time constraints to consider. As a teacher myself, I can attest to the fact that there are ever-increasing demands on our time. I expected that the number of teachers willing and able to meet with me at length, on their own time, was limited. Due to the intimate, in-depth nature of the interviews, it was necessary to meet with participants outside of school hours, so that our conversations would not be rushed. These interviews could not have taken place during a lunch hour, for example. I wanted the participant to have ample time to reflect and to feel at liberty to speak freely. It was feasible to conduct seven interviews

in this manner between November 5th, 2011 and December 1st, 2011.

The in-depth nature of the interviews yielded significant data from just seven participants, providing insight into the experiences and perspectives of public school educators in similar contexts. According to Hargreaves (2005), asking participants about "critical incidents," whereby they recall specific instances when they experienced or had to suppress especially strong emotions, is a "more methodologically productive and evocative" way to elicit data (p. 970).

Another possible limitation is that the language of emotions and perceptions can be vague. The words used to discribe them varies from person to person. Such is the nature of discussing the subjective. This challenge was dealt with by carefully defining terminology for the partcipants and asking clarifying follow-up questions whenever necessary.

While this study is not wholly generalizable, the findings do offer insight into the perceptions of public school educators struggling to maintain self-efficacy and sound pedagogical practices amidst "factory school reform" measures. As the 2014 deadline imposed by NCLB approaches,

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increasingly more teachers are faced with similar circumstances.

Definitions of Terms

Artifacts (of compliance) refer to evidence that certain mandates are in place, which administrators look for during walkthroughs and evaluations (Crocco & Costigan, 2007, p. 512). These can include, but are not limited to: content objectives, language objectives and sentence frames; "Focus" walls; posting: student work, data, and standards; writing lessons plans in a particular format that would not otherwise be utilized by the teacher.

Brokering/Modifying/Negotiating are synonymous terms for the ways that educators interpret and adapt curricular and pedagogical mandates to their classroom practice. While the current political and policy contexts surrounding "factory school reform" are oppressive, impeding teachers' ability to exercise professional autonomy outright, it is common for teachers to adhere to scripted reading programs while skipping or adapting lessons, adjusting pacing, and integrating student-centered background knowledge building activities

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within the privacy of their classrooms (Johnston-Parsons, Wilson, et al., 2007, pp. 4 & 100-103).

Communities of Practice "is the name used by researchers to denote groups of teachers who meet regularly to discuss their practice." Researchers have found that as members of these communities, teachers who are able to build a sense of shared goals, values, and ideas about what is effective are able to successfully improve their teaching (Reich & Bally, 2010, p. 179).

De-skilling is "the transformation of highly skilled work into highly unskilled work" (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 154). It eliminates the need for individuals' specialized knowledge and makes workers easily replaceable.

Fidelity refers to "...strict adherence to the text, pacing guides, and teacher scripts associated with the programs adopted by the state and district," to the exclusion of any and all outside materials (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006, p. 32).

Mandates are those top-down directives, such as scripted curriculum and objectives-driven education, which do not necessarily honor individual student needs or the professional discretion of teachers (Au, 2011; Gerstl-Pepin & Woodside-Jiron, 2005).

Principled Resistance is resistance fueled by teachers' professional principles, including: agency/autonomy; individuality and creativity (for teachers and students); high expectations; instruction that focuses on the individual needs of diverse students and community-building (within the classroom environment as well as professional communities).

Professional Autonomy is generally defined as individuals having some control over aspects of their work that are directly related to their day-to-day tasks (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 18). Within the field of education specifically, professional autonomy is the authority and flexibility necessary for caring, engaged, efficacious, committed teaching (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 43).

Resilience is exhibited with "...elasticity, flexibility, and tenacity in working within challenging school cultures" (Crocco & Costigan, 2007, p. 515).

Self-Efficacy is a teacher's perceptions of his or her job performance. It has been attributed to the "sense that he or she is making a positive difference in the lives of students" (Hammerness, 2003, p. 52). It is also understood to be achieved through "feelings of competence, successful achievement, and accomplishment both in one's

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job and the organization" (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006, p. 498).

"Sensemaking" refers to the process by which teachers collectively—within their professional communities—make sense of policies and demands imposed by outside authorities, decide which "messages" to address, and broker/mediate/negotiate them to their own teaching practice. This is achieved through co-constructing meaning through dialogue (Coburn, 2001, pp. 145-146; Louis, Febey, & Schroeder, 2005, p. 179).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

How High-Stakes Testing and Top-Down Mandates
Are Detrimental to Education

A three-year long study, consisting of interviews

with high school English teachers from a couple of

different districts in New York, revealed that high-stakes

testing has some negative effects, including: Pervasive

emotional pressure, a reductionist view of literacy,

conflicted views of teaching and learning, and

stratification of schools and districts (Miller, 2002).

Narrowing of Curriculum

High-stakes testing has been detrimental to American

public education in that it puts pressure on teachers to

increase test scores by any means necessary, including

"teaching to the test" (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 179). The dire

consequence of which has been the "dumbing down" of

curriculum; as the National Academy of Sciences President,

addressing the pitiful state of science education today,

remarked: "...it's easier to test for facts than

understanding" (Wood, 2004, p. 40). Research has noted the

narrowing of curriculum, as art, music—even science and

social studies fade away in favor of only tested domains

(Smith, 1991, pp. 8-10).

This state of affairs is not acceptable in high Socio-Economic Status (SES) schools. Noddings (2007) points out that "most well educated, financially able parents would...object strenuously if our children were deprived of social studies, art, music, drama..." (p. xii). Kozol (2007) contributes that principals who work in low-performing schools feel pressure to enforce federal mandates and accountability measures, even though they themselves often share the same reservations as the teachers over accommodating practices that "would ever have been tolerated in the good suburban schools that they attended" (pp. 192-193).

Lack of Equal Opportunity: Educational Apartheid

The centralization, standardization and privatization of the American public school system have been particularly detrimental for those so-called "at-risk" students it was meant to rescue (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, p. 64). Ironically, while high-stakes testing has taken away teacher autonomy in an effort to raise scores, it is necessary to reclaim it in order to effectively address the needs of our "marginalized" students (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 181). The pressure and anxiety resulting from the restrictive policy environment, within which public school educators in low SES schools dwell, leads to students

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perceiving this stress as mistrust or fatalistic expectations of their ability to learn. However, once teachers, in their communities of practice, empower themselves to collectively interrogate the tests, they will be better equipped to prepare their students for the big concepts and skill sets which they have identified (Ingersoll, 2003).

The development of higher-order thinking skills, rather than rote regurgitation of facts, is imperative if our students are going to be competitive in the future (Smith, 1991, p. 11; Zhao, 2009). Darling-Hammond (2007) demonstrates, using published aggregate data, that the modern, global economy requires specialized skills and training beyond those acquired in high school. In fact, today 70% of jobs require such education and expertise, compared to just 5% roughly 100 years ago. Yet graduation rates have steadily declined over the past several decades. For instance, in the year 2000 only 69% of American youths earned a diploma, compared with 77% in 1969.

There exists, in America's public schools, an educational apartheid (Bartolome, 1994; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Dudley & Paugh, 2005; Kozol, 2005; Rodríguez, 2008). Current reform efforts emphasize Direct Instruction (DI),

which Dudley and Paugh (2005) refer to as the quintessential "pedagogy of poverty," for children deemed at risk of failure (p. 167). This sort of instructional model first became prominent in the 1960's as part of President Johnson's "War on Poverty." However, it decontextualizes the problem by ignoring the social and economic disparities that exist, by framing low academic performance as an individual and technical problem, rather than a societal one. It further dehumanizes struggling learners by invalidating their cultural (and often times linguistic) heritage, as well as their experiences. This article questions whether these pedagogical and curricular mandates are really good for learners (Dudley & Paugh, 2005, pp. 156-157 & 167).

While DI is supposedly proven to be effective, the integrity of such claims are questionable, given that often times the proponents stand to profit from the scripted reading programs being adopted. Also, with such an exclusive focus on "basic skills," much is left to be desired (Dudley & Paugh, 2005, p. 161). This narrowing of the curriculum serves to put at-risk students at a further disadvantage by limiting their exposure to a rich curriculum (Dudley & Paugh, 2005).

Students from economically disadvantaged or ethnic

minority backgrounds are denied access to a curriculum

that includes the liberal arts, including philosophy, art

and government. Instead, their futures are dictated for

them—they are to be made useful in the labor force. It

seems there is no tolerance for lofty idea(l)s. To dream,

to think critically, to analyze—these are performed by

free-thinking people. In contrast, these students are only

allowed access to the *servile* arts (such as law

enforcement, medical assisting and mechanics). In addition

to the gross injustice for our students, this presents a

very true and present threat to the strength of our

democracy (Barber, 1994).

Kozol (2007) keenly sums up the fact that poor

children, children of color, and children in urban schools

receive less access to educational opportunities and an

enriching curriculum which develops critical-thinking and

problem-solving skills versus rote learning. He states:

> The children of the suburbs learn to think and to
>
> interrogate reality; the inner-city kids meanwhile
>
> are trained for nonreflective acquiescence. One race
>
> and social class is educated for the exploration of
>
> ideas and for political sagacity and future economic

power; the other is prepared for intellectual

subordination. (p. 121)

United States Federal Language Policy: Rooted in Ideology

There exists, within mainstream U.S. society,

misconceptions and prejudices with regard to

second-language acquisition and ELs. Consequently, rather

than language policy based on research, it is shaped by

ideology—which is defined as "a system of ideas, beliefs,

and thoughts that is closed to further questioning"

(Hansen, 1994, p. 269). To support this assertion, Evans

and Hornberger (2005) cite the U.S. Department of

Education:

> Unlike medicine, agriculture, and industrial
>
> production, the field of education operates largely
>
> on the basis of ideology and professional consensus.
>
> As such, it is subject to fads and is incapable of
>
> the cumulative progress that follows from the
>
> application of the scientific method and from the
>
> systematic collection and use of objective
>
> information in policy making. (p. 96)

A qualitative study exploring teachers' perceptions

of NCLB, as it relates to the education of ELs, critiques

the "monolingual," "language as problem" ideology behind

the assumption that ELs should be held accountable to perform at the same level as English Only (EO) students, after only three years of instruction in English (Evans & Hornberger, 2005, p. 95). They further stated that the data were collected through interviews with seven elementary teachers and a few language acquisition specialists. These teachers taught in southern Oregon, where the phenomenon of Spanish-speaking ELs was relatively new at the time. Participants discussed the federal sanctions that reigned down upon their school, after two years of under-performing (Evans & Hornberger, 2005).

In a qualitative analysis of the current backlash against teachers and students of poor and linguistic and/or ethnic minority backgrounds, it is outlined how the status-quo, masked as high-expectations regardless of race or economic status, actually preserves inequality in education, as it proclaims to be "color-blind" and thus ignores the very real disparities that impede student learning (Gutierrez, Asato, Santos, & Gotanda, 2002, pp. 335-336, 346). To illustrate this point, the authors quote Faludi, a feminist who described the concept of backlash as, "at once sophisticated and banal, deceptively progressive and proudly backward" (Gutierrez et al., 2002,

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p. 335). The danger is that, "clothed in the rhetoric of reform, backlash pedagogy becomes the judicial arbitrator of who gets 'sound' educational practices and in what form" (Gutierrez et al., 2002, p. 345). An example of this reactionary double-speak, which touts egalitarian ideals while being rooted in ideology that resents the inclusion of linguistic or ethnically diverse people is Prop 227, which was entitled "English for the Children" (Gutierrez et al., 2002, p. 340). The article concludes that the challenge for educators is to resist this wave of school reform, rooted in "backlash ideology," and instead value the linguistic and ethnic diversity in our country as an infusion of vitality (Gutierrez et al., 2002, p. 348).

High-Stakes Testing

A study conducted by Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (2000) was comprised of interviews including 59 teachers and 20 parents in two states about the effects of high-stakes testing on teaching and learning. The data from this study that is relevant to my present inquiry has to do with A) teacher practices surrounding test prep and administration; B) their perception as to the value of such tests; and C) how high-stakes testing influences their instructional decision-making. Participants all responded that high-stakes testing is stressful and

detrimental to quality education (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000).

An Invalid Measure of Assessment. High-stakes testing is detrimental to students in that it diminishes curriculum, is anti-intellectual and undermines good teaching (Noddings et al., 2007, p. xii-xiii). On those grounds not only is the justifiable value of such measures of achievement questionable, but also according to Campbell's law, which states that "any indicator to which high stakes are attached will be subject to corruption," the validity is as well (2007, p. xi).

Schools will go to great lengths to avoid the consequences for not meeting their ever-increasing, unrealistic Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) goals. So desperate are some that they have resorted to dishonest and exclusionary practices, including dropping students from their rosters and discouraging students from staying in school (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, p. 57). Another tactic employed to keep low-performing students from negatively impacting a school's AYP is to siphon them off into programs that are exempt from NCLB's accountability measures, such as general education degree (GED) programs. School administrators are more apt to suspend or expel students who fetch low-test scores in the weeks before

state testing. They find creative ways of manipulating the tested population, including holding back ninth grade students with low scores and then promoting them directly to eleventh grade to avoid the tenth grade test (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, pp. 57-62).

Furthermore, schools are guilty of strategically targeting those students whose improved scores would go the farthest in helping the school escape punitive actions of NCLB. These students receive all the attention and extra support, while the already Proficient or Advanced, as well as the very low-scoring students (considered to be lost cases) are indeed "left behind." This cynical practice can be likened to "educational triage," whereby children are labeled as "non-urgent cases, suitable cases for treatment, and hopeless cases" (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, p. 75).

We are supposed to affirm the inherent value of every child who walks through our doors, and yet we are witness to the morphing of America's staunchest advocates for children into cynical data-manipulators. Nichols and Berliner (2007) were careful to clarify that this corruption "lies in the policy, not with individual teachers or administrators" (p. 77). The lamentable fact is that so much time, energy and resources are wasted on

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strategic self-preservation that our focus has deviated from the true task at hand-providing each child with a quality education that facilitates their self-actualization.

Senator Wellstone (2000) made a speech before Congress about how the zealous use of high-stakes, standardized testing is ineffective, inequitable, and has become the holy grail of academic achievement to the detriment of actual quality education. He stated:

> Education is, among other things, a process of shaping the moral imagination, character, skills, and intellect of our children, of inviting them into the great conversation of our moral, cultural and intellectual life, and of giving them the resources to prepare to fully participate in the life of the nation and of the world. (para. 1)

How High-Stakes Testing and Top-Down Mandates Constrain Professionalism

High-stakes standardized tests compromise teachers' professional autonomy, and thus their ability to do their job with integrity. Many teachers have testified that the focus on high-stakes testing, and the consequential lack of professional autonomy, make it difficult for them consider and address the diverse, individual learning

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needs of their students (Brimijoin, 2005; Crocco &
Costigan, 2007, p. 523; Ross & Reskin, 1992; Smith, 1991).

This is consistent with the findings of an
ethnographic field study conducted by Mathison and Freeman
(2003) at two elementary schools in upstate New York. The
data were collected from interviews, focus groups, and
observations. Participants taught at schools that served a
majority African-American population, with most students
qualifying for free and reduced lunch. Teachers felt
distressed at having to compromise what they knew to be
best for their students. High-stakes accountability
attempts to justify the means (including narrowed
curriculum and the constrained professionalism of
teachers) with the ends. Yet "the means do not represent
good professional practice and, the state's desired ends
(high test scores) are a poor but powerful proxy for the
teachers' desired ends (the contextually appropriate
success of every child)" (Mathison & Freeman, 2003,
p. 18).

Scripted and Prescriptive Curriculum

Pressures on low-performing schools to increase their
standardized test scores often lead administrators to
direct teachers to use scripted/prescriptive curriculum
exclusively. Even when teachers are allowed to practice

professional discretion with regards to instructional and pedagogical matters related to non-tested disciplines, the looming threats of sanctions from NCLB ultimately undermine their agency by siphoning more time and focus towards Language Arts and Mathematics. Such was the case for an experienced 5th grade teacher in a poor, rural school in Southern California with a high population of ELs. For this case study by Wills and Sandholtz (2009), all 66 social studies lessons that she taught her class were videotaped; she and her administrator were also interviewed throughout the 10 months that this study spanned. The findings compelled the researcher to coin the phrase "Constrained professionalism...a new situation in which teachers retain autonomy in classroom practices, but their decisions are significantly circumscribed by contextual pressures and time demands that devalue their professional experience, judgment, and expertise" (Wills & Sandholtz, 2009, p. 1066).

Teachers resent having to teach using scripted direct instruction (SDI) because they feel it is anti-intellectual and does not effectively reach their students (Cwikla, 2007, pp. 572-573). Meyer (2002) reported the findings of a case study that took place in a primary classroom where the curriculum was changed from

one that was culturally responsive and child-centered, to a mandated, scripted one. The original curriculum was designed by the highly-qualified teacher (who presented at national conferences; had earned a Master's degree; and utilized readers & writer's workshops, grand conversations, and sophisticated assessment tools such as miscue analysis). The researcher noted the drop-off in student engagement. Threats and intimidation ultimately arrested the teacher's professional autonomy. In this article further criticism was aimed at the fact that scripted curriculum, focusing exclusively on phonics, lacks context and meaning (nonsense words and highly "decodable" texts confused the students), and is profitable for curriculum publishing moguls (Meyer, 2002, p. 453).

Another negative consequence of commercial, scripted reading programs is the inevitable "de-skilling" of teachers, alienating them from their craft. Once professional autonomy has been revoked, teachers resort to merely implementing a one-size fits all curriculum as it is written. Research has shown that skillful teachers have much more to do with student success than does any particular curricular program (Duncan-Owens, 2009, p. 27).

Lack of Professional Autonomy

In exploring the nature of teachers' work in American public schools, Ingersoll (2003), who taught secondary school in Canada and later in the United States, was struck by the lack of professional agency and input that teachers in the U.S. are afforded. He argues that it is unfair to hold individual educators accountable while simultaneously taking away their professional autonomy. With power is supposed to come responsibility and vice versa, but in this case increased responsibility (accountability) is accompanied by less control (pp. 154-155 & 244-245).

Other researchers have also outlined how teachers are increasingly frustrated and fraught with despair over having to shoulder more responsibility without being entrusted with the authority and flexibility that should go hand in hand with it (Boote, 2006; Nichols & Berliner, 2007). Tension exists between those who call for greater professional autonomy and the proponents of accountability (external controls). Boote (2006) argues that professional autonomy and accountability are not paradoxical, suggesting that teachers use "professional discretion" to "mediate among competing demands while using their learned

expertise in order to meet the needs of their students"
(p. 462).

Boote (2006) goes on to explain that, when provided
with scripted/mandated curriculum, teachers have a myriad
of factors to take into consideration, including:
students' individual learning needs, community concerns,
their own values/educational philosophy, the materials and
resources available to them, standard curriculum practices
(strategies/routines established by your colleagues,
followed to provide consistency for the students),
national standards, standardized tests, and district
directives. Reflective practice, professional development,
and more reflexive policies are required to develop the
competency that teachers need to be able to effectively
mediate curriculum (p. 469).

According to both Berger and Luckmann (1966), and
Thompson (1980), the pressures on teachers to adhere to
curricular and pedagogical mandates are intense and
two-fold. The current policy environment employs both
technical (accountability measures) and moralistic
control, whereby those who question the dominant messages
are ostracized as being uncooperative (Achinstein & Ogawa,
2006, p. 55).

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An individual teacher's values and society's criteria
for their evaluation do not always align. Since teaching
shapes society, the citizens of a society should have
input. However:

Teachers need the room to reach their own judgments
about individual students' needs and problems and how
best to address them. They should be prepared to
defend their judgments, given the public nature of
the work, and to alter them if they prove wrong. But
they ought not to be forced to accept solutions and
strategies without their own input...To take away
that autonomy is to undermine the basic terms of
their work. The protection [of professional autonomy]
enables teachers to perform one of the most lasting
contributions they can make: it positions them to act
independently, creatively, and imaginatively, thereby
helping the new generation to develop those qualities
themselves. (Hansen, 1994, p. 274)

Teachers in low-income schools are particularly
constrained (Au, 2011; Ogawa, Sandholtz, Martinez-Flores,
& Scribner, 2003; Pedulla et al., 2003). In the district
where I conducted my research they are subjected to
intensive oversight in the form of: walkthroughs; pressure
to strictly adhere to mandates and scripted curriculum;

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and having to demonstrate such compliance via "artifacts." This has led to the teachers feeling that there is no more joy or creativity in teaching and learning. Indeed, since professional autonomy and the ability to engage in creative work are central to job satisfaction, the lack thereof leads to a damaged sense of self-efficacy and stress (Ross & Reskin, 1992).

Teacher Stress and Coping

Low morale, stress, and burnout are noted in epic proportions among public school educators today. Many factors contribute to low teacher morale, including low salaries, being held in low esteem by the public, inadequate support, administrators lacking in empathy, and unrealistic expectations with regard to workload (Kiziltepe, 2006, p. 146). Stress often manifests itself as frustration, anxiety, negativity, strain, and depression among educators (Gardner, 2010; Kiziltepe, 2006, p. 148).

Finally, burnout refers to "a syndrome of exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy" involving "strain, particularly chronic fatigue resulting from overtaxing work...cynicism (which) refers to an indifferent or a distant attitude," and the pervasive

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feeling that one's work is of no value (Hakanen et al., 2006, p. 498).

Maslach, as quoted by Kiziltepe (2006), identified three components which comprise teacher burnout: exhaustion, cynicism (depersonalization) and inefficacy (p. 146).

Teaching is Among the Most Stressful of Professions

Teaching ranks among the most stressful professions (Kiziltepe, 2006, p. 148). Guglielmi and Tatrow (1998) speak to "heightened job pressure and reduced professional satisfaction" among teachers when they note that "our educational system has become the target of widespread scrutiny and criticism, while at the same time the rewards of teaching are often obscured by the difficult working conditions that are prevalent in many of our schools" (p. 61).

The effects of public scrutiny and mandated testing on elementary teachers were explored in a qualitative study by Smith (1991). Data were collected through observations of classrooms and meetings, interviews with teachers and administrators, and document analysis. Teachers from two elementary schools in the Phoenix-metro area participated. Findings illustrated that teachers felt

stress in response to pressure to raise test scores. They
felt shame when the scores were ultimately published.
Alienation set in; for they felt scrutinized and
manipulated by their administrators, and blamed by the
public, for scores which they feel were "worthless" in the
first place (Smith, 1991, p. 9).

In reviewing the literature related to psychological
distress in teachers, Gardner (2010) found that teachers
suffer from stress much more than the general population—
especially when compared to other professionals. Educators
perceive themselves as less competent and their job to be
more taxing than other professions, due in-part to the
ever-increasing demands on them (pp. 18-20).

Unrealistic Expectations and Demands on Time. In a
qualitative study, in which fifteen middle school teachers
were interviewed, found that unrealistic expectations of
teachers lead them to feel powerless and stressed. Often
they aren't aware of the stress that they are under. It
continually grinds them down, leading to burnout and,
eventually attrition. It also has negative consequences
for the teacher's health and well-being, their
relationships with their students, and their students'
behavior and academic success (Froeschle & Crews, 2010,
p. 301).

Mathison and Freeman (2006) performed an ethnographic study across three demographically diverse school districts in New York, investigating the effects of high-stakes testing on teaching and learning. Classroom observations, informal interviews, and focus groups around emerging themes were conducted over one year's time. The study focused on fourth and eighth grade teachers, since they were charged with administering state tests. A review of the literature revealed that teachers noted an increased workload, due in part to: changes in curriculum, high-stakes accountability measures, and pressure to do more with the same limited time and resources.

The related research further posits that pressure and the threat of sanctions are utilized in order to impel teachers (who are supposedly complacent and lazy) into working harder to help their students achieve (Mathison & Freeman, 2006; Webb, 2006, p. 15). Such a motivation technique is contradictory to self-determination theory (SDT), which states that people respond when given feedback, *after* feeling that their point-of-view is valued. Therefore, teacher stress can be attributed to the dissonance between how human beings naturally function and the rigid, authoritarian nature of the institution (Mathison & Freeman, 2006, pp. 48-49).

The findings of Mathison and Freeman's (2006) study demonstrated that the nature of teachers' work has changed dramatically with regards to the: de-skilling; lack of autonomy; unrealistic demands; ambiguous or hidden goals and agendas; omni-present oversight; and risk of being shamed as incompetent that educators must now endure (pp. 49-50). The teachers' self-efficacy was diminished by their having been denied the freedom to make pedagogical decisions. They resented not being regarded as professionals, and were distressed at being coerced to teach in way that was contrary to their best judgment. The study concluded that outcome-based accountability has lead to: stress; fear; negative self-perception due to guilt over "compromised integrity"; self-doubt fostered by a system that requires dependency; and compliance rather than creativity among public school teachers (Mathison & Freeman, 2006, pp. 51-61).

Occupational Stress Theory

Various occupational stress models, including: the Demand-Control Model; the related Effort-Distress Model; the Demands-Supports-Constraints Model; and the Effort-Reward Model; all deal with work demands versus autonomy. The greater demand upon the worker and the less decision-making latitude/support/reward they receive in

return, the greater the strain (Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998, pp. 63-64).

Conflict Between Inner Values and External Expectations

Stress results from a conflict between the self and the environment. Boote (2006) cites Wideen et al. in asserting that "most teachers enter the profession because they see teaching as an expression of their values...when there is a significant mismatch between what teachers value and what they are able to accomplish, they are much more likely to burn out or disengage" (p. 464).

When asked what drew them to the profession, many teachers cite the desire to: "make a difference" in young people's lives; contribute to society; and to work in a knowledge-oriented field (Crocco & Costigan, 2007, p. 522; Fried, 2005; Hammerness, 2003; Noddings et al., 2007, pp. xiii-xiv).

Thus, it can be concluded that some of the major contributing factors to present-day teacher stress come from incompatible goals/values, such as the creeping attempt to privatize public education and the veneration of high-stakes test scores as the definitive measure of success. Policy makers far removed from the realities of the classroom assert that a free-market approach is the

most efficient and therefore the most prized. Furthermore,

test scores are upheld as objective, fair, and reliable

measures of teacher competency. The problem is that aim of

the free-market (profit) and that of most teachers (to do

something meaningful and to make a difference in the lives

of their students) are most certainly incompatible. Having

a calling implies that you are deeply invested in your

work; to deny teachers' expertise and to further expect

them to betray their values erodes their sense of

integrity and self-efficacy, and leads to stress (Lambert

& McCarthy, 2006, pp. 215-216 & 224).

In another study, in which a total of eighty teachers

were surveyed and sixteen interviewed, interviews with two

novice teachers are featured. One of these teachers taught

in Massachusetts and the other in California; both were

high school teachers with a diverse student population.

The results indicated that new teachers are discouraged by

the gap between their idealized vision of what it means to

teach and the realities of the public school classroom in

an era of high-stakes accountability (Hammerness, 2003).

Pillay et al. (2005) argue that while teachers' roles

used to be about nurturing their students' potential,

recently it has become increasingly complex and stressful.

Trudging onward despite the cognitive dissonance (internal

motivations/ perceptions vs. external pressures/
expectations) and stress leads to serious physical and
mental repercussions. Consequently, the teaching
profession as a whole has experienced record levels of
burnout and attrition. For their quantitative study of
mid-career elementary and secondary teachers in Australia,
data were collected through surveys. Five hundred teachers
received the survey in the mail, along with a return
envelope and release form. However, less than one hundred
and fifty of the returned surveys were useable. The survey
featured six sections: A) demographic items—gender, age,
marital status, and highest education completed; B) work
details including work, work level and whether work was
full-time or part-time and permanent or contract;
C) current perception of life/work; D) current perception
of job satisfaction; E) Perceived Control of Internal
States Scale (PCOISS); and F) the Educator Survey version
of the MBI, which measures emotional exhaustion,
depersonalization and personal accomplishment (Pillay,
Goddard, & Wilss, 2005, pp. 22-23 & 25-26). The results
indicated that in order to cope with stress these teachers
detached themselves from their work, seeking "to minimize
a sense of incompetence that arises from difficult human
interactions" (Pillay et al., 2005, p. 29).

Coping with Stress

There are numerous coping mechanisms that teachers employ. Unfortunately, some turn to negative and/or self-destructive behaviors such as excessive alcohol consumption and withdrawal. There are healthier ways to manage stress, including: mindfulness (meditation); focusing on awareness of present moment; cognitive techniques to learn to recognize and consciously change irrational thoughts; relaxation techniques including visualization; exercise; social outlets; humor; and personal time management. It also helps when one receives praise or recognition, but this, unlike all of the other techniques outlined above, are outside of one's control (Gardner, 2010, pp. 21-24).

Research has identified resources from within (that the individual can utilize) that help buffer teachers from job-related stress, including: self-acceptance/ a strong sense of self-efficacy; reflective practice and policy brokering strategies (finding ways to modify, resist or enhance mandated curriculum and practices); and becoming involved in advocacy. Additional resources that protect teachers from stress and burnout, though coming from without, are: a student-centered, high-interest curriculum and pedagogy which integrate inquiry, creativity, and the

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use of technology; professional flexibility; peer support; and professional development, resources and materials needed to meet diverse student needs (Gardner, 2010; Lambert & McCarthy, 2006, pp. 221-222; Meyer, 2002; Prati et al., 2010).

Comrades. Among the most powerful coping mechanisms in the teacher's arsenal are the relationships that we develop with colleagues (Webb, 2006). So found Montaño and Burstein (2006) in an ethnographic case study profiling the experiences of twelve teachers with less than five years in the classroom, and the support networks they developed. They taught in large, urban, L.A. area districts with students who were from ethnic minority and low SES backgrounds. The methodology employed included interviews, sociograms (graphic organizers showing teachers' relationships with supportive colleagues), and inquiry groups. Empowerment-via-relationships was evident in that these teachers sought out their own informal support networks based on a shared educational philosophy, which helped them to navigate their early experiences. The findings further suggested that the most meaningful support networks were not ones organized by the district (such as assigned mentors or grade-level teams). Rather, "the informal network was the primary location for the

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emotional support they needed to sustain their bearings in a sometime oppressive situation" (Montaño & Burstein, 2006, p. 186).

Resistance: The Struggle to
Maintain Sound Practices

Principled Resistance: Resistance as "Good Sense"

A study comprised of survey questions posed to teachers, as well as interviews with teachers and district-level administrators, sought to reveal whether teachers' resistance to school reform measures stemmed merely from a reluctance to evolve their teaching practices or were based on "good sense" (Gitlin & Margonis, 1995). The results indicated that the teachers' concerns over time and authority were well-founded. The reforms did lead to an increase in their already-overwhelming workload and an increasing centralization of power was evident (pp. 393-395).

Drawing on the work of Gitlin and Margonis (1995), a qualitative study by Achinstein and Ogawa (2006) also challenged the understanding of teacher resistance as resulting from a lack of character or an unwillingness to change (p. 32). The research article reporting the study features case studies of two beginning teachers in California, as they resisted implementing the scripted

"Open Court" language arts program with full fidelity, and explores the tension that exists between human agency and organizational hierarchy when districts insist upon teachers' complete fidelity to adopted, prescriptive literacy programs.

Individual Reflective Practice

Many researchers have noted the power of reflective practice and critical pedagogy in combating the cognitive dissonance that may arise from the challenge of increasing student achievement in a high-stakes policy climate. "Thinking critically about practice, of today or yesterday, makes possible the improvement of tomorrow's practice" (Freire, 1998, p. 44).

Lipman (2004) conducted dozens of formal and informal interviews of teachers from four different low-income schools. While the teachers reported that they were conflicted about the top-down mandates and found it difficult to maintain their sense of purpose, the data revealed that a well-developed personal educational philosophy and practicing critical pedagogy aided them to maintain their commitments to inquiry teaching and bilingualism.

The importance of reflecting upon one's teaching practice, considering one's purpose, and developing a

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personal educational philosophy is reaffirmed by Woods
(1994). Though this study took place in England in the
1990's, it is relevant to the current situation in the
United States in that teachers had suffered: low morale;
the imposition of a standardized, mandated National
curriculum; a loss of professional autonomy; as well as a
loss of prestige in the public's eye. Remarkably, many
teachers chose to resist, despite these stressors and
constraints. Collective action (forming allegiances), and
"a reaffirmation and restatement of their educational
philosophy and goals" were the collective and individual
features of resistance that emerged (Woods, 1994, p. 251).
These teachers were comparable to the participants in this
study in that they served low SES students. They taught in
one of two schools: a rural school that served students
from working class families or a school with over 70% of
its students being ELs from an ethnic minority background
(Punjab). The teachers critiqued the standardized
curriculum for failing to address the needs of their poor,
culturally and/or linguistically diverse students (Woods,
1994, pp. 250-252).

Teachers should learn to examine, develop,
articulate, and defend their vision, in order to clarify
their sense of purpose. In doing so they will gain inner

strength, and the courage to practice their agency and
"teach against the (new) grain" (Hammerness, 2003, p. 55).
You cannot defend that which you cannot articulate (Woods,
1994, p. 253). According to Bartolome (2002), it is
imperative that teachers cultivate and maintain "political
and ideological clarity in working with...subordinated
minority student groups" (p. 167).

Brokering/Modifying/Negotiating Mandates

The role of the teacher has been described as that of
policymaker at a grass-roots level (Evans & Hornberger,
2005; Webb, 2006). When policy does not align to what
teachers know to be best practices, they make decisions to
broker/mediate/negotiate curriculum and pedagogical
mandates (Cwikla, 2007; Evans & Hornberger, 2005; Gitlin &
Margonis, 1995; Johnston-Parsons et al., 2007; Lipman,
2004; Meyer, 2002; Smith, 1991; Webb, 2006; Woods, 1994,
p. 252).

Au (2011) wrote that teachers create spaces for
educational opportunities that they deem essential or
enriching when at all possible; doing so usually involves
some sort of deception/ double-entry teaching and personal
risk.

As part of an action research project in dialogic
analysis of common challenges facing educators at a low

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SES (94% free & reduced lunch) school, teachers reported—within the privacy of their classrooms—skipping or adapting lessons, adjusting pacing, and integrating student-centered background knowledge building activities as they saw fit (Johnston-Parsons et al., 2007, pp. 4 & 100-103). The mixed-methods study (comprised of survey questions and interviews of teachers) by Gitlin and Margonis (1995) also found that, ultimately, teachers resist by preserving their teaching practices quietly (p. 382).

An ethnographic study was conducted over the course of four years at a low SES (98% free and reduced lunch) middle school in the southeastern United States, which served primarily Black children (97% of the population). Upon getting back disappointing test results, the teachers and principal argued that the scripted, remedial curriculum had not exposed their students to the benchmark standards assessed on the state test. Subsequently many teachers resisted, and continued to use manipulatives, and inquiry-type learning activities behind closed doors (Cwikla, 2007, pp. 572-573).

Webb (2006) profiled a small group of teachers under pressure of high-stakes accountability in a case study which spanned one year. It took place in a low-performing

elementary school serving three hundred and thirty students. A little over half of the students (56%) qualified for free/reduced lunch. There was a 27% mobility rate; 51% of the population was comprised of students of color, with the Latino population increasing at the fastest rate. The methodology employed interviews within focus groups as well as interviews with individual participants. Seven teachers were audio taped and their interviews transcribed. Data were organized by identifying "patterns of generalization within a case" —themes that serve as analytic constructs (Erickson, 1986, pp. 148). The study sought to find out a) How do teachers reconcile psychic conflicts (i.e. stress) between what they themselves determined to be their professional responsibilities and the expectations imposed on their work by external authorities (accountability)? b) What were the reasons cited for negotiating or resisting such top-down directives? And finally, c) How do teachers cope with the stress caused by this cognitive dissonance? Results of the study indicated that teachers were especially stressed when the mandates that they were directed to follow contradicted what they felt in good conscience that they should do (Webb, 2006).

Under the circumstances, the teachers decided to "broker" (negotiate/modify/mediate) and even resist accountability measures (Wood, 2006, p. 9). Instead, they adopted a self-imposed accountability system based on professional discretion and a commitment to student learning, rather than on external pressures and fear of sanctions stemming from NCLB. This involved: A) taking time out from prescribed curriculum to deal with students' emotional and behavioral problems (considering the very real challenges of abuse, alcohol and drug use, that many of them live with); B) modifying curriculum to meet students' needs (re-teaching and providing more time for ELs); and C) opting for more authentic assessments.

Collective "Sensemaking"

Related to brokering/mediating/negotiating is the concept of sensemaking. Sensemaking theory states that teachers apply their worldview to make sense of the many varying messages that come from external sources, helping them determine whether to ignore these messages (gatekeeping), or how to interpret (co-constructing understanding) and adapt them (negotiating practical/technical details) (Coburn, 2001, pp. 147 & 152). Teachers apply their own worldviews and educational philosophies when interpreting directives, but this

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process is often done with the aid of colleagues in what is referred to as communities of practice.

Professional Communities of Practice

The research demonstrates how instrumental communities of practice are in supporting teachers through the challenge of raising student achievement in a high-stakes policy climate (Webb, 2006; Woods, 1994). Working collaboratively, teachers can more aptly bridge the gap between the abstract expectations imposed on them and the day-to-day practicalities of teaching (Cwikla, 2007). Professional Learning Communities (PLC), a result of action research which "empowers teachers to...assume control over their respective situation," engages teachers in meaningful collaboration whereby they share common vision and values, fostering "renewable professional growth" (Gilles, Wilson, & Elias, 2010, pp. 93 & 96).

In a qualitative study based on teacher narratives, Ingersoll (2003) focused on how high school social studies teachers worked within their "communities of practice" to question the top-down policies that undermined the quality of their instruction, spoke out against the ideology that drives such mandates, and reclaimed their agency (p. 179).

Another qualitative study explored the role of teachers as policy-makers through interviews of thirty-two

elementary teachers in four schools located in Northern California, which served primarily EL students from Latino backgrounds (Lucinda Pease-Alvarez, Samway, & Cifka-Herrera, 2010). These teachers were mandated to use a scripted curriculum which they asserted did not meet the language and literacy "needs, interests, and understandings" of their students (Lucinda Pease-Alvarez et al., 2010, p. 313).

With the support of their professional communities, the teachers strove to reflect and improve upon their practice while mediating curricular and policy mandates for the good of their students. Based on findings that teachers often feared retribution and suffered from stress in such a rigid environment, Lucinda Pease-Alvarez et al. (2010) argued that public school educators should be afforded professional autonomy and that their input should be considered, together with that of other stakeholders, when shaping future policy (p. 329).

Support. Relationships with colleagues, whether they are formal networks or informal alliances, help to ameliorate the high-stress environment that accompanies school reform (Coburn, 2001, pp. 145-146). Kozol (2007) also acknowledges that "a sense of renewal" is to be gained from fellow faculty (p. 225). He urges teachers to

reach out to colleagues and empathetic administrators in order to "build a network of politically sophisticated educators to resist the punitive and...discriminating practices that are being forced upon them by the state and federal governments" (pp. 205-206).

Advocacy

There is strength in numbers (Woods, 1994, p. 264). Moreover, it has been demonstrated that becoming involved in advocacy empowers the individual and effectively mitigates the feelings of stress and hopelessness that many teachers feel (Meyer, 2002).

Pease-Alvarez and Thompson (2011) reported the preliminary findings of their qualitative case study based on interviews with public school teachers in a Program Improvement (PI) district. The field notes were reported in this chapter, as part of a book that articulates a research-based case against high-stakes testing and the ensuing narrowed curriculum and loss of agency for teachers and students. Emerging themes surrounding: collective resistance, union involvement, and concern for anonymity in a climate of budget cutbacks and pink slips were discussed.

A subdivision of the teacher's union, Educators Advocating for Students (EAS) negotiated state and

district mandates, supported a moratorium on testing, and staged protests hundreds of members strong (Pease-Alvarez & Thompson, 2011, p. 282). Their resistance against standardized, high-stakes methods of instruction and assessment has been bolstered by the organized efforts of the local union. During contract negotiations, several members of EAS appointed to the testing committee were successful in convincing the district to agree to greater teacher input. A clause added to the 2008-09 contract stated, "The District acknowledges the need to review the total number of assessments...and to only support those assessments deemed to be effective and necessary...The District shall seek the input of the union's assessment committee on this topic" (Pease-Alvarez & Thompson, 2011, p. 290).

Speaking Out as First-Hand Eye-Witnesses. Kozol (2007) notes that teachers

> find themselves today in situations that require courage of their own...(They) struggle to reconcile their calling as a teacher, and the relatively quiet and noncontroversial nature of the role this is expected to imply, with that 'other calling' as a witness to injustice in our public schools, to which they are almost always the *best* witnesses. (p. 205)

Resilience

A Sense of Purpose or Vocation

Teaching is more than a profession—it is a vocation (Crocco & Costigan, 2007, p. 515; Hansen, 1994). A sense of vocation can reinforce teachers' sense of self-efficacy and purpose, even in the face of difficulty and stress. To teach requires determination, courage, flexibility, and the willingness to "learn from this barrage of disappointment, joy, surprise, delight, and sadness" (Hansen, 1994, p. 269).

The challenge for teachers is to "navigate the contradictions (the profession) presents without forfeiting one's personality or undermining the ideals that make our work with children 'a vocation' in the truest sense rather than a slotted role within a spiritless career" (Kozol, 2007, p. 203).

A vocation has both a public and a personal dimension (Hansen, 1994, p. 261). It originates from an internal, altruistic motivation to contribute something that is of social value, but also breeds a sense of personal fulfillment and is ultimately integrated into one's identity (Hansen, 1994, p. 263). Additionally, a person's unique agency and "sustained creativeness" are necessary to "convert an otherwise familiar social role into a

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vocation" (Hansen, 1994, p. 267). Top-down mandates do not allow teachers to follow their vocation, confining them instead to a "constrained" role. Hansen (1994) argued that teachers are irreplaceable:

> Every teacher has a unique and varying influence on students' orientations toward learning, toward knowledge, and toward other people. Moreover, those differences have to do with much more than overt dissimilarities in personality and teaching style, they have to do with the ethos of the person, his or her...expectations, hopes, fears, worries, and more. (p. 268)

Inspiration. Kozol (2007) asserts that having been immersed in the humanities and having cultivated a love of language and aesthetics serves to "immunize" a teacher against "putting up with inauthentic words" (p. 97).

Perspective

Perspective can be one of the most powerful tools to achieve resilience in the face of "factory school reform" (McCarthy, Kissen, Yadley, Wood, & Lambert, 2006). Research has indicated that perception is a major factor in psychological stress (as opposed to biological-that is stress stemming from actual, physical threats) (Aldwin, 1994; Lazarus, 1966, 2000; Spielberger & Sarason, 1991).

This notion is further supported by several other theoretical frameworks. One of which is Symbolic Interactionism, which states that "humans act based on meanings they perceive; meaning is based on social interaction; and meanings are created, evaluated, and changed based on individual interpretations" (Froeschle & Crews, 2010, p. 292). Another is the Transactional Model of stress, wherein perception—our subjective evaluation of the situation at hand—is emphasized as a resource for coping which we possess (Lambert & McCarthy, 2006, p. 217; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005).

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Seven public elementary school teachers, serving in a
low SES district located in Southern California
participated in this qualitative study. Data were
primarily collected from in-depth interviews, as well as a
few questionnaire and ranking-type exercises. The data
were then analyzed and coded for emerging themes, sub
themes, and trends.

Data collected from the interviews were collected and
presented in such a way as to maintain confidentiality,
thus ensuring the privacy of participants. Interviews took
place at times and locations chosen by the participants.
Interview responses were coded and the results are
reported by theme (Froeschle & Crews, 2010, p. 297). By
collapsing data in this way and reporting results in
aggregate, confidentiality was further protected.
Specificity with regard to: geographic locations, sites,
incidents, physical or other characteristics of persons,
etc. was obscured so that neither participants nor school
sites, colleagues, administrators, or other individuals
could be identified. In addition, all people, geographic

regions, school sites and institutions are referred to by
pseudonyms.

Participants

Participants were recruited as teachers in Valley
Unified, a (K-12) school district which has been
identified as Program Improvement (PI) under NCLB. As a
consequence of being labeled an underperforming district,
a mandated program entitled "Full Speed Ahead" has been
implemented gradually throughout the district. All
participants are at schools which have been already
inducted into the program.

The participants in this study come from four
different elementary schools, representing among the
lowest SES, mid-range, and among the highest SES schools
(in an overall low SES district). Grade level assignments
range from kindergarten to sixth grade, specifically: K,
2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 4-6th grade "Language!"
(intervention). Six of the participants are female; only
one is male. The age range is from late-twenties to
late-fifties. Years of experience ranges from three years
to over thrity years, with an approximate average of 18
years. The mean is twenty-three years of experience. Four
of the seven participants have earned Master's degrees,

for which they cited "Higher Order Thinking Skills,"
"Foundations of Reading," and "Multiple Intelligences" as
topics of theses/projects or areas of concentrated study.

Four participants stated that they grew up in
Southern California; one moved back and forth between
Southern California and Mexico several times throughout
the course of their K-12 education; another grew up in
Arizona; and one had a varied foreign and domestic
experience, as part of an Airforce family. Most were from
middle class families (ranging from lower-middle to
upper-middle) and went to public schools. A couple
participants attended Catholic school for periods of time.
Many emphasized that they went to their local
"neighborhood" school, to and from which they recall
walking.

In the interest of full disclosure: I am a teacher in
this district and invited certain colleagues to
participate in this study based on past observations of
and/or my experience/relationship with them. Being
conscientious of my role as a participant observer, I have
taken advantage of the enhanced insight and access
afforded me, while still maintaining "guarded intimacy"
and a thorough methodology in the interest of good
research (Glesne, 1999, p. 63). Practicing "purposeful

sampling," these particular participants were approached after having observed them speak out at required district trainings, formal meetings, or in informal conversations with colleagues (Maxwell, 1996, p. 70). All are intriguing to me, whether for the sense of purpose and self-efficacy they seem to posess, or for the resistance and/or resilience that they demostrated. Many have struggled with the conflict between their educational values and the top-down mandates, feeling isolated, unsupported, and vulnerable. These are educators that I feel have something valuable to share.

District Context

As previously indicated, Valley Unified School District is a K-12 district located in inland Southern California. It serves approximately 20,000 students. Eighty-one percent of the student population is Hispanic, 14% is white (not Hispanic), 3% is African American (not Hispanic), 1% is Asian (not Hispanic) with the remainder being Pacific Islander, multi-ethnic or declined to state. 35% of the student population is classified as ELs, and over 70% qualify for free or reduced lunch. The district scores below county and state averages for both percentage

of students "Basic and Above" and "Proficient and Above" in the areas of Language Arts and Math.

This information was obtained from the California Department of Education's website at cde.ca.gov. There exists a "dataquest" feature whereby one can generate their own report. This information was current as of the 2010-2011 academic year.

Data Collection

This study employed a qualitative methodology whereby in-depth, semi-structured interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. Seven public school teachers particpipated in interviews regarding their perceptions of the impact that policy mandates have had on their teaching practices, professional satisfaction, and personal well-being. Each interview took place at a time and location of the participant's choosing—usually in their classroom or at a local coffee shop. The interviews ranged in length from just under an hour to well-over two hours. The transcriptions totaled two-hundred and sixteen typed pages.

The data collection instrument was designed by this researcher, who brainstormed and refined it over the course of months, while conducting the literature review.

The questions were organized into eight categories:

1) Personal Bio Information; 2) Vocation/Sense of Purpose/ Educational Philosophy & Goals; 3) Curriculum Mandates & Instructional Decisions; 4) High-Stakes Testing; 5) Stress/Burnout; 6) "Critical Incidents"; 7) Coping/Resilience; and 8) Support (See Appendix B). Whenever necessary the researcher defined terms, such as "mandates," "artifacts," and "self-efficacy," for the participant. Due in part to the relationship between the researcher and participants, both parties felt comfortable asking clarifying and follow-up questions of each other. This explains why some interviews lasted over two hours.

In addition to the interview questions, participants were presented with a couple of exercises in ranking and a checklist of sorts, which included one open-ended opportunity for a written response. In order to prepare the two ranking exercises, the researcher wrote a number of factors, or tasks, on small sticky notes. The participant was presented with a blank piece of paper and the stack of sticky notes, in no particular order. They were asked to rank the 1) factors that they take into consideration when making instructional decisions, in order from most to least influential and 2) various work-related tasks, in order from most to least time

consuming, respectively. Instructions were further clarifed that it did not have to be linear, and that parallel rankings could be demonstrated by placing sticky notes next to each other. This methodology allowed for participants to manipulate and consider each of the factors/tasks, until they were satisfied that their ranking was an accurate as possible.

Finally, participants were shown a list of possible strategies used to cope with stress, which was generated by the researcher and informed by the literature. The participants were asked to circle any and all strategies that they had utilized. In addition, they were invited to write-in any other strategies that they could think of on the "Other:_____" space provided.

Analysis

Data generated from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed and coded for emerging themes and sub-themes (as they evolved and became more abstract). Of interest were common themes, outlier responses (and the probable explanations for such differing perspectives), and participants' real world experience and perspectives which echoed those evidenced in the related research. The interview transcriptions were then further analyzed and

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trends were identified within the themes/ sub-themes

(Coburn, 2001, p. 149; Crocco & Costigan, 2007,

pp. 518-520; Cwikla, 2007, p. 559; Gerstl-Pepin &

Woodside-Jiron, 2005, p. 233).

Participant responses were analyzed to illuminate the

impact, if any, that high-stakes testing and mandates have

had on the participating teachers and their work, and how

they cultivate resilience. In analyzing the data, I

employed a "phenomenological approach...whereby the data

reflect(s) the stakeholders' perceptions of their

experience" (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000, p. 387). To

ensure the accuracy of my presentation and any drawn

conclusions, I consulted with participants in what has

been referred to as "member checks," to verify that the

results are consistent with their perceptions

(Gerstl-Pepin & Woodside-Jiron, 2005, p. 233).

Data were triangulated (enhanced) with additional

data derived from informal conversations with colleagues,

observations, and aggregate data readily available to the

public (Crocco & Costigan, 2007, pp. 518-520;

Pease-Alvarez, Samway, & Cifka-Herrera, 2010,

pp. 319-320). The existing published aggregate data was my

source for profiling the district where the participants

teach, providing student demographic information.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Presentation of Findings

Primary Findings

Seven themes emerged through the analysis of the

data. These include: 1) Vocation/ sense of purpose (Why

did they go into teaching?); 2) Mandates and artifacts, or

the "dog and pony show"; 3) Professional autonomy; 4) Lack

of self-efficacy; 5) Misconceptions/ blaming of teachers;

6) Stress (causes of); and 7) Stress (manifestations of

and coping with).

Subsequently, nine sub-themes (as well as various

trends) related to particular themes were identified in

the data. Within the first theme, two sub-themes were

identified: 1) Teacher's commitment to their students and

2) Love of literature (or art, or other creative

pursuits). Within the third, the sub theme 3) Resistance

in the form of negotiating/brokering/mediating was

identified. In the fifth theme, the sub-theme

4) Advocating for multiple measures of success and

authentic assessment/ questioning the validity of

standardized test scores was recognized. Two sub-themes

were found within the theme of "Stress (causes of)":

5) Unrealistic expectations and 6) Conflict between internal values and external expectations. Finally, within the last theme, three sub-themes were identified as ways that the participants coped with stress: 7) Collaboration/ support of colleagues; 8) Perspective; and 9) Inspiration.

The sub headings that follow denote the themes. Any sub-themes and trends related to each theme are presented within the same section. In this way the primary findings are presented in an organized manner.

Vocation/ Sense of Purpose. When asked, "Why did you go into teaching?" most participants responded that they love children and wanted to make positive impact. Marilyn, a second-grade teacher, said that what drew her to and compells her to stick with teaching is the "opportunity to change somebody's life. It might be just one in my whole life, but it's more than I would get doing certain other jobs" (Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011).

As far as their educational priorities, or what they wanted to nuture in or impart to their students, three trends were found in the data: 1) to instill a life-long love of learning; 2) to foster in the kids confidence in themselves and in their dreams; and 3) to develop character education—teaching their students to be "good people." Bianca, who teaches fifth grade, stated, "I feel

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like if we can teach the kids to think, they'll be able to learn in all situations. I have a deep-seated belief that all kids can learn and succeed" (Bianca, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011). Phil, a kindergarten teacher, echoed this sentiment, "My personal goal is to instill in my students the idea that they can succeed. That they can be who they are; that they...don't have to live within somebody else's limits, or limitations" (Phil, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011). Mary, an intervention teacher for grades 4-6, clarified her purpose: "I want my students to have self-confidence, believe in themselves, and to be honest, compassionate and caring people" (Mary, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011).

A sub-theme that emerged is teachers' commitment to their students. Esperanza, a third grade teacher, shared:

> I think that having a relationship, for me, is most important—having a relationship with my students and my parents, because I think they need to know who I am and where I come from. And I also want to know who they are and where they come from. And just, (pauses) I really care about them a lot. (Esperanza, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

This commitment was consistently demonstrated as a concern for their students' health and well-being. Marilyn

commented on how her educational priorites have shifted, from the grandiose to the here-and-now:

I feel like I'm dealing with the more emotional thing of trying to make good people. Trying to educate them and give them what [they need]. Now it's like do they have enough food, and do they have this, and has anyone hugged them? Has anyone told them that they loved them?....I'm trying to give kids, maybe—I can't even say a sense of purpose, but maybe a sense of worth. (Marilyn, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

The participants commonly spoke of putting in extra hours and spending their own money to provide for their students or to enhance their educational experience. Several decided, with their grade level teams, that they would teach Extended Learning Opportunities (ELO) out of the goodness of their hearts. The district used to provide extra compensation for teaching ELO during lunch or after school, but these teachers noted that, while budget cuts have created a situation where there's no money, there's still a need. One participant tries to enhance the curriculum, without breaking the rules, by teaching social studies or foreign language during lunch recess, for students who are interested.

A second sub-theme that emerged is a love of literature, art, or other creative pursuits. All participants were either multi-lingual, well-traveled, had backgrounds in art, cherished the books they read, or a combination of the above. As trends, it was found that literature: 1) served as an inspiration to the teachers, who in turn 2) wished to have their students also "fall in love" with it. Isabella mused:

> ...a good book inspires me. I'm inspired by literature; I want so desperately to have kids have that love of literature. I want to share my love with them, because I feel like a lot of our students won't go places *physically*. Just because of the kind of community that they're being raised in. So if they could at least fall in love with books, and get to travel in their minds that way, it'll take them so much further than they ever thought possible.

(Isabella, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

Books were described by other participants as being "magical," "windows into other worlds," capable of "opening doors" and of "expanding minds."

The veteran teachers critiqued that students never get to experience the ark of a novel in its entirety, and that they don't identify with the stale excerpts available

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in the current adopted curriculum. They remember when
students learned how to read more naturally, gaining
skills in context; and were more intrinsically motivated
to succeed because it was meaningful to them. Marilyn
recalled:

> ...what kids *used* to be able to do, what *I* used to do
> with them. They still learned how to read. The
> strategies might have been a little bit different, it
> may not have been as "systematic," but they took
> their learning more personally. They wanted to be
> successful because they wanted to be able to get up
> and read that story without any mistakes....when I had
> author's chair. (Marilyn, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec
> 2011)

Finally, a third trend within the sub-theme of "Love
of Literature" was present throughout the data. There was
repeated and resounding lamentation of the lack of quality
literature that would be meaningful and relevant to the
students. They attested to a lack of books in favor of
excerpts. They missed being able to read-aloud to their
class. It frustrated them that skills and strategies are
prized over stories in the current adoption. Isabella
railed:

I think we've gone so far to the phonemic awareness

and excerpts and 'let's beat literature to death'

instead of 'let's fall in love with a book.' Let's

fall in love with a book! Let's hear an entire story

so we can actually say we have a favorite book. These

kids can't say that they have a favorite book,

they've never read one! Nobody ever says they have a

favorite excerpt. Nobody says that, 'I have a

favorite passage.' No! People have favorite *books*.

These kids haven't read a book. (Isabella, Personal

Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

Mandates and Artifacts: "The Dog and Pony Show."

Participants repeatedly and independently referred to the

artifacts required of them as a "dog and pony show."

Similar phrases including "song and dance" and "bells and

whistles" were also employed. They described the mandated

program "Full Speed Ahead," from which the artifacts

originate, as mechanic, rigid and as operating at a

frenetic pace. One participant likened it to "a

never-ending hamster wheel;" another stated that they felt

like they were "in the military;" a third felt like a

"robot."

Several metaphors akin to drowning illustrated how

overwhelmed the participants felt in trying to accommodate

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the directives of "Full Speed Ahead." They spoke of feeling "inundated." Phil frankly stated, "Look, the water level is right here (gestures at nose) and I'm getting ready to drown because *one more* millimeter will cut off all air supply" (Phil, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011). Kristen wryly attempts to motivate and comfort herself and her colleagues with the cheerful motto from the animated movie "Finding Nemo," "Just Keep Swimming! Just Keep Swimming!" (Kristen, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011).

Participants were consistent in reporting the walkthroughs and artifacts, both features of "Full Speed Ahead," as among the biggest contributors of job related stress. The district tried to implement "too much, too fast" without providing them enough training and support. Kristen said she felt a lot of pressure and isolation as a result of not feeling confident in what she was doing:

> I felt like a bad teacher because I wasn't doing what they wanted me to do. And I just felt like I put it up there on the walls for show, and hoped and prayed that they didn't come in when I was supposed to be teaching that. (Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

Another emerging trend was the enormous extra amount of work it took to create these artifacts. Phil sums up the exasperation consistent among the participants:

We're all feeling just major overwhelmed right now. *All* of us! Yeah, I'm overwhelmed with the "Full Speed Ahead," trying to keep up with the content and language objectives, trying to keep up with doing everything according to the instructional model, trying to see to each child's particular needs. And guess what?! With this particular program they're not giving me any more minutes! I still have twenty-four hours in a day! And my body's still insisting that I sleep six to eight hours a night. And thanks to some of this...I'm not even doing that. (Phil, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

In two inter-related trends, teachers found laughable (if it weren't so tragic) the notion that artifacts authentically demonstrate: 1) student learning or 2) teacher ability. With regard to exhibiting student learning, Phil decrees, "...what's really going on here is the stretching of these little minds that, I'm sorry, we can't open up their mind, take their brain and spread it all over the bulletin board!" (Phil, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011). With regard to teaching ability Mary explained that skilled teachers already do things like make lesson objectives explicitly known to their students, without having to have their hand forced. She chided:

'I'm complying! I'm complying! I'm a good teacher.'
'Look it, look it! She's a good teacher because she's
got her focus wall up! She's a good teacher because
she's got two sentence frames! She's a good teacher
because she's got current writing posted!' That
doesn't make me a good teacher! That doesn't show
anybody what my students are learning. (Mary,
Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

Teachers found that the materials they create
themselves to support instruction, such as charts,
diagrams and posters *are* helpful to their students, so
they do not resent the time and effort they require, as in
Esperanza's case:

I try to make them as colorful and attractive as I
can. Not so much for the district to see, it's for
the students, because I notice they really use them a
lot. When I see them using them I feel more obligated
to make them really "cool." It's a lot of work, it's
really time-consuming, but it's worth it, for me.
They're always asking me when I'm going to make a new
poster for them. They love it. (Mary, Personal
Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

However, the content and language objectives and
sentence frames were generally not perceived to be helpful

to their students. They were even percieved to be detrimental in a couple respects, namely in crippling students' ability to think and express themselves creatively, and in making them dependent upon awkward scaffolding. Marilyn shared her concerns:

> ...all these stupid sentences frames. I'm sorry, but when you take that away, then what do they do? That's one of my concerns with all this. I know they need a certain amount of support...I think giving them a sentence starter, or two, is one thing, but having it all be scripted like this doesn't teach them to be independent thinkers. It doesn't teach them how to explore. I don't think they even know how to put their own thoughts together, because they're so used to being told what to do and how to do it. I think we're squelching their ideas. I have a kid who I call "the professor," because he's totally absent-minded and he's unorganized and very quiet and smart and he does the world in a very different way. There's a way to nurture him and I know there is. But I don't have the freedom to nurture him, within this system.
> (Marilyn, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

Teachers agreed that, other than certain aspects which helped with organization, such as posted daily

schedules, they were mainly "only for show" and a big
"waste of time." They are not helpful to their teaching
practice. Phil:

> ...they try to tell me, 'Well, this is useful to you,
> as a reminder to you.' *Who* developed the lesson in
> the first damn place! I don't need to look at a
> bulletin board to see, 'Oh, *that's* what I'm supposed
> to be doing. Now I remember!...as I sit here and
> think about it—and my blood starts to boil a little
> bit—how insulting! How insulting! (Phil, Personal
> Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

Professional Autonomy. One obective of this study was
to investigate how teachers interpret curricular and
pedagogical mandates. Participants were asked to rank nine
factors in terms of how much weight they bear on their
instructional decision making: 1) Standard curriculum
practices (strategies/routines established by my
colleagues/ school culture, followed to provide
consistency for the students; 2) My own values/educational
philosopy; 3) Students' individual learning needs;
4) District directives; 5) What I deem, based on my own
professional experience/ opinion to be the most
appropriate instructional goals; 6) Grade level standards;

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7) Standardized tests; 8) The materials and resources available to me; and 9) Community concerns.

Figure 1 visually parallels what each participant produced when they ranked the factors taken into consideration when making instructional decisions. Recall that they did so by manipulating sticky notes, with said factors written on them, on a blank white page until they were satisfied that it reflected their actual (as opposed to idealized) practice. Thus, Figure 1 is essentially a visual amalgam of the participants' responses (See Figure 1).

Standard curriculum practices: strategies
/routines established by my colleagues/
school culture, followed to provide
consistency for the students

My own values/ educational philosophy | Students' individual learning needs

District directives

What I deem, based on my professional
experience/opinion, to be the most
appropriate instructional goals

Grade level standards

Standardized tests

The materials and resources available
to me

Community concerns

Note: Factors are arranged in order from most (top) to least (bottom)
influential.

Figure 1. A Visual Representation of Participants'

Rankings of Factors Taken into Consideration When Making

Instructional Decisions (Averaged)

Each participant's rankings are enumerated in Table 1. The average ranking of each of the nine factors is also reported. Furthermore, the table is organized so that the highest-ranked factor (that which, on average, influenced participants the most) is listed in the first row, at the top.

The participants were invited to provide any other factors that influence their instructional decision making, however only one participant chose to do so. Marilyn offered that the "Hunger, abuse, and poverty" that her students contend with very much affect her. (See Table 1 next page)

Table 1. Participants' Rankings of Factors Taken into Consideration When Making

Instructional Decisions

Factors	Kristen	Bianca	Marilyn	Mary	Isabella	Esperanza	Phil	Avg. Ranking
Standard curriculum practices (strategies/routines established by my colleagues/ school culture, followed to provide consistency for the students	1	1	1	3	4	1	2	1.86 (1st)
My own values/ educational philosophy	5	4	2	2	2	2	3	2.86 (2nd)
Students' individual learning needs	6	3	2	1	5	2	1	2.86 (2nd)
District directives	2	2	1	5	4	4	4	3.14 (3rd)
What I deem, based on my professional experience/opinion, to be the most appropriate instructional goals	4	4	4	3	1	3	5	3.43 (4th)
Grade level standards	8	1	6	2	6	1	1	3.57 (5th)

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Factors	Kristen	Bianca	Marilyn	Mary	Isabella	Esperanza	Phil	Avg. Ranking
Standardized tests	3	2	6	4	6	1	4	3.71 (6th)
The materials and resources available to me	7	3	3	4	3	3	6	4.14 (7th)
Community concerns	9	5	4	6	7	3	7	5.86 (8th)
Other:_____	N/A	N/A	Hunger, abuse, poverty.	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	

Several trends were apparent in the data, primarily
the commonly held perception that they are not being
treated as professionals. Isabella acknowledged:

I'm bitter about the fidelity requirement because the
state requires that I'm highly qualified—and I had to
jump through *all sorts* of hoops to get that little
label after my degree—"highly qualified." And yet,
they don't *treat* me as highly qualified because they
have made it so that, 'Here is what you're teaching.
You can *only* teach this. Teach nothing *but* this. And
teach *all* of this.' Well, all you needed, then, was
someone who knew how to read. You didn't need me to
spend all this money to get a degree to be highly
qualified, when all I have to do is lick my finger,
turn the page of the Teacher's Edition, and
persevere. That is not highly qualified behavior.
Highly qualified is using my expertise, and my
knowledge of the world, and my passion for things and
bringing that in. They took the creativity out of the
profession. (Isabella, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec
2011)

The second trend builds on the concept of
"constrained professionalism," to the detriment of
creativity and innovation within the classroom (Wills &

Sandholtz, 2009). Esperanza noted that she is saddened by not being able to implement all the exciting techniques for teaching literacy that she is currently acquiring in her Master's program. There exists a universal feeling that there is little joy in education today.

The most common concerns pertained to narrowed curriculum—no more room for art, music, even science now that they must "teach to the test." Participants argued that these subjects contribute to a well-rounded mind and an understanding of one's self and the world. Marilyn said that looking at old photos of her class and returning students reminded her of how it used to be, before this "slow erosion":

> The ways that I would teach then, the creativity I was allowed to do, inspired, and was a little contagious. I mean, I sent home neat things! I had kids winning art contests... They would just understand a *concept*. They wouldn't just understand a capital letter and a period. They understood that Japan was different than Africa. They understood that Antarctica was a place. They understood issues, because they could touch them. (Marilyn, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

It saddened her that her former students' most
cherished memories are all of things that no longer take
place in her classroom, meaning that her current students
would not have the opportunity to experience the same
transformative learning experiences.

When students see that they can be successful, it
"changes their conception of themselves—of what they're
capable of." Different students will excel in different
areas. The danger of only prizing Language Arts and
Mathematics is that some students will be disenfranchised.
Furthermore, other domains of learning (such as art or
sports) can facilitate the acquisition of skills in
Language Arts or Mathematics, via the motivation it
provides and the connections that are made. So asserted
Phil:

> We used to have music programs! We don't have time
> for that (now). And there's such—I'm going to start
> to cry, because there's such—(Starts to cry and
> struggles to compose himself). God, I didn't know I
> was this passionate! There's such value in music and
> art. That is the key, for so many kids: to learn to
> read, to understand math, to get the basic skills—
> they do it through this. They aren't doing it through
> some two-bit story out of Houghton Mifflin... That's

not how they're getting it. And for those kids who

are not voracious readers—who just can't wait to sit

down with "Pride and Prejudice" or whatever—who have

other ways (of learning about the world). They *are*

going to learn to read, they're going to learn math,

through auto mechanics, or through building

something, or through singing or through doing a

painting. They are going to learn that! But nobody's

thinking that because you can't take that and put it

on a goddamn piece of paper and judge it! And

determine data. So yeah, I do miss the old school. I

miss being able to do stuff—stuff that kids are going

to remember from school, *much* more than they're going

to remember their friggin' Summative Tests. (Phil,

Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

The final trend that emerged was that the

participants understood the district's position. They did

not blame their administrators, and most often describe

them as supportive. They recognized that these mandates

are coming down from on high and that everyone is "just

following orders." They try to "stay positive" and rise to

the challenge of being creative within the parameters set,

stating that they've always been allowed to use

"strategies."

Within the theme of professional autonomy, or lack

there of, data were analyzed for the subtheme of

resistance in the form of brokering/mediating/negotiating

mandates which affected their instructional decision

making. Participants responded that they modified the

curriculum by adjusting pacing, skipping lessons not

deemed to be worthwhile, and enhancing it with additional

materials and activities. Colleagues were cited as being

instrumental to aiding them in determining instructional

focus, effective strategies, and ways to enhance the

curriculum.

Lack of Self-Efficacy. It was astounding how often

participants divulged that they felt like an

"ineffective," "unauthentic," "surface," "novice,"

"first-year teacher all over again" and "a shit teacher."

To have a population of professionals so dedicated to

their craft, overworking themselves for the benefit of

their students, yet still feeling inept and guilty is

highly worrisome.

Two trends emerged in answer to what factors have

damaged these teachers' sense of self-efficacy:

1) feelings of inadequecy as a result of not perceiving

themselves as capable of implementing the district's

directives to their satisfaction and 2) feelings of guilt

over short-changing their students of an enriching
curriculum, engaging lessons and their energy and
attention.

Isabella described the decline in staff morale, a
result of their plummeting self-efficacy, upon the
implementation of "Full Speed Ahead." It started making us
as a campus, and me as a person feel like, "I am not an
effective teacher. I can't—I'm not doing anything right,
because if I was, I'd still love this. And, no" (Isabella,
Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011). Once a vocation that
they loved, teaching threatens to become a chore, which
causes them to question themselves.

By no means novice teachers, with an average of
eighteen years of experience, they responded frequently
that they, "just can't figure it out" and worry that they
are "not doing it right." The walkthroughs and comparing
student test scores across grade levels and across the
district has led them to feel "incredibly judged" "unsure"
"insecure" "vulnerable" "extremely tense" and "stressed
out."

> I feel overwhelmed a lot. And like I said, I feel
> like a first-year teacher. I actually have—and you're
> going to make me cry—(Starts to cry). Um. I've had to
> seek out people, because I've just felt like a shit

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teacher. I've felt really ineffective. Totally

ineffective. And it's really—(Pause) it's really hard

to feel really overwhelmed and ineffective at the

same time, when once upon a time I felt like an

effective teacher. That's been really, um, tough.

(Isabella, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

Marilyn addressed the second trend, when she

described how she feared that she was doing her students a

disservice, "I'd like to give them a good foundation that

they could go forward with. And I don't feel like I'm

doing that" (Marilyn, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011).

Teachers felt that the fast pace and mandated materials

did not allow them to differentiate for their students.

Misconceptions/Blaming of Teachers. One theme that

emerged through the analysis of the data was

misconceptions/ blaming of teachers. All participants

agreed that portrayals of teachers in the media are either

inaccurate or downright negative. Kristen remarked:

I feel like people say we work eight to three, and we

have all these holidays off. And we have summers off.

When in reality, we're working from 6:45 to 6 at

night, and we take stuff home and we're *constantly*

working. (Kristen, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

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Many also stated that they try to ignore it: "I've become a bit of an ostrich" "I don't know what they're saying about us—I don't want to know what they're saying about us."

Sadly, the borage of public scrutiny has made Esperanza feel ashamed:

Currently I wouldn't want anyone to know I'm a teacher, just because the way it seems like they're pointing all the faults—everything, all the bad things that's happening with the school system and with students, it seems like it's the teacher's fault. 'The teachers make a lot of money, and they have so much time off, and they only work five hours (a day)'—I don't like how the media's portraying teachers, currently. It's not right. They're always trying to blame someone. I guess it's our turn, this time. (Esperanza, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

Marilyn was relieved that her son had given up on his dream of becoming a teacher. Initially she was disappointed, but then she thought about how it's not what it once was and perhaps it is better that he be spared a job filled with too much stress, grief, and disparagement.

Several trends that pertain to the scapegoating of teachers in society and in the media were present,

including: 1) teachers having a much more positive

conception of the work they (collectively) do;

2) insisting that policy makers have no classroom

experience and are unqualified to perpetuate mandates and

judge them; 3) questioning the validity and value of

standardized test scores; 4) advocating for multiple

measures of success/authentic assessment; and finally

5) being outraged at being held accountable for factors

over which they have no control.

Bianca's observations illustrate the optimistic view

that the teachers in this study shared, with regard to

their (collective) effectiveness:

I think we're doing a fabulous job! I think we're

doing a wonderful job because I've seen kids from

kindergarten to 6th grade and seen how much they

learn and how much they grow and change. There's just

so much more than what's punched out in that number

(standardized test score), reported in the newspaper.

I see my kids every year—I'm floored by how much they

grow in one year! (Bianca, Personal Interview,

Nov-Dec 2011)

Isabella thinks that teachers are misrepresented as

being lazy and ineffective:

...people think that California teachers are terrible. And that we're just so excited to have tenure—and stop doing a good job because we can never get fired. I think we're misrepresented as people who don't care, and those are people who have never been in the classroom. They don't know the population of students we're teaching. All they see is the dropout rates in high schools in the counties across Southern California and they attribute that to teacher flaws. I don't think that they have the full picture of what teachers are doing, and having to do, and going through. They think that (the fact that) students are failing is directly related to bad teaching. And that is so sad, because I look around this campus—

...there's probably only (pauses) one person that I wouldn't want my kid in that person's class. That's. it!...*One!* If you had a workforce of ████████ amazing people and one—you have a pretty amazing workforce. That's pretty good odds. (Isabella, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

A major critique was that the people deciding what is appropriate for children, and who are handing down these mandates are not educators and do not understand the educational process. "There are...just natural factors

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that can't be governed by a timeline that Sacramento, Washington D.C., or somebody else has put forth" (Phil, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011) begins Phil, who continues, "the acquisition of a second language may take longer...Oh well! Deal with it!" (Phil, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011). Other "factors" offered by participants included poverty; parental involvement; and developmental readiness— "not everyone's going to be where they think they should be at five years, nine months of age" (Phil, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011) stated Phil soberly.

Each participant affirmed the fact that students are unique individuals with unique circumstances, not "puppets" "robots" "parrots" or "machines," as "factory school reform" measures would have them. Standardized test scores do not take into consideration the "myriad of reasons"/ "factors" and so do not reflect accurately the "whole picture." Bianca bore witness to this universally held perspective:

> In every single little life in here there's a hundred factors that that child brings to school every day that we don't have any control over. I had a little girl crying this week about her mom moving out. And saying that she's never going to see her mom

[again]...she just kept crying...It's things like that that don't measure on a test. And I just can't believe that anybody would think that students are just little robots that we're going to be able to punch out certain numbers...I know that they're taking that business approach of the bottom line. We're *not* a factory! You're dealing with *people*...that human element is the most important, what I value the most. I can relate to...the kids and understand them. When that little girl is crying because of her mom, that's what I can do: I can help her. I can present her with all of the standards but if I don't care about her, or help her with—(begins to cry). That's what makes a difference. (Bianca, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

Stress (Causes of). In this study two main causes of job-related stress among teachers were found: 1) unrealistic expectations and 2) conflict between internal values (professional principles) and external directives (mandated policies). Teachers described the expectations of them and the demands on their time similarly, as "unreasonable" "impossible" and "unrealistic." Bianca illustrates this sentiment:

It's almost as if they forget we are with these kids all day! We've got thirty kids to take care of everyday, and meet all those other demands that they place on us. People are going to be walking through, your room has to be ready, you're gonna be in training, you have to be observed, you have to meet with parents...So yes I've been overwhelmed! In that last training, well you know, you were there. I just started crying. I just—it's too much! It's unrealistic and I really wonder, does the district ever stop and think, how many hours are there in a day? And *when* are we supposed to do this? When?! And *and* these guys (gestures toward desks) should be our first priority, and they've become our *last* priority! They go to the bottom of the list because of everything else...that you have to keep up with on a day to day basis. (Bianca, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

Participants were also asked to rank various work-related tasks, in order from most to least time-consuming. This exercise was conducted similarly to the previous, in that the tasks were written on sticky notes, which were then given to the participants in no particular order. They were also provided with a blank

piece of paper, on which they arranged the sticky notes. In this manner the participants were able to consider and report how much of their time the following tasks demanded: 1) Preparing lessons; 2) Working on "artifacts" (i.e.: content objectives, language objectives, and sentence frames; "Focus Walls"; posting student work, data, standards; etc.); 3) Grading; 4) Getting to know my students; 5) Other: _____ (participants could write-in a response); 6) Collaborating with colleagues on administrators' terms (with the agenda directed by them); and 7) Staff development (attending trainings and workshops).

Once again, Figure 2 illustrates a visual representation of all rankings, whereas each participant's responses are recorded and averaged in Table 2. (See Figure 2 on the following page and Table 2 on the page thereafter).

Preparing lessons

Working on "artifacts" (i.e.: content objectives, lang. objectives & sent. frames; "Focus Walls"; posting student work, data, standards; etc.)

. Grading	Getting to know my students

Other:_____
(3 of 7 participants included "Other." See table 2 for what they wrote.)
Collaborating with colleagues on administrators' terms (with the agenda directed by them)
Staff development (attending trainings & workshops)
Interacting with colleagues on an informal basis

Note: Tasks are arranged in order from most (top) to least (bottom) time-consuming.

Figure 2. A Visual Representation of Participants' Rankings of Work-Related Tasks (Averaged)

Table 2. Participants' Rankings of Work-Related Tasks, in Order from Most to Least
Time-Consuming

Tasks	Kristen	Bianca	Marilyn	Mary	Isabella	Esperanza	Phil	Avg. Ranking
Preparing lessons	2	1	1	2	3	1	2	1.71 (1st)
Working on "artifacts" (i.e.: content objectives, lang. objectives & sent. frames; "Focus Walls"; posting student work, data, standards; etc.)	1	3	1	2	1	1	4	1.86 (2nd)
Grading	3	2	3	1	4	3	3	2.71 (3rd)
Getting to know my students	4	1	4	2	5	2	1	2.71 (3rd)

Tasks	Kristen	Bianca	Marilyn	Mary	Isabella	Esperanza	Phil	Avg. Ranking
Other:_____	N/A	N/A	2: Trying to adjust curriculum to student needs & meet district expectations	1: Thinking/ reflectin g on lessons, students, classroom issues, ways to meet student needs	N/A	N/A	6: Parent contact	3 (4th) (with only 3 of 7 including "Other")
Collaborating with colleagues on administrators' terms (with the agenda directed by them)	5	3	5	3	2	4	5	3.86 (5th)
Staff development (attending trainings & workshops)	6	4	5	3	3	2	5	4 (6th)
Interacting with colleagues on an informal basis	7	4	6	4	4	5	7	5.29 (7th)

With regard to unrealistic expectations of/demands on teachers, two related trends were found: 1) lack of time and 2) having to cover too much curriculum were both repeatedly cited as a source of stress. Teachers were overwhelmed at the breadth that they must cover—at the expense of depth. They felt at a loss because the pacing did not allow time for building background knowledge, re-teaching, or extension activities. Mary asserted that it was a hectic, harrowing pace at which they were expected to operate:

> I feel like it's a never-ending hamster wheel. In the classroom, there is no downtime. There is no time just to sit and reflect and think—either for myself or the students. You're constantly putting out little fires here and there. But it's more now than it ever was, because so much curriculum is packed—we're expected to cover so much! (Mary, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

Participants also identified the conflict between their professional principles (what they knew to be best practices) and the mandated policies that they must operate under as stressful. Isabella spoke about the self-inflicted double-entry teaching that she engages in:

Me wanting to get everything prepared that I know I

want and need to do and that competing with what they

tell me I have to do, because they don't always

match. So I feel like it's a double workload: what

they want me to have—which I don't think is really

necessary, and what I want to have—that I do think is

necessary. So I have two stacks of work that I need

to accomplish. And in order to look good when they

walk though, theirs has to be done, and mine suffers.

What I want to do suffers. What I think it right for

kids suffers. (Isabella, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec

2011)

They are frustrated that their focus has necessarily

been shifted from their students:

Things that you want to do with your students, and

sometimes that can be a stress for me. Right now,

with some of this stuff that I feel is absolutely

useless, and having to spend so much time on (it).

And just the feeling that I'm being judged as to

whether I'm a good teacher or whether I'm not a good

teacher, based on how I perform for some other

friggin' *adults*?! Who are creating these programs,

and not even for my kids?! That bothers me a lot.

That's a tremendous source of stress. (Phil, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

Stress (Manifestations of and Coping With). When asked if they felt stressed every participant answered with a resounding "yes." Many struggled to contain their emotions as they attested to specific manifestations of stress, including: grumpiness—taking it out on family members and/or their students; difficulty sleeping; needing to be prescribed anti-depressants; self-medicating with over-consumption of food and alcohol, and smoking.

Several teachers said that their families suffer repercussions of their stress. Kristen, for instance: "...I sort of shut down. So that takes effect when I get home, and I don't want to talk to my husband..." (Kristen, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011). Most teachers admitted that they inevitably take their stress out on their students as well. Two veteran teachers, who specified that they had only ever received one or two parent complaints in their previous decades of teaching, were horrified to realize that they had suddenly become "screamers" after getting numerous complaints from parents about "yelling" at their kids.

Stress has had actual physical manifestations for the participants of this study. One suffered a heart attack

and Isabella was among one of the participants who experiences pain as a result of prolonged tension, "I get serious stress pains up my shoulders and into my neck and down my spine. Periodically I actually get migraines" (Isabella, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011).

Whereas many participants stated things akin to "stress manifests itself in really ugly ways for me," they also attempted to channel constructive ways of coping with stress. A breakdown of all of the coping mechanisms employed by participants is shown in Tables 3 and 4, on the following pages. Table 3 pertains to the strategies that participants affirmed or declined using, as indicated on a checklist questionnaire. Participants' write-in responses were organized into common categories and are reported in Table 4 (See Table 3 and Table 4)

Table 3. Participants' Answers to the Question: "Have You Used Any of the Following Strategies to Cope With Stress?"

Strategies	# of Participants Who Indicated Yes	% of Participants Who Affirmed They Use This Strategy
"This too shall pass" -The pendulum swings, and/or I've outlasted previous pedagogical and/ or curricular overhauls.	6 (of 7)	86%
A sense of humor	6 (of 7)	86%
Working closely with my colleagues...	6 (of 7)	86%
to share ideas	4 (of 6)	67%
to divide workload	4 (of 6)	67%
to "vent" or for support	4 (of 6)	67%
to interpret what is expected of us and how best to accommodate those expectations in a realistic manner	3 (of 6)	50%
Maintaining a façade of strict compliance, while in the end I do what I feel is best for my students—regardless of what I'm "supposed" to do.	5 (of 7)	71%

Table 4. Participants' Responses to the Open-Ended "Other"

Categories of → Responses	Perspective	Time Management	Substances: food, alcohol & (prescription) drugs	Physical/ outdoor activity	Other
Sample Participant Responses→	"Remembering that this is 'just a job'." "Taking it one day at a time." "Getting through the day." 'Just to go home. Not take it with me, focus on my family.' 'My family is what's really important.' (4x)	"Prioritize" "Time management"	"Antidepressants & drinking" "antidepressants" "I drink more than I used to." "over consumption of alcohol" "Wine and French bread" "Eating too much" 'Junk food'	"Yoga" (2x) "Gardening" 'Exercise/ running'	"Happy hour" (2x) Note: in context of building community w/ colleagues, rather than just on the drinking itself. "Professional Counseling"

The most powerful techniques for coping with stress were revealed to be support of colleagues, maintenance of priorities/ sense of perspective, and inspiration.

A major trend was participants' mentioning the support of their colleagues (including administrators) as integral to their ability to be resilient in the face of "factory school reform." They found immense comfort in the knowledge that "we're all in this together." Collaboration and collective "sensemaking" were identified as helpful in

mitigating stress, while the importance of building

relationships inside and outside of work was found to be

instrumental in sustaining them through periods of stress.

An interesting trend was that participants thought

they must have been "lucky" or "fortunate" to have had

such supportive administrators and colleagues. However,

this was consistently reported—obviously not the exception

to the rule. They referred to their colleagues as

"friends" and even more often as "family." They vacation

together, and have supported each other through life

crises and professional upheaval. Isabella emphatically

answered:

> ...they're my favorite people in the *entire world!*
> ...(Starts to cry) We went through a lot together! If
> ██████ wasn't here, if ███████ wasn't here, if ████████████
> wasn't here, if ██████ wasn't here I couldn't have
> made it through...There are *amazing* people on this
> campus!...I *love* these people, with my whole
> core!....Were it not for the employment that I have
> here, I never would have met these people, and yet
> they're my breath! That is *huge!*...I didn't know I
> needed them. And I needed them just because I needed
> friends, but I didn't know I needed people in my life
> so desperately, for what we were about to go

through...And now that we've been through that, well,
it's a little bit like war buddies, I think. Now I
would do *anything* for these people! (Isabella,
Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

Another strategy that was cited as being helpful in
coping with stress is prioritizing. This goes for inside
the classroom, as in time management and prioritizing the
never-ending list of tasks, as well as for finding a
life-work balance. These teachers admittedly struggled to
do so, saying in one breath that they wish they "could not
care" and "could let it go" but continued to literally
lose sleep. Mary described the conundrum this way, "We all
say, 'Well this is just a job,' but if you're going to be
an effective teacher it's not just a job, it's a way of
life" (Mary, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011).

In the next breath they tried to balance the
propensity they share, to be "...a workaholic, which you
practically have to be, to be able to do what they want
you to do," (Marilyn, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011) as
pointed out by Marilyn. Ultimately, teachers learned that
they have to maintain certain boundaries, such as forcing
themselves to walk away from their desk to go have lunch
in the lounge and connect with colleagues. Mary spoke
about avoiding burnout, "I only have X amount of energy to

spend at school. I learned this a long time ago—X amount of energy to spend at school, and when that energy is done—stop!" (Mary, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011).

There is potential to feel overwhelmed because there is always more to do—a teacher's job never ceases, "There are no finished products in education," (Isabella, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011) at the same time, Isabella has had to establish an arbitrary boundary for the sake of balance: "I have a line, and my line is four o'clock. And if it can't happen by four, that's when I go back to my real life. I've got kids to take care of and a husband and I want my marriage to last. That is my priority and this is just my job" (Isabella, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011).

Keeping things in perspective was another powerful and universally employed technique for coping with stress. Similar to Isabella, the majority of participants spoke about the importance of focusing on life outside of work-on friends and family. Mary said she reminds herself that:

> It's only a job. I am replaceable...Yes I want to have a legacy of helping students and being remembered by students, but in the grand scheme of life this is—my kids are more important, my husband's

more important. My family's more important than this.

(Mary, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

In terms of perspective, participants also suggested keeping the big picture in mind, "What's the end goal?" There was a trend of participants reporting that they focus on just "getting through the day," "one day at a time."

The third and final main factor that served to protect the teachers in this study from the onslaught of stress was finding inspiration to sustain them. Marilyn shared what, for many, makes it all worthwhile:

What inspires me is, the little miracles that sometimes can still happen, when somebody is just completely faltering. And then, between the network of parent, teacher and kid trying the energy and effort that goes into that, sometimes it actually makes a difference. It doesn't always make a difference. But when you see it make a difference, it's really emotional. It's really exciting.

(Marilyn, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

Other participants expressed this as "seeing the light bulb go on" "witnessing that hunger for knowledge" "seeing a child make great strides." Esperanza described her motivation:

I'm inspired by my students. Every day when I go to

teach, whether it's in the academic (realm) or just

in their overall life. I think it's just, for me, to

make sure that I'm guiding them and I'm seeing what I

want to see from each one of them. That's my energy,

my boost; that really inspires me to continue.

(Esperanza, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

Not only was the knowledge that they were making a

positive impact in the lives of their students inspiring,

but teachers in this study were inspired by the students

themselves. Isabella cooed, "That innocent love, that

truthfulness that's in little kids—oh, it charms me!"

(Isabella, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011). Kristen,

too, is delighted by her students:

I always don't want to come back from the summer. And

I always realize the first day that I come back that

the kids inspire me because they are so enthusiastic

about learning, and they want to be there. And just

their drive for life and their happiness and kind of

like their—I don't know—their happiness as a child,

it's so simple. It inspires me. (Kristen, Personal

Interview, Nov-Dec 2011)

Some participants were replenished by more abstract

concepts, things outside the field of education. So said

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Isabella, "I like beautiful things, all sorts, like artistic, nature...I like creating things, and then spiritual things. The spiritual side of things intrigues me" (Isabella, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011). And Phil: "Acts of life inspire me. They could be acts of kindness" (Phil, Personal Interview, Nov-Dec 2011).

Secondary Findings

Those participants who themselves were not part of what would be considered dominant society (white, native-English speaking, Protestant, heterosexual), were the same participants who were *most* empathetic of their students' life circumstances.

To be clear, all teachers expressed that attending to their students' basic needs for food, safety, love, and acceptance were first and foremost in their minds. All participants indicated that it is most important to them to build a relationship with their students, get to know them individually, encourage them, and to teach them how to be honest, compassionate human beings.

It was remarkable, however, how those teachers who experienced marginalization on account of their own heritage, identity or orientation, were the most conscientious: not to fall into the trap of commonly-held deficit views; to maintain relationships and communication

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with parents; of the fact that the adopted curriculum does not reflect the diversity of our students, or teach values of justice and equality; to encourage students to become who it is that they are, and to refuse to accept imposed limitations and what that is/ what that will be.

Discussion of Findings

Discussion of Primary Findings

It occurred to me that age and experience may influence how teachers cope—their sense of self-efficacy and levels of stress or distress as they perceive mandates being in direct conflict with their ideals. Five of seven participants, with the youngest two being the only exceptions, broke down in tears, overcome with emotion or frustration at one or more points during our conversations. The younger, less-experienced teachers, who came into the profession after NCLB had already been enacted, were more pragmatic. They had an attitude of 'I do what I have to do' and focused on maintaining a sense of perspective to sustain them through the high-stress climate.

In contrast, the more experienced teachers were absolutely heartbroken at not being able to utilize a wealth of materials and techniques to expose their

students to meaningful learning experiences. They could recall their old room environment, the enthusiasm of their former students and what visiting students would return to rave about. These recollections pose an ever-present, stark contrast to their lived realities.

Having decades of experience made them all the more vulnerable to the detrimental effects of eroded self-efficacy. They lamented that the skills they've developed over the course of their careers are seemingly irrelevant and worthless. They are distraught to find themselves being "judged" in a context where they suddenly feel inept.

Discussion of Secondary Findings

There exists a fine line between the pitfalls of having a deficit view and not acknowledging the very real challenges associated with poverty that our students and their families contend with on a daily basis. To insist that all we need is high expectations and accountability to have every child "perform" on standardized tests is to dehumanize our students and take education out of the social context to which it belongs. At the same time, however, educators must be mindful not to take up old assumptions as their own and thus maintain the status-quo.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

Summary

Working from a conceptual framework informed by critical pedagogy, this study sought to explore how teachers interpret and negotiate top-down mandates; the effects of such mandates on self-efficacy, professional autonomy, and stress; and finally, what sources of inspiration and/or support help teachers cultivate resilience.

The design of this study was qualitative, collecting data primarily from semi-structured interviews with seven public elementary school teachers from a Southern California district classified as "Program Improvement" under NCLB. The interviews were audio taped, transcribed and then analyzed and coded for emerging themes, sub themes, and trends.

Addressing the research questions, the results indicated that participants viewed high-stakes assessment policies, and the restrictive curricular and pedagogical mandates that go hand in hand with them, as failing to address the needs of the children that they served, many of whom were learning English and were of low

socio-econimic status. It was also revealed that the

current educational policy climate is stressful and

detrimental to the participants' sense of well-being and

job satisfaction. Finally, the three most oft cited coping

techniques were found to be: 1) support of colleagues

(both to interpret and accomplish (broker/ mediate/

negotiate) external expecations, as well as for general

moral support); 2) the maintenance of a life-work balance

(perspective); and 3) finding inspiration e.g., students'

zeal for life and learning; as well as art, literature and

other creative or humanistic pursuits.

Implications

Maintaining sound practices in the midst of

restrictive curricular and pedagogical mandates requires

self-efficacy, professional expertise, and experience.

Thankfully, there are many teachers who remember a

different educational policy climate, one where: the

education of the "whole child" mattered; childhood was

prized as a time of curiosity and joy; teachers'

creativity and expertise were valued; and their

professional discretion was honored.

One salient implication is, will this institutional

memory wane? As veteran teachers retire, experienced

teachers are lost to attrition, and educators of all ages
resign themselves to the pressure of prescriptive policy,
will the art of teaching be lost? Will future educators
know how to design lesson plans based on students'
inquiry? Will they have the skill set necessary to
coordinate enriching educational experiences in the form
of field trips and school plays? Will they be able to
create a classroom environment that is cheerful and
stimulating?

From my own experience, I can testify that what I
learned while earning my credential has proven to be all
but obsolete. My teacher education program did not prepare
me for the high-stakes reality of teaching in
"low-performing" schools that serve poor and ethnic
minority children. I realize now that the seemingly
outdated "getting to know you" activities; "brainteaser"
sponge activities; emphasis on open-ended discussion
questions, "grand conversations," and cooperative learning
groups; classroom research projects which engaged
higher-order thinking skills (and which developed over the
course of days or even weeks); and *quality* children's
literature were a taste of what teaching used to be.

Our cohort's advisor wanted to equip us with pedagogy
that would instill a life-long love of learning. I

remember her expressing frustration at the restrictions she encountered from the schools where we were assigned to student-teach. She wanted us to develop a diverse repertoire, yet the schools, in their early days of being labeled PI were struggling to contend with all that that entails.

Assigned to design several thematic, cross-curricular units, the experience of making connections and drawing from a wealth of resources was unique. My career as an actual classroom teacher, however, has meant primarily teaching math and language arts in prescribed strands and blocks of time, according to a district-wide pacing and assessment guide—living and dying by the sword that is standardized testing.

How can these skills and techniques, the tools of the trade—better yet the arsenal of an artist—be preserved? Will teachers maintain a culture that is reflective, critical, committed, and ensure the dignity of our profession?

Recommendations for Further Research

I think it would be fascinating to study whether a culture of intellectualism and skepticism toward "factory school reform" measures exists among public school

educators, and how it may be perpetuated. Perhaps it would be similar to how, extraordinarily, the culture of childhood is propagated from one generation to the next, without interference from adults. For instance: the same sing-song, rhythmic hand-slapping games, and chants exist in schools on both the north and south side of town. Consider as well how a younger relative can recite a schoolyard rhyme that you had not thought about in years. Granted, a few words may have changed through the process of evolution. Still, you are left awestruck, transported right back to your days in early elementary.

But even more pressing is the need to research and develop accountability alternatives that support authentic learning and skillful teaching. Teachers should be afforded professional autonomy and their input should be considered when shaping future policy (Lucinda Pease-Alvarez et al., 2010, p. 329).

Gitlin and Margonis (1995) affirmed:

Our interpretation of the insights of resistant teachers indicates that reformers might be better off focusing on the preconditions for reform: giving teachers the authority and time they need to teach in ways they find educationally defensible. The educational hierarchy ought to be transformed so that

school administrators and district personnel support

the efforts of teachers, and teachers' workloads

should be decreased to allow time for planning,

curriculum development, and innovative pedagogy.

(p. 403)

Conclusion

It is clear, from the related research and the

findings of this study, that public school educators

remain committed to equitable educational opportunities

for all their students. Even when policy mandates seek to

arrest their professional autonomy, teachers lament the

frenzied, narrow focus on that which is tested, and the

imposition of scripted curriculum which fosters rote

rather than critical thinking skills. When the needs of

their diverse student population—particularly their EL,

ethnic minority, and/or economically disadvantaged

students—are not met, dedicated educators are compelled to

seek a more balanced approach to literacy instruction.

The research demonstrates how instrumental

communities of practice are in supporting teachers through

the challenge of raising student achievement in a

high-stakes policy climate. Teacher resistance stems from

professional principles, and manifests itself in the form

of collective "sensemaking," as well as brokering/ mediating/negotiating curricular and pedagogical mandates.

Contributing to stress among teachers are: eroded professional autonomy; the subsequent lack of self-efficacy; criticism in the public sphere; unrealistic expectations and conflict between teachers' internal values (professional principles) and external expectations (top-down mandates determined by policymakers—not educators). Stress manifests itself physically and emotionally in teachers, from aches and pains, to insomnia, to depression, mood swings, and withdrawal. Self-destructive (junk food, alcohol, and smoking) and constructive (exercise, humor) behaviors alike are employed, but the most effective strategies for coping with stress were demonstrated to be: support of colleagues, priorities/ perspective, and finding inspiration.

These findings are significant in that consistency in the emerging themes shed some light on how teachers, charged with the challenging task of raising student achievement as measured by high-stakes testing, can cultivate resilience. Resiliency in this high-stakes policy climate is key to sustaining our most skilled, creative and committed educators, without whom our

students, and by extension the future of our society, will suffer.

The participants in this study inspired me with their testimonies. They taught me about the importance of orienting oneself, less you be overcome with stress; feelings of inadequacy; and guilt over subjecting your students to a joyless, subpar education. I will keep their kernels of wisdom with me, keeping in mind the importance of: ideological clarity; developing a personal educational philosophy; faith in one's professional judgment and abilities; generosity of the heart; and an undying commitment to building our students up. Fortifying myself thus, I hope to make a difference the way these courageous and caring teachers have.

APPENDIX A

NOTICE OF INFORMED CONSENT

College of Education
Department of Language, Literacy and Culture

Informed Consent

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate the impact of school reform efforts on teachers—their teaching practices, the materials that they utilize and their overall sense of well-being. This study is being conducted by Jenny Brooks under the supervision of Dr. Flores and Dr. Rodriguez, Professors of Education, California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino.

Purpose: The objective of this project is to explore public school educators' perspectives on the challenge of raising student achievement in the current high-stakes policy climate.

Description: Participants will be interviewed regarding their experiences in teaching. Questions will pertain to: their own early educational experiences; their educational philosophy; how they make instructional decisions; and what supports (ie: collaboration, staff development, etc.) they perceive as helpful in coping with any stress.

Participation: Participation is completely voluntary. Teachers have the right to refuse participation at any time, even after agreeing to participate. If you decide to withdraw from the study, there is no penalty.

Confidentiality: Every effort will be taken to ensure complete confidentiality. Participants will be able to choose the time and location of their interview, so that privacy is protected. Participants will only be referred to by their pseudonym (fake name); all identities will be protected. The interviews will be audiotaped, to allow the researcher to better collect and analyze the data. However, once transcribed, the tapes will be erased. No one except the researcher will listen to them.

Duration: The interview will take approximately 1 to 1.5 hours to complete, depending on whether follow-up questions or more conversation evolves beween the researcher and the participant. The initial interview and will consist of a predetermined list of questions asked of every participant. Research will take place during the CSUSB Fall 2011 quarter, beginning on November 05, 2011, and ending on December 1, 2011.

Risks: There are no significant forseeable risks.

Benefits: The individual does not stand to gain anything by participating, other than contributing to knowledge that may benefit the teaching profession and the institution of public education in general.

Results: Results will be used for educational purposes, to fulfill the requirements to obtain a Master's of Arts degree in Bilingual & Cross-Cultural Education. Information will be presented to the aforementioned advising professors, and the department of Grad Studies at California State University, San Bernardino. Results can be obtained by contacting Jenny Brooks.

If you have any questions about this study, or would like more information, please feel free to contact the researcher, Jenny Brooks, or her advisors, listed below. Thank you.

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(vertical text, right margin:) CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD COMMITTEE APPROVED 10/18/11 VOID AFTER 10/17/12 *Ramona Ward, Ph.D* CHAIR IRB# 11022

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APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(Notes to the researcher are in parenthesis, and will not necessarily be stated to the participant.)

Personal Bio Information:
- (Note age range & gender)
- How many years have you been teaching?
- What was your undergraduate major?
- What credential(s) do you have?
- Do you have a Master's degree? If so, in what? If you wrote a thesis, what was the topic?
- What is your current position (what grade/subject)?
- Where did you grow up?
- Can you briefly describe your early schooling experiences, as a student?
- What type of schools did you attend? For example: public vs. private, urban vs. rural, high vs. low SES, diverse student ethnic and/or linguistic backgrounds...?

Vocation/Sense of Purpose/ Educational Philosophy and Goals
- Why did you do into teaching?
- What do you see as your personal goal or purpose, as a teacher? What are your educational priorities?
- What inspires you? (This can be what inspires you, specifically, in your role of teacher; or as a human being—what inspires and informs your outlook on life, in general.)
- Has your experience in the classroom differed from your original vision? How?
- Do you ever wish you had chosen a different career path?
- Have you considered leaving the profession? Why?

Curriculum Mandates & Instructional decisions:
(It will first be necessary to define terms for the participant, including: "fidelity" and "artifacts.")

- How do you feel about the district's emphasis on "Full Program Fidelity"? [1]
  - Does your practice closely follow the methods of your school's literacy program?
  - Do your own beliefs about teaching literacy correspond with your school's literacy program? If not, where do they diverge?
  - Does your administrator and/or school culture support you to experiment with different approaches to literacy instruction? [2]
  - What principles or beliefs would you say influence your work and/ or your approach to teaching literacy?"
  - Do you find yourself making adjustments to the:
    - (For elementary teachers): "Language!" or Houghton Mifflin Reading program?
    - (For secondary teachers): the adopted curriculum for your subject?
    - If so, what kind of adjustments are you making?

- Why are you making those adjustments?[3]
  - o Has anyone helped or enabled you to make adjustments to this program? How have they helped you?[4]
- Which of the following factors do you take into consideration, when making instructional decisions: (Write these factors on sticky notes & ask participants to rank them, from highest to lowest, by arranging them on a blank piece of paper. Rankings need not be completely linear, parallel (equal) rankings are allowed. The researcher will note #s 1-10, 1 being the highest, in the boxes. To denote parallel rankings, list the number that corresponds to the level (top of the page being 1...) for both/all factors.)
  - ☐ Students' individual learning needs
  - ☐ Community concerns
  - ☐ Your own values/educational philosophy
  - ☐ What you deem, based on your professional experience/opinion, to be the most appropriate instructional goals
  - ☐ The materials and resources available to you
  - ☐ Standard curriculum practices (strategies/routines established by your colleagues/school culture, followed to provide consistency for the students)
  - ☐ Grade level standards
  - ☐ Standardized tests
  - ☐ District directives
  - ☐ Other:_____
- How do you spend your time at school—Can you rank how much time you spend:
  - ☐ Preparing lessons
  - ☐ Grading
  - ☐ Interacting with colleagues on an informal basis
  - ☐ Collaborating with colleagues on administrators' terms (with an agenda directed by them)
  - ☐ Staff development (attending trainings & workshops)
  - ☐ Getting to know your students
  - ☐ Working on "artifacts" of compliance (i.e.: content objectives, language objectives, & sentence frames; "Focus" Walls; posting student work; posting data; posting standards; writing lesson plans).
  - ☐ Other _____
- To what degree do you feel that the "artifacts" required of you enhance your teaching practice? That is, are they useful to you, or only for show, or how would you describe the breakdown?

High-stakes testing:
- Do you have concerns about accountability measures that have been implemented in your district? (For instance the Essential Standards Test (EST)...)
- Did you have to give some things that you used to do in your class up to make room for test-prep and test-taking? Such as?

- How to you feel about the prospect of teachers being evaluated by their students' standardized test scores?

Stress/ Burnout:
- Would you say that you are stressed? (Ask about specific manifestations/ symptoms of stress? And the degree?)
- What are some of the sources of stress and pressure that you feel?
- What would you say are the factors that interfere with your ability to fulfill expected instructional/accountability outcomes? (i.e.: standardized test scores/ meeting API/ AYP goals, poverty, truancy, transiency...Do not offer these—leave it open ended.)
- Do you feel teachers are portrayed accurately by the media?
   o If not, how has your experience as a teacher differed from society's conception?

"Critical Incidents"[5]:
(It will first be necessary to define, for the participant, the terms: "self-efficacy" and "mandates.")
- Can you recall a time when your sense of purpose and/ or self-efficacy were threatened or damaged by mandates?
- Can you recall a time when you felt a conflict between your personal values and what you hope to contribute as an educator and what you're expected to do?
- Can you recall a time when you or another colleague questioned or spoke out against these mandates? How did it make you feel? What was the mood in the room, if other teachers were present? How did the authorities/ administrator(s) react?
- Have you ever felt isolated, unsupported or vulnerable? How so?
- Do you feel that your professional reputation would suffer for not complying? Have you ever experienced punitive action from an administrator for questioning policies, voicing concern, or resistance?
- Have you ever felt overwhelmed? Can you give an example?

Coping/Resilience:
- Have you used any of the following strategies to cope with stress?
   □ "This Too Shall Pass" (The pendulum swings, and/or I've outlasted previous pedagogical and/or curricular overhauls.)
   □ A sense of humor
   □ Working closely with my colleagues...
      ▪ to interpret what is expected of us and how best to accommodate those expectations in a realistic manner
      ▪ to share ideas
      ▪ to divide workload
      ▪ to "vent" or for support
      ▪ other:_____

- ☐ Maintaining a façade of strict compliance (lesson plans, "artifacts" serving as evidence of implementation) while in the end I do what I feel is best for my students, regardless of what I'm "supposed" to do.
  - ☐ Other:_____
- What else do you find is helpful to you to cope with stress and maintain perspective?

Support:
- Do you prioritize building and maintaining relationships with your colleagues? Why? How do you do so?
- Do you prioritize reaching out to your students' parents?
  - o If yes: Why? How do you do so?
  - o If not: Why? What are the challenges?

Wrap-Up
- Is there anything else that you'd like to share about your experiences?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Notes

1-4: Adapted from Pease-Alvarez, Lucinda, Samway, K. D., & Cifka-Herrera, C. (2010). Working within the system: teachers of English learners negotiating a literacy instruction mandate. *Language Policy*, 9(4), 313-334. doi:10.1007/s10993-010-9180-5

5: Adapted from 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.

Balance Developed by Jennifer Brooks

APPENDIX C

TRUDEAU COMIC

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