LISTEN TO THE TEACHERS: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHING AND THE TESTING POLICY OF THE 2001 NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act is the most recent federal push to reform America’s public schools through standardized testing and accountability measures. The problem is that this policy impacts practice without including teachers in the dialogue. This means that the legislation of NCLB creates a discrepancy between teacher practice and policy objectives, thus leaving teachers the classroom as the one place for autonomy.

Located in sociocultural and critical ways of knowing and incorporating the feminist principles of research, this dissertation utilized collaborative methods to explore the lived experiences of five urban Midwest teachers implementing the testing policy within NCLB. Teacher participants represented varying grade levels, teaching experience and racial and ethnic backgrounds in an effort to depict the diverse make-up of the teaching population in an urban city. Through intense reflection, questioning, and dialogue, teacher participants demonstrated the particular ways that practice is getting pushed by the testing policy and the ways that teachers are exercising their agency and pushing back. Moreover, teachers also explained the dilemmas of teaching bilingual and special education students that are emerging through the testing policy. The experiences of the teacher participants demonstrated how collaborative research methods grounded in teacher meanings can create a safe political space for teacher empowerment and
development, thus, impacting teacher practice and creating better informed policy and research. Not only do the findings portray how qualitative research can be more purposeful to teachers but the narratives also serve policy and scholarship alike. The data describes what supports are needed for teachers within the policy as well as the ways that collaborative methods can create a “realism bridge” between practice, theory, and policy. This approach is significant because it answers teacher calls for realistic research and realistic policy. Finally, the teacher narratives contribute to the understanding of the enactment of this fairly new legislation by providing teacher perspectives to the call in the literature for exploration of the implementation issues surrounding NCLB.
Dedicated to God, who gave me the talents, hope, drive, and faith to believe,
   To my mother, who taught me that nothing is impossible,
          To my friends and family,
   To my students who gave me a purpose and a connection to humanity,
          And, most of all,
   To Mark, my husband and best friend,
For your unconditional love that enables me to be who I am and more. Thank you for your patience and belief that this would always happen.
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### TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract……………………………………………………………………………………ii  
Dedication………………………………………………………………………………...iv  
Acknowledgments…………………………………………………………………………v  
Vita………………………………………………………………………………………..vi  
List of Tables……………………………………………………………………………xiii  
List of Figures…………………………………………………………………………...xiv  

**Chapters:**

1. Research Significance……………………………………………………………..1  
   Statement of the Research Problem:  
   Teachers and the Policy Process…………………………………………..3  
   Brief Overview of the Dissertation Design…………………………………7  
   Research Significance: Why Explore How Teachers Experience Standardized  
   Testing Within the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act………………………….8  
   Teacher Culture as a Context for Policy………………………………………8  
   Policy Implications……………………………………………………………..10  
   Scholarly Contributions………………………………………………………11  
   Bridging Theory and Practice: Researcher Positionality……………………..13  
   Sociocultural Approach to Policy: Assumptions and  
   Purpose for Teachers and the Testing Policy…………………………………..16  
   Critical Theory and Policy: Assumptions and Purpose  
   For Education and Research in Regards to Testing Policy  
   Within NCLB…………………………………………………………………….20  
   Conclusion……………………………………………………………………….24  

2. Teacher Culture, Agency, and NCLB: A Review of the Literature……………..27  
   The Culture of Teachers: Factors Affecting Leadership  
   and Policy……………………………………………………………………...28  
   Current Policy Implementation: Teacher Response, Agency and
Positionality and Role in Teachers’ Lives
and Classrooms.................................................108
Document Analysis: Texts from Teacher Participants
and Diversity Place School.................................112
Data Analysis.........................................................114
Trustworthiness Criteria........................................119
Conclusion.........................................................124

4. Teacher Stories and Assumptions: Practice Getting Pushed By
And Pushing Back at Testing Policy.........................125

Policy, Teachers/Practice, and Research:
Three Intersecting Circles of Education....................127
Teacher Participants..............................................128
  Daisy: Third Grade Bilingual Class.........................130
  Isabel: Fifth Grade Language Arts/Social Studies........131
  Bianca: Sixth Grade Social Studies.........................132
  Susan: Seventh Grade Social Studies.......................132
  Umberto: Seventh/Eighth Grade Special Education......133

“It’s difficult to remain an intelligent person.”
Teacher Practice, Testing Policy, and Teacher Agency.....135
School Environment and Teacher Culture....................137
  School Activities as Interruptions to
  Practice or Ways to Collaborate?.........................137
  Teacher Stress Levels as Affected
  By Implementation and Timing of
  Testing Policy................................................141
  “We get inundated with paperwork. It becomes
too much.” Daily Time Constraints on Teacher
  Practice.........................................................145
Testing Practice as a Response to Testing Policy...........148
  Constraints in Developmentally Appropriate
  Instruction with Testing: Ways that Teacher
  Practice was Pushed.........................................149
Ways that Teacher Practice Pushed Back
  at the Constraints in Developmentally Appropriate
  Instruction with Testing....................................155
Teacher-Scripted Instruction in Summer
  School: Ways that Testing Again Limited
  Developmentally Appropriate Practice and
  Practice Pushed Back........................................157
Difficulties in Teaching Culturally Relevant
  Practice: Test Scores and Student Culture..............159

“You can’t meet the kids where they are.”
Curriculum Selectivity as a Response to
the Pressures of Testing Policy............................162
of Teaching Bilingual Students…………………………………………………199
Language Instruction: Can Teachers Attend to Both Native Language and Test Language?…………………200
“Why should I, just because they don’t speak English, start them off in a first grade book?” Testing Policy Timeline and Expectations for Bilingual Students……………..202
Parental Inexperience with Testing Policy Hinders Parental Support of Bilingual Students with Testing…………….204
“We’re not meeting the needs of our bilingual students.” School Response to the Challenges of Testing Policy and Bilingual Education………………………………………………………205
Teacher Response to the Challenges of Testing Policy and Bilingual Education……………………………………206
“We’re losing good potential teachers.” Testing Policy and Cultural Norms………………………………………………………….208
Conclusion………………………………………………………………………...210

6. Collaborative Research: Blurring the Roles in Research and Purpose………..213
Collaborative Research and Teachers: A Political Space for Change and Empowerment………………………………215
“She’s from this world. She’s a teacher.” Blurred Role of Researcher as a Form of Access and Agency………………216
“Did you have your own room in the olden days, Mrs. P?” The Blurred Role of Teacher/Researcher as a Complete Member of the Classroom……………………………………221
“You could spend time with us even when the [teacher] is not here.” Blurred Researcher Role and Student Relationships in Collaborative Research…………………………224
Blurred Role of the Researcher as a Tool for Checking Researcher Subjectivity…………………………….226
“Mrs. P. knows what 2 do and what not 2 do.” Researcher Perceptions of the Blurred Role as Complete Member of the Classroom……………………………………229
Back and Forth: Variance in Teacher Construction of the Blurred Researcher Role…………………………………233
Timing of Testing Policy as a Construction Researcher Role………………………………………………234
Researcher Role as an Expert Transformed Through Collaborative Research………………………………236
“Thanks for listening. I really think what YOU’RE doing will make a difference.” Tensions in Researcher Role and Participant Rapport………………………………239
Contributions of the Blurred Role for Practice and Research……………………………………….241
Impact on Cultural Identities……………………………………………………244
Influence on Individual Change/Praxis ........................................... 246
Conclusion .................................................................................. 248

7. Reflections and Implications: Realistic Policy, Realistic Research
   and Realistic Practice ............................................................... 250

   Summary of Data Findings ....................................................... 252
   The Circle of Policy: Practice Pushed and Practice Pushed Back .... 253
   The Circle of Practice: Issues of Diversity and Equity ................. 254
       Dilemmas of Teaching Special Education Students ............... 255
       Dilemmas of Teaching Bilingual Students ......................... 256
   The Circle of Research: Collaboration and Teacher Empowerment .... 257
   Implications of the Study ....................................................... 260
   Meaning for Teacher Educators: Training and Professional
       Development Efforts ......................................................... 260
       Teacher Educators and the Call for Community ................. 261
       “Make sure you tell them what it’s really like in the
       classroom. Make it real.” Teacher Educators and
       Reflective Practice ............................................................ 262
       Teacher Educators as Grounded in Public School
       Classrooms ......................................................................... 264
   Administrators and Providers of Professional Development Efforts .... 265
   Policy Implications of Teacher Lived Experiences with Testing
       Policy within NCLB ........................................................... 268
       Policy Sustainability and Teacher Supports ....................... 269
       Policy and the Economic Effects of the Local Community .... 271
       Policy and the Purpose of Schools ...................................... 273
   Implications of the Study for Scholarly Understandings
       of Policy and Practice ....................................................... 275
       Sociocultural Approach to Policy and the Role of the
       Researcher ......................................................................... 276
       Collaboration as a Space for Critique ................................ 277
       The Realism Bridge: Approach that Crosses Policy,
       Practice, and Theory ........................................................ 278
   Reflections on the Study ........................................................ 281
   Limitations of the Study and Implications for Future Studies .......... 281
   Crossing the Borders of the Study from the Perspective
       of the Researcher ............................................................. 286
   Conclusion ............................................................................. 292

Bibliography ............................................................................. 294
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 4.1 Participant Information
- 5.1 Dilemmas of Teaching Special Education and Bilingual Education Students with the Testing Policy
- 6.1 Summary of Researcher Roles
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Taxonomy of Ways that Teacher Practice is Impacted by the Testing Policy of NCLB</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>The Intersection of Policy and Practice as Applied to Diversity and Equity</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Recursive Interaction of Teachers/Practice with Research</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

“The whole failed history of modern education reform - from the prescriptive lesson-plan formats of the 1970s to the restructuring plans in the 1980s to the state testing and curriculum of the 1990s - has addressed the ‘needs of the child’. It has paid hardly any attention to the work of the teacher, the one critical player in the school who makes the biggest difference” (Marantz-Cohen, R., 2002, p. 532).

As facilitators of democratic ideals perpetuated through public schooling, teachers and teaching are the foundation upon which our democratic culture is built. Each plays an important role in shaping student learning and transmitting cultural norms. However, federal education policy has broadened its role within state educational policy in an effort to standardize teacher quality and pedagogy along with student performance. The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act aims to accomplish these goals for all students - particularly for students within the following four categories - race, poverty levels, special education and limited English proficiency. President Bush states that the law will ensure accountability in schools, flexibility in funding opportunities, an increase in parental control over local education, and provide a qualified teacher in every classroom (Mathis, 2003). The tenet of the reform is that through standardization of curriculum and state accountability measures derived from data of standardized testing that teachers, school, and subsequently, student learning will improve.
During such legislative change, it is important to note that the act of teaching is not a standardized process that implements certain criteria and can guarantee particular results through policy objectives. There is no formula that removes the socio-historical lives of students and teachers from their interactions during the schooling process. Each day in the classroom presents a different challenge and experience for teachers as they facilitate social construction of knowledge in their classrooms. Teachers and students bring both a distinctive culture and resultant norms of experience and knowledge that impact the reciprocal teaching and learning process. In addition to this classroom practice, Darling-Hammond (1997) describes the centrality of teachers in the development of the democratic ideal and the responsibility this places upon them. She writes:

It is the capacity of teachers that make democratic education possible—that is, an education that enables all people to find and act on who they are; what their passions, gifts, and talents may be; and how they want to make a contribution to each other and the world. (p.viii)

As such facilitators, teachers must demonstrate both intelligence and a passion to meet the needs of their students. Furthermore, the act of teaching also serves as a tool for the transmission of culture, particularly epistemological and cultural norms to students (Spindler, 1982).

Historically though, reform efforts have focused on what constitutes knowledge (Apple, 1996; Rosen, 2001) and not on how to better engage teachers in the implementation of policy (Lynch, 2002; Marshall, 1997; Temes, 2002; Walsh, 1984) in ways that might empower teacher development and practice. This means that teachers lack explicit support for accomplishing the objectives of reform and thus their efforts to instill particular skills and knowledge in their students are typically done in isolation.
The process of educational reform thereby hinders teacher participation in the discussion surrounding the change itself and subsequently creates political challenges to teachers whom are faced with pressure to implement the reform objectives without clear understandings on how to do this. Finally, since teachers focus on their students to develop specific skills and knowledge but are not supported to develop their own learning, the process of educational reform creates a discrepancy between policy and teachers/practice. This study, however, aims to create a space for teacher development and empowerment in the process of educational policy and research. Through a description of the lived experiences of teachers with the testing policy of NCLB, the study attempts to connect teachers to the policy process and position their experiences as purposeful to teachers, scholarship, and policy. I will now delineate how this study contributes to such understandings.

Statement of the Research Problem: Teachers and the Policy Process

Drawing from the diverse theoretical framework of sociocultural, and critical feminist paradigms, this collective case study explored how teachers in an urban school in a large Midwest town known as Center City experience the testing policy of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act during the second year of implementation. The study focused on the following questions as co-constructed through extensive time with participants and in the research site. These questions reflected both local teacher issues and researcher interests:

1. How do teachers experience standardized testing within NCLB?
   a. How do teachers change or assimilate testing policy within practice?
   b. How do teachers push back at the testing policy through practice?
   c. How does this process impact teacher ability to respect issues of diversity and equity in the classroom?

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1 For the sake of brevity, the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act will be abbreviated as NCLB.
2. What implicit and unintentional cultural norms are transmitted around standardized testing policy?
3. How does teacher voice get enacted and heard at the school level?
   a. What structures of school governance exist to facilitate teacher voice?
   b. How much is teacher voice heard regarding testing policy at the school level?
4. How can research create and support a political space for teacher growth and development?

As explored in chapter two, the relevant literature on NCLB focuses on the issues of implementation and the concurrent new relationship between state and federal government as each interprets the legislation from differing locations (Edley, 2002; Education Commission of the States, 2004; Pinkerton, Scott, Buell & Kober, 2004; Sunderman, 2003; Trahan, 2002). Furthermore, the literature relates the success of the implementation of the legislation to a clearer dialogue regarding state and local challenges with federal expectations (Edley, 2002; Sunderman, 2003). Darling-Hammond (1988) recognizes the need for standard legislation as a first step to reform but also charges that the problems of implementation of such policies lies with the individuality of teachers and students. She writes “the problem with the policy makers’ search for a better ‘system’ for schooling is that, while policies must be standardized and uniform in their application, students are not standardized in their needs and abilities” (p. 58).

Therefore, the main actors of the policy in the classroom, the teachers, are not considered in this discussion of policy implementation. Since policy is a social practice that positions actors within the policy in various roles dependent on the context (Levinson & Sutton, 2001), recognizing that teachers are major actors of NCLB is central to its success and to the development of responsive classroom practice, as well as the sustainability of the implementation issues surrounding the legislation.
The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, more commonly known as NCLB, advocates that student achievement will be improved through state and district accountability measures. In order to understand how these systems are currently working and how they could be improved, it is necessary to give consideration to how this policy, particularly the testing component of NCLB, impacts teachers and their practice. This study provided teacher participants with not only the opportunity to reflect on their pedagogy and testing itself but also to consider the parallels between the Center City reform efforts and NCLB and what that means for the future of their classrooms and careers. Since policy itself can be viewed as a form of cultural resistance in that its implementation often reflects the norms of the locale and not policymakers, teachers play an important role in how the testing policy of NCLB is implemented in terms of renegotiating and negotiating meanings dependent on their understandings and norms of the classroom.

This dissertation provides an in-depth look at how and why teachers are enacting the testing policy of NCLB to construct a picture of the implementation issues from the local level. The feminist collaborative principles of the study along with the theoretical framework of sociocultural and critical ways of knowing position the teacher participants as equal contributors to the sharing of their stories—more specifically, the ways that testing policy is unpacked in the classroom. This means that the inquiry itself is based on local truths and thus, better grounded in teacher meanings. In other words, the study relies on teacher narratives to construct a clearer understanding of the effects of the testing policy of NCLB upon teacher practice. Knowing how the policy unfolds in classrooms and effects teacher practice and development can not only illustrate the sustainability of the legislation (Rist, 2000) but also what supports are needed for teacher
practice to honor student needs and policy demands. This approach to policy studies centers on the exploration on the teachers and their practice in order to encourage “backwards mapping” (Elmore, 2004) that builds reform from the classroom to better align policy with local and federal needs. The overall aim of this study is to build upon the call for such policy understandings to create policy that is relevant and realistic to teachers, policymakers, and scholars alike. Through such collaboration, teachers can be empowered and in turn, empower student learning.

Using the sociocultural approach to policy studies and the critical feminist standpoints on epistemology, collaborative methods were employed to support teacher empowerment and to avoid perpetuating the inequitable power dynamics of educational policy. These power dynamics unfold within teacher/administrator relationships as teachers are pushed and also push back at policy within their practice. Collaborative methods also served to explore the power dynamics that emerge between researcher and participants that may hinder the research process and subsequent teacher agency. Pelto and Pelto (1978) describe the importance of respecting local meanings while exploring local truth and experience, “The very rigidity of definition may lead to misunderstanding of the essential problems involved…If it is our purpose to understand the thoughts of a people, the whole analysis of experience must be based on their concepts, not ours” (p. 55). How collaborative methods not only served the methodology of the study but also created a space for teacher empowerment and development will be furthered explored in chapter three. I now provide a brief overview of the dissertation design to help contextualize its significance and theoretical framework.
Brief Overview of Dissertation Design

The findings of this dissertation and its exploration of teacher experience with testing policy can be best described through the concept of three intersecting circles – policy, teachers/practice, and research. This conceptual framework will be explained in detail in chapter four. Its is through the interaction of each that the following questions and findings emerged from the lives of teachers. In this chapter, chapter one, the problem and its significance will be explicated in order to situate the study and its findings in the relevant literature on NCLB and the theoretical approach of the research itself. In chapter two I review the relevant literature on NCLB and explain the focus on issues of implementation and the lack of teacher perspective in the discussion on what supports are needed to ensure the success of the policy objectives. I argue that the concerns surrounding NCLB center on state and federal interpretation of the law and ignore the local perspective of the teacher. This dissertation then answers the gap in the literature to provide a description of the local enactment of testing policy from the teachers’ perspectives and the impact of the testing policy upon practice.

In chapter three I sketch the particular methods used in the collaborative collective case study and the ways that these methods aligned with the theoretical framework. I add that the collaborative methods also strengthen the ethical practice of the research and construct deeper understandings between researcher and participant. In chapter four, I explore the particular ways that teacher practice was impacted by the testing policy and the ways that teachers exercised their agency through their practice and pushed back. In chapter five, I present teacher perceptions of the dilemmas of teaching
special education and bilingual students through testing policy and what this means to
good teaching. In chapter six, I explain how the collaborative methods of the dissertation
created a political space for teacher empowerment and development. From this space, I
illustrate in chapter seven how collaborative research can create a realism bridge in
research that creates research that is relevant to teachers, policy and scholarship. I
expand upon this to include the implications of this study for teacher educators,
administrators, and policy makers to describe how to create professional development
and policy that is grounded in teacher meanings, and as such, more effective and
democratic. It is important to now give consideration to the significance of these
chapters as a collective.

Research Significance: Why Explore How Teachers Experience Standardized Testing
within the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act

This section will explore the significance of the study for the fields of
teachers/practice, policy, and scholarship. First, I examine teachers’ culture and its
perception of the policy process and how this creates a discrepancy between practice and
policy objectives. From there, the discussion turns to how this study can assist
policymakers bridge the gap between theory and teacher practice. Finally, I conclude
with the importance of this study for scholarship knowledge and the creation of relevant
research. I begin with teacher culture and policy.

Teacher Culture as a Context for Policy

Since teachers are not often included in the policymaking process, they develop
negative assumptions and feelings toward policy in general. This creates a dissonance
between the culture of policy and teacher culture. And since teachers lack a collective
professional culture, it also isolates the individual teacher from reform efforts. Spring (2002) adds that the structures of policymaking and schools contribute to the isolation of teachers from the change itself.

Clune writes that “policy has long been viewed as an external initiative that teachers are expected to fit into their existing routines. An alternative position sees policy as an endless dialogue rather than a series of self-sealing implemented demands” (as cited in Lieberman and Miller, 1991, p. 105). Eisenhart, Cuthbert, Shrum and Harding (1988) concur that the implementation of policy is dependent on the attitudes of teachers toward the workplace. If teachers have negative attitudes toward policy and feel silenced within the structures of their schools, then reform objectives will be interpreted in a dissonance and fail in the long-term. Like NCLB, when teachers are not included in the policy conversation, they are unable to identify with the culture of the policy regardless whether its intent is relevant to student success and thus, may exercise their agency in ways that may contradict the policy.

NCLB posits that an increase in teacher certification requirements will raise teacher quality and as such, close the gap of student achievement and improve public schools. Standardized testing will then be the sole measurement of these efforts. Schools today would be better served instead with dialogue that included the issue of teacher quality along with a re-examination of the purpose of schooling and the process of policy creation and implementation that foster the current obstacles in student achievement. Although democratic schooling proposes that all student voices be heard and respected in both curriculum and classroom culture, teachers’ voices are seldom heard in the creation of educational policy and thus teachers are uncertain as to how to transform pedagogy.
Without creative and positive teacher leaders in the classroom, federal policy will continue to struggle with providing equitable education despite extant policy objectives and regulations. In order to ensure student success, policy must first develop and support teachers (Ayers, 1992; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Temes, 2002; U. S. Department of Education, 2000).

*Policy Implications*

This dissertation answered the call in the relevant literature to explore the implementation of testing policy within NCLB from teachers’ perspectives. The lived experiences of the teacher participants in this study provide policymakers with a clearer understanding of the discrepancies between the objectives of the testing policy and the realities of teachers. The following discussion will delineate how such research can provide policymakers with a clearer understanding of the effectiveness and sustainability of its goals (Rist, 2000) in an urban school environment. In other words, this study will “inform the current decision situation of the policymaker” (Erickson, 1986, p. 153) regarding issues of the implementation of the legislation and the testing component.

Through empirical data, both scholars and policymakers can better understand and respond to the implementation process of standardized testing and use such knowledge to bridge the dissonance between the lived experiences of teachers and policy objectives. Each step of the policy implementation from staff in-services to grade level meetings enables teachers to re-negotiate their meanings of testing policy and then reposition them within the school culture. Each step requires that teachers make meaning of testing policy and redefine previous knowledge according to the developing knowledge. This is a continuous social process through which teachers create new
representations of themselves within their individual classrooms and the collective school culture through testing policy as teachers exercise their agency through testing policy. It is important that administrators, district personnel, policymakers, teacher unions and teachers understand this complex social process that mediates how teachers respond to standardized testing. This study created such understanding for policymakers and teachers by exploring the issues of inquiry through reflection and dialogue.

In addition, this study contributed to policymakers’ understandings of the political risks and costs involved in the local implementation of standardized testing in an urban school as a component of NCLB. For example, through developing rapport and access to such teacher culture, the researcher was able to understand what political issues were of importance to teachers and how their knowledge or lack of knowledge regarding testing policy within NCLB played a role in their teaching practice. Policymakers can use these experiences and narratives to also analyze the long-term political risks (Rist, 2000) emerging from the testing policy within the teaching population. I now turn to how this study applies to scholarly understandings.

Scholarly Contributions

While this particular study warrants further inquiry into how to reproduce such experiences on a larger scale, the robust experience contributes to scholarly understanding of qualitative collaborative methods and their potential for facilitating transformative change. Moreover, the collaborative research methods used centered on dialogue, reflection, and constant questioning throughout the research process to create a safe political space for teachers through which to facilitate teacher development and empowerment. Through such practices, the study also contributes to scholarly inquiry
that aims to better create purposeful research for classroom teachers by describing the needs of real teachers and their perceptions of research and its relevance to their work.

Through an exploration of how testing policy within NCLB is socially enacted within various contexts by teacher participants, this study adds to the sociocultural understandings of policy and critical ways of knowing. The collaborative study aimed to create research that was both purposeful to participants and teaching practice and useful to scholarly theory. Scholars can gain understanding of the relationship of power and knowledge and how that mediates identity and consequently, teacher worldviews, understandings of policy and implementation of policy within their practice. Teachers, on the other hand, can use the questions and reflections of the participants as a model for their own reflection and exploration of the policy process within their own school cultures and classrooms. Findings from the study can also contribute to teacher understandings of the application of sociocultural theory in the classroom and understanding of the standardized testing component of the policy of NCLB.

The vagueness of the language of the testing policy in NCLB and the process of implementation at each state level makes the full implications of the policy upon both schools and academe unclear at this point of implementation. The language leaves much room for state interpretation and consequently, district interpretation to differ from the national intent of the policy objective. This is particularly evident in the research site of Center City where educational district policy has already addressed similar issues of teacher quality and equity in student achievement. Reconciling the national and district reform efforts may confuse and challenge local schools and teachers. Because the language of the policy enables diverse interpretation and as such affords random
implementation at the local level, NCLB creates an opportunity for academic inquiry to address how this legislation changes practice and teacher knowledge of policy. In turn, such research can enlighten policymakers and academics on the impact of the policy process itself upon teachers, the specific impact of the testing policy upon teachers and whether or not changes are needed in the overall policy itself to develop better teacher understandings and support classroom practice. Such understanding can also answer the theoretical questions of how teachers locate themselves ideologically and how such beliefs impact practice and implementation of policy. Scholars can use the findings of this study to explore the relationship between policy and pedagogy as impacted by teacher agency and policy structures in an urban school setting.

Through positive involvement in research, teachers could affect their general attitudes toward both policy and educational research and concurrently, transform their classroom practice. The result would be reform that better mirrored the realities of schools and teachers because the focus of the research would combine theory with the lived experiences of participants. The methods used in this specific study aimed to position teacher participants as equal contributors in order to explain findings in local meanings and inform several fields. I now explore the researcher positionality that informed the research process and the theoretical locations of the dissertation.

**Bridging Theory and Practice: Researcher Positionality**

I feel compelled to explain my background since this has directed me to the topic of teachers and policy as well as my approach to research. As a veteran sixth-grade teacher, I have experienced diverse school cultures and local communities each with its own educational policies, cultural norms and expectations of good teaching. In suburban
D.C., the school in which I taught centered on collaborative teaching methods to integrate special-needs students into the mainstream classroom. In rural Louisiana, the conservative social norms and local politics fostered traditional pedagogy and inequitable power dynamics within the school structure. The Mojave Desert in California provided a progressive school administration that focused on integrating the increasing diversity of its students with the conservative norms of the dominant local community resistant to the growing influx of Hispanic immigrants. In suburban Ohio, the school community served both military and civilian populations and struggled with meeting the educational needs of two distinct and somewhat mobile cultures. Teaching in each community was a lesson in understanding both school culture and the diverse home cultures of my students and how policy mediated this knowledge.

During the latter experience in Ohio, it became increasingly clear that teacher leadership or voice were exceptions rather than established norms within the daily school culture. While there were opportunities to participate in exploratory committees, the findings of these committees did not typically impact school governance. The result was that the talented and energetic teachers with whom I worked ended up disheartened and silenced. Many of the teaching colleagues in the public school sector I encountered utilized medication to deal with the anxiety attacks and stress that the job created. There was no systemic support within the district or the school structure for the development and sustainability of teacher leadership or participation in the reform efforts to raise student test scores. Teachers then developed low morale that manifested itself through such physical and psychological ailments described above.
As a teacher myself, I was challenged by the process of educational policy that employed a top-down hierarchy to implement reform objectives, more specifically the standardized testing policy and its impact upon classroom practice. I found that while research argued that culturally relevant teaching and teacher awareness created liberatory education (Bennett, 2003; Freire, 1988; Freire, 1998; hooks, 1994; hooks, 2003; Kohl, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994), the nature of educational reform efforts (and the school structures in which I had taught) continued to exclude the professional input of teachers and thus, did not reflect the realities of the classroom (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Temes, 2002).

These teaching experiences invoked a great interest with the following two questions that laid the foundation for the context of this study - 1) how can teachers better incorporate student diversity into the classroom amidst policy that emphasizes standardized practice and 2) how do teachers make meaning and respond to the process of educational policy? The inherent problem to the current process of policy is that without the input of teachers as a collective as well as teacher perspective from the local level, policy will continue to be implemented in isolated ways dependent on teacher meanings of policy and local culture. Sustainable reform depends on a process of policy that works with instead of against the development of teachers in order to transform the quality of schools.

My individual beliefs predicated on these personal experiences have enhanced and developed my perspectives regarding the inquiry topic along with the theoretical understandings as a doctoral candidate embracing qualitative research as a tool for
change. I now explore the sociocultural and critical theoretical locations of the study to situate the researcher positionality along with the topic of teachers and testing policy.

Sociocultural Approach to Policy: Assumptions and Purpose for Teachers and the Testing Policy

Consideration will be given in this section to the assumptions and values of the sociocultural approach to policy studies and its relevance to the examination of teachers’ lived experiences with standardized testing within NCLB. Policymaking, in itself, is directly tied to issues of power through the power dynamics that the language of the testing policy encourages through implementation in schools and classrooms. Levinson and Cade (2002) define policy as “the exercise of power in the distribution of rewards and resources” (p. xiii). It is a practice of social relations between the creators of the policy, those who implement the policy, and the students and teachers who are impacted by such decisions (Cade, 2003; Levinson & Cade, 2002; Levinson & Holland, 1996; Marshall, 1991; Marshall, 1997; Sutton & Levinson, 2001; Shore & Wright, 1997). For example, as district leadership interprets testing policy, particular meanings and subsequent decisions are made that affect the local school. In turn the administration at the local school then interprets these meanings within their own individual knowledge and school context. The teacher then mitigates these meanings along with her own understandings that are influenced by the school power dynamics.

The ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions of sociocultural approach to policy build upon the following views. First, how an individual constructs knowledge and locates the lived experiences are dependent upon social and cultural contexts of the individual. How a teacher understands and mediates
testing policy is dependent on her values and ideologies that in turn influence her social interactions.

Since policy is a social practice that involves teachers and is enacted at various levels depending on the context and perception of actors at each level of the school culture, it can also be a practice that works on the view of self. Aligned with the sociocultural epistemological view of constructing knowledge through social and cultural participation, teachers’ perceptions of standardized testing and what decisions they make relevant to the policy also impact their view of self. As explained earlier, how one understands policy is dependent on the cultural location of the individual. For example, as a teacher makes meaning of how to raise test scores and help all students in her classroom to achieve on the standardized test, she must first position herself within the policy of testing in NCLB. The teacher must understand the testing policy, the meaning of potential student transfers following substandard test performance and a lack of adequate yearly progress, how this accentuates the quality of her teaching practice, and how the policy impacts exclusive responsibility to the teacher. Then she must renegotiate her understandings based on this new knowledge and create new categories of meaning that will be enacted in her teaching practice. Throughout the process of understanding, the teacher’s view of self has been impacted and transformed.

Policy, however, distances itself from the actual actors through its use of scientific language to appear neutral and apolitical. NCLB’s use of such language to eradicate inequities in the education of diverse student populations is an example of such practice. The bureaucracy of policy is, however, a value-laden method of transmitting certain norms and ideologies (Erickson, 2002; Marshall, 1991; Marshall, 1997; Shore & Wright,
1997). Shore and Wright (1997) explain that “the language of policy-making seems to endorse realism by presenting ‘problems’ as if they could be solved by filling knowledge gaps with new, objective data” (p. 21). Policy, then, is a reflection of those in power and their worldviews toward social issues. This is evident through the newly carved federal role that NCLB creates within the traditional role of the state in education and reform efforts. Elmore (2004) adds “the Bush administration, with its centerpiece No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law, has presided over the largest single expansion of federal authority into state and local decisions in the history of the country. This level of activity shows no signs of abating” (p. 2). The sociocultural approach to policy can provide a clear exploratory picture of how this change impacts the realities of policy in schools.

For example, while the federal government created NCLB and its subsequent sanctions for not meeting policy objectives, the states are left with reconciling these objectives with already established educational structures and institutions. Therefore, the states must assimilate the worldviews and ideologies of the federal policymakers into their educational culture, which means that the testing policy will then be enacted in various ways in the actual classroom. The sociocultural approach to policy seeks to describe such a process that categorizes and shapes actors, in this case, the teachers. It also aims to name the tensions that exist between the institutional norms of the policy and the local context from the perspectives of the local actors in order to create a narrative that is useful for both researcher and participants. Erickson (2002) explains how overall policy implementation is impacted by the social context in which it is created. He writes that:

Policy decisions are about options within choice sets that are themselves framed and that on some days are tipped one way rather than another by
technical information, on other days by quasi-religious or literally religious leaps of faith or by whiffs (and more whiffs) of race, ethnicity, language and gender. (p. 193)

The sociocultural approach to policy studies views policy as a dynamic process instead of an isolated, single event from the social life it influences (Rist, 2000). It claims that the space between policy formation and policy implementation is mediated by tensions between the moral discourse of the local culture and the institutional norms from which the policy was created.

Sociocultural theory can contribute to the transformation of schooling and policy implementation by constructing an optic through which schools can see patterns of cultural meanings as they are reproduced (Carroll, 1992; Demerath, 2002; Levinson & Cade, 2002; Sutton & Levinson, 2001). The sociocultural approach to policy can help schools and more specifically, teachers understand how patterns of meaning are created and transmitted through diverse contexts within schools. Once teachers engage in such a dialogue, they will be able to create new awareness of policy and reflect on how this overall process impacts their teaching. It can also help policymakers expound on the social complexities that emerge from interpretations of policy in various contexts and why policy objectives are rarely performed as they are intended. This approach can help policymakers avoid, as Marshall and Rossman (1989) write, their frustration “…with traditional social science research that tests relationships among variables without regard for the complexities of sociocultural context” (p. 29). It can also help policymakers avoid the problem with the sustainability of current reform efforts- the discrepancies between policy objectives and the causes of school failures (Elmore, 2004). Elmore (2004) asserts that “our capacity to initiate and sustain reform has exceeded, to a considerable degree,
our capacity to solve the problems that undermine the effects of reforms” (p. 3). He advocates research that illuminates policy and school reform “from the inside out”. Sociocultural theory can provide purposeful description that will enable such policy.

In summary, this theoretical approach claims that all knowledge is socially constructed through the interaction of an individual with the environment and other human beings. The epistemological view is that truths are many, reality is not objective, and is a result of social and cultural experiences. One’s knowledge and concurrent worldview are dependent on the attitudes internalized from learning experiences within the social world. This approach fits well with policy analysis because it can explore how social interactions and responses to policy create cultural meanings which teachers then enact through their practice in the classroom.

Critical Theory and Policy: Assumptions and Purpose for Education and Research

In Regards to Testing Policy within NCLB

This section will explain the traditional role of teachers within schools in order to understand the complimentary use of critical theory, along with sociocultural approach to policy to explore teacher experience and teacher agency through testing policy. It is important, however, to first explain the cultural purpose of schools to better situate the topic of testing policy within NCLB with the theoretical framework. Schools play a large role in the control of access to symbolic meanings of culture. They transmit norms of citizenship, cultural values, labor skills, certain talents, and create a social class (Dillard, 1997). Gates (1995) writes that “…our schools [are entrusted] with the fashioning and refashioning of a democratic polity; that’s why the schooling of America has always been

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2 Agency is defined as a person's perception of her ability to create change within her own reality.
a matter of political judgment” (p. 8). What values this democratic polity should reflect are at the center of the policy debate and controversy surrounding the implementation of NCLB and its use of testing measurement for school accountability. NCLB aims to provide equal educational opportunities for marginalized students but does not address the structural changes necessary to incorporate all within the debate, predominately the classroom teacher.

Schools are also the places where one learns control of the presentation of selves (McCormick, 2000) necessary to mediate culture. As the main controller of knowledge within a classroom, the teacher plays a vital role in the construction of what knowledge is learned and what norms are transmitted to students through interpretation of curriculum and implementation of educational policy. This has a direct impact on student construction of self and knowledge. Without an opportunity to reflect on the teacher role within this cultural process, teachers unknowingly perpetuate hegemonic norms of the official curriculum and policies. Critical ways of knowing center on reflection, dialogue, questioning and dialogue again to empower participants to name their realties and individual beliefs in an effort to transform the power dynamics inherent to their knowledge. Through such practices, teachers in this study were able to reflect and develop a personal awareness of the topic and their own beliefs.

This study located itself in both the sociocultural approach to policy and critical theory in order to explore the nested contexts of policy and how power impacts meaning making. Banks (1996) writes that “knowledge…is the way that a person explains or interprets reality” (p. 5) and as part of a social process, “reflects the social context, [and] has normative, value assumptions” (2002, p. 29). This study enabled teachers to reflect
on their social context, the knowledge of testing policy, their role within the construction of knowledge, and their own assumptions and positionality.

Critical theory illuminates this process with the following epistemological belief. Critical theory claims that like the social process of sociocultural theory, truths are many and constructed through sociohistorical interactions but are mediated by asymmetrical power relations that determine one’s worldview (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Its epistemological assumption is that knowledge is constituted by social interaction mediated by inequitable power relations over time. In other words, what a person knows or her assumptions and truths are reactions to the limitation of power placed upon the development of self or due to the lack of opportunity to reflect and know this knowledge. For example, teachers often already know their assumptions but because of the time constraints of their jobs are unable to explore this knowledge.

Critical theory demonstrates how opportunities in life, and in schools, are tied to the socio-political structure of the world (Apple, 1996; Freire, 1988). The structures within culture create categories that serve to limit individual agency and knowledge or access to knowledge (Bourdieu, [1977]1992; Foucault, 1984; hooks, 1994). For example, as demonstrated in chapter four, teachers and their practice are being pushed by the testing policy of NCLB through and across school structures such as time constraints and colleague relationships. However, teachers are exercising their agency within this oppression through their practice in ways that push back at the testing policy and its constraints on their practice and subsequent student learning.
The purpose of the critical way of knowing is to create change and to promote a transformation of the realities of the oppressed people. It is to accomplish what Anzaldúa describes below:

Theory produces effects that change people and the way they perceive the world. Thus we need theories that will enable us to interpret what happens in the world, that will explain how and why we relate to certain people in specific ways, that will reflect what goes on between the inner, outer and peripheral ‘I’s within a person and between ‘I’s and the collective ‘we’”. (as cited in Rich, 2001, p. 97)

Power mediates this process of ontology often without awareness. Bourdieu ([1977]1992) claims that the “habitus” or system of practices dictates social meanings. “Interpersonal relations are never, except in appearance, individual-to-individual relationships and that the truth of the interaction is never entirely contained in the interaction” (p. 81). This dissertation as located in such framework aimed to help teacher participants name their practices and the practices of the school and policy that dictate their individual meanings of testing policy and practice.

The structure of policy itself also acts as a constitutive tool through which teachers are also often unaware of the subtle play of power. Carspecken (2002) explains that “the system functions occur often without the discursive awareness of those whose actions bring them about” (p. 61). Swanson, Spencer, and Petersen (1998) write that this lack of knowing creates limitations of possible selves/identities that “are important because they function as incentives for future behavior…[and] provide an evaluative and interpretative context for the current view of self” (p. 955). Although Foucault (1984) claims that “the problem is not changing consciousness- or what’s in their heads- but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth” (p. 74), I argue that teacher consciousness must change first before the structures that institutionalize policy
can evolve. To empower such awareness and change, teacher participants relied on dialogue and reflection to name the power dynamics of their school and classrooms.

In conclusion, if schools are to improve and become more equitable through the policy aims of NCLB, then policymakers need to include teachers in the dialogue. In turn teachers must also be aware of their selves both within the school and within policy process to fully contribute to the political process of policy as empowered participants and not simply reactors. Through the framework of sociocultural and critical ways of knowing, teachers in this study were afforded such opportunities for conversation and awareness that impacted individual meanings, practice, and participation in the research itself through teacher enactment of their own agency.

Conclusion

In summary, the purpose of this study is three-fold. First, the inquiry examined how teachers in an urban elementary/middle school made meaning of the standardized testing component of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act. The purpose of this was to explore teacher meanings and local understandings to situate the policy and teacher effects. Second, this study used such reflection and emergent dialogue with participants to encourage the development of a collective teacher culture at the school level that could serve as a model for how to better support and develop teacher practice and teacher voice in the development of educational reform. Mutual interpretation, collaborative methods, and trustworthiness criteria supported teacher participants as they explored a dialectic space to understand their practice, the policy of testing and NCLB, and their contributions to these issues. Third, this study provided both scholars and policymaker with a rich description of the enactment of policy as a social and cultural practice from
the perspective of teachers and constituted by their meanings and power. The goal of such consideration was to connect the issues of implementation of NCLB, more specifically, the testing policy to the local actors the teachers.

Through the testing policy of NCLB, this study helped teachers better understand how they see their social and political world and how they respond to such knowledge. It also demonstrated how policy and research could not be politically neutral through its exploration of ways that participants were and were not included in the implementation of testing policy in an urban school. Through collaboration, this study aimed to be written both for and about the participants, in order to co-construct a local context for change. Demerath (2002) adds that this approach to policy and subsequent methods can construct a clearer understanding of how policymakers and educators view the world and how they see the work of research.

Once teachers are empowered and participating in a collective dialogue about the nature of policy, the effects of testing, the purpose of schools and teaching, and the social and political demands of their jobs, student achievement will be impacted (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Meier, 1995; Temes, 2002). Loucks-Horsley and Stiegelbauer (1991) best summarize the importance of this change for democratic education with the following assertion, “The kinds of changes everyone from parents to the President of the United States imagine will only succeed if the needs of those closest to children are attended to” (p. 16). Policy must incorporate systematic support of teachers as a necessary component of development and implementation of educational reform to ensure success. This study attempted to construe possible solutions on how to achieve this connection between policy culture and the realities of the classroom. As argued
throughout this dissertation, it is important that such change be premised on listening to the teachers to bridge theory and practice in ways that will transform schools and policy.
CHAPTER 2

Teacher Culture, Agency and NCLB: A Review of the Literature

“In particular, we must forge strong partnerships with practitioners in the schools. They are the people working in the trenches. This is the only way that we will be able to improve practice-through research and system-wide reform” (Condliffe-Lagemann, 2002, p. 1).

While the call to forge partnerships with teachers to better locate policy and research appears relevant to effective change, it is not a focus in the relevant literature on the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act. In fact, the literature focuses more on the immediate issues of implementation at the state level without considering the impact of the policy at the local level. It is this need for local perspective that this dissertation aims to fulfill. For reference in this text, the latter legislation will be referred to as NCLB. Before this dissertation and its exploration of teacher experience with testing policy can be located in the literature on NCLB, it is necessary to give consideration to the culture of teachers and teacher agency that may bind or hinder teacher leadership or involvement in policy. From there, the discussion will delineate the challenges that teachers face with creating reflective practice amidst the pressures of standardization inherent to general policy. The relevance of these issues will be applied to the policy of NCLB through a discussion on the scholarly critiques of the legislation.
Next, scholarly perspectives on the legislation will then explore the focus of the literature on NCLB and the emergent dilemmas of the policy itself. This will help contextualize the previous discussion on teacher culture and practice with policy. Furthermore, this framework will better situationalize the focus of this dissertation and also locate the call for a collective teacher culture and profession as tools for policy development and improved practice.

The text will then describe the issues of implementation that are emerging in the NCLB literature and the absence of teacher perspective within such discussion. Finally, the discussion will attend to the manner in which this dissertation with its focus on the local enactment of the testing policy from the teacher perspectives can inform the policy dialogue. I first attend to the culture of teachers and its role in the policy process and subsequent impact upon classroom practice.

The Culture of Teachers: Factors Affecting Leadership and Policy

The absence of collective professional expectations and guiding behaviors for teachers make teachers scapegoats for the ills of American democratic society and educational problems (Lynch, 2000; Lynch, 2002; Urbanski & Nickolaou, 1997; Walsh, 1984). Anthropologist Jules Henry ([1963]2000) wrote that “when, in anxiety about the present state of our world, we turn upon the schools with more venom that we turn on our own government, we are ‘right’ in the sense that it is in the schools that the basic binding and freeing processes that will ‘save’ us will be established” (p. 24). However, research that explored the organizational structures within schools found that schools are disorganized instead of autonomous entities that reflect local cultural norms (Ingersoll, 2003). Since schools are seen as disorganized, this means that policymakers view the act
of teaching, the premise of the school culture, as a measurable task that can be standardized to create organization in schools. This is nowhere more evident than in the legislation of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, the recent federal push for standardization of practice and reform efforts in American schools.

Teachers struggle with the challenge that teaching is a vocation and not a profession with autonomous governing structures that facilitate a solid voice in educational reform. As a result, teachers lack a professional collective culture through which to garner large participation in the discussion on educational policy overall or NCLB. Within the framework of the local school, this means that teachers react to policy instead of actively transforming it as a collective actor. While schools play a large role in the control of access to the symbolic meanings of culture, teachers serve as agents of transmission of such norms but are not equal partners in that process. In other words, teachers are not actively engaged in the conversation about what norms and whose knowledge should be taught in schools and what processes best serve the interests of students and ultimately, democratic ideals. This lack of involvement in such dialogue ultimately creates educational policy that does not mirror the realities of the classroom and as such, is ineffective to create long-term change.

Urbanski and Nickolaou (1997) assert that the lack of professional criteria through which to participate in policy forces teachers to exercise their agency through “creative insubordination” regarding official policies and implementation. Agency being the concept used to describe an individual’s self-determination or view of self and concurrent power to create change (Bourdieu, [1977]1992). The individual is viewed as structured by culture and history but also structuring it in the process of human action.
This process of agency as manifested in “creative insubordination” to policy costs public education more money since the reform efforts are not being implemented as expected and as such, unexpected dilemmas emerge in the schools. Examples of such dilemmas are discussed at length in the data section of chapter four.

Furthermore, the lack of professional criteria means that teachers, as individuals and as a collective, are not judged by the quality of learning in the classroom but by how well they implement the guidelines of legislation (Ayers, 1992; Darling-Hammond, 1997). In fact, prior to the accountability measures of NCLB, districts often claimed that state reform measures were successfully implemented without any real organized assessment from either the district or the state (Marshall, 1988). Now that accountability is key in the NCLB legislation, teachers are now directly responsible for the implementation of the policy but yet still do not have a strong participation in the dialogue about the issues of policy implementation. Ingersoll (2003) clarifies the debate around teacher autonomy and policy implementation by describing that individual teacher decisions in the classroom are structurally connected to policies and policy decisions. This means that although teachers have power in the local decisions of their classrooms, these decisions are mediated by the structures of policy and not individual agency. He describes the power dynamics between instructional decisions/teacher power and policy objectives/policymaker power in the following:

These decisions…are often subsidiary to, largely nested within, and predetermined by higher order decisions not under the control of teachers. Typically, teachers are regulated responsibility for implementation, execution, and enforcement, but do not exercise actual control over the conception and determination of larger policies and decisions. The parameters of teachers’ classroom activities are effectively set by larger school policies. (p. 266)
Once again, individual and collective teacher participation in the implementation of policy is reactive instead of proactive in the implementation of policy in schools and classrooms.

The Task Force on Teacher Leadership (2001) cogently argues that the push to establish widespread official professional guidelines that would reify teacher involvement in policy creation and implementation is impeded by the traditional hegemonic practices of school cultures. The traditional school structure employs a top-down hierarchy that limits teacher agency in conjunction with teacher leadership that would mediate participation in the space of politics. Marantz-Cohen (2002) also argues that the local view of the teacher directly influences teacher agency and quality of practice and thus, active teacher involvement in the implementation of reform policies. If a teacher feels valued and respected, she will be empowered to actively participate in reform but if she feels disrespected in the community, she will not participate as a form of self-preservation. Ergo, teachers chose to either follow the procedures of the policies or implement those components that coincide with their pedagogy.

Bourdieu ([1977]1992) writes that “it is because subjects do not know, strictly speaking, know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know” (p. 79). The current inability to reflect as both individual teachers and as a collective profession means that teachers are unaware of their personal and professional choices as effects in the classroom. Watkins (1992) explains that the lack of personal awareness affects the social and cultural construction of knowledge since “school members, community members, policymakers, and researchers alike have lacked a sense of the effect of their own personal unexamined beliefs and actions on the maintaining of
the status quo” (p. 209). The maintaining of the status quo is also reinforced by the power dynamics inherent to the policy process itself. Policy is usually created by external leaders to the classroom, enforced by school administrators, and implemented by teachers. Allen (1991) adds to the call for a collective professional culture of teachers by concluding that the daily structure of teaching does not afford teachers the opportunity for growth and reflection. Whether through research or policy, he asks “why should teachers sometimes be chastised for lack of eloquence about their own implicit theories of instruction, largely unarticulated, when discourse systems that might make those theories explicit are systematically absent from their own work setting?” (p. 249).

A professional culture of teachers would address the above issues of practice and teacher awareness that would in turn, create effective school reform and teacher leadership. First, a professional culture would empower the development of teacher leadership and subsequent active involvement in educational policy, thus improving teacher practice by increasing teacher morale. Second, a professional teacher culture would also afford teachers the opportunity as both individuals and as a collective to explore cultural and social locations and policy meanings that would impact teacher awareness and practice (Darling-Hammond, 1988; Lieberman, 1988; Lieberman & Miller, 1991; Kohl, 1986; Kohl, 2003). This inquiry is motivated largely by my conviction that if teachers were able to reflect on practice as clearly argued above and become aware of their assumptions and individual pedagogy, this awareness would contribute to a solidarity among teachers that could in turn, result in a newly active role in the policy process. By empowering teachers and as hooks (2003) encourages making the “personal political” and the political personal, teachers could develop a sense of
personal and political awareness and student learning would be immensely impacted. Furthermore, I believe teachers could also more closely attend to issues of diversity and equity in their classrooms if given such professional opportunities for reflection, dialogue and action.

Current research can better support the development of a professional teacher culture and the process of knowing and becoming by affording teacher participants the opportunity to be reflective through inquiry (Little, 1991). Little (1991) writes that reflective pedagogy, to use a research term, would create a snowball effect that would improve teacher practice, school culture, and the collective teacher culture. I assert that through collaboration, research can also provide teachers the ability to better understand the standardized testing policy component of NCLB, and in turn, develop their practice in ways that employs both policy and local needs. Such reflection, dialogue and transformative change impacts teacher agency, classroom practice, professional awareness and leadership.

Finally, this study and its collaborative nature demonstrate to administrators and policymakers the need for and benefit of incorporating such reflective pedagogy into professional development efforts and ultimately supporting the development of a collective professional culture of teachers. After clearly establishing the need for the latter, I turn to the current reaction of teachers to policy and then address teacher response to the standards movement that predicated the federal legislation of NCLB. This exploration will further build the context for this dissertation on teacher experience with testing policy of NCLB. From there, I attend to the individual teacher response to policy and the affects upon teacher agency that constitutes practice and policy implementation.
Current Policy Implementation: Teacher Response, Agency and Collective Culture

Standards and Teachers: A Collective Response of Teachers to Policy

Few research sources exist about teacher involvement in policy because there is little to describe since teachers are typically reactive and not proactive to official policy (M. Smylie, personal communication, October 22, 2003). A review of the literature on teacher involvement in policy indicates a focus on how teachers make meaning of policies behind the closed doors of their classrooms or through isolated school efforts (Barth, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Eisenhart, Cuthbert, Shrum & Harding, 1988; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Levinson & Cade, 2002; Meir, 1995; Sutton & Levinson, 2001; Temes, 2002). For example, Marshall and Beck (1992) described how sexuality educators appropriated external policies to adhere to local meanings and norms. They examined the view of educators when implementing external policies created by outsiders to the field and learned that the educators created their own systems of structures to deal with the emergent challenges of the policies. The success of these policies was due to the participants learning how to work “within and around bureaucracies” rather than the policies affecting real change. Teachers implemented or reacted to this policy in their own manner according to the needs of the local culture and their own understandings.

As indicated by this example, there is a dichotomy between teacher response to policy based on local meanings and the objectives and overall effectiveness of the policy itself. The sociocultural approach to policy as described in detail in chapter three attends to this dichotomy by describing policy as a social practice enacted in various contexts. This dichotomy, however, adds to the disorganization of schools as cultural contexts
which may have in turn, fostered the standards movement that predicated NCLB. Since schools were viewed as disorganized and ineffective, policymakers turned to the business strategies of change to generalize reform. Policymakers and reformers alike may have viewed the standards movement as an opportunity to remove the individual teacher and the individual school from educational reform. In other words, once a problem is identified with the creation of a product in the business model (the students), and then the approach to creating the product is reviewed until the individual cannot impact the process. Finally, the process of creating the product is standardized to the point that the formula for this could be replicated, in theory. It is important to understand teacher response to the standards movement in order to situate the exploration of teacher experience with testing policy of NCLB.

The standards movement that emerged from the enactment of the Improving America’s School Act of 1994 demonstrates the business approach to educational reform. Since much of the standards movement that laid the foundation for NCLB emerged from the State of Texas, it is pertinent to explore teacher response to this policy in this context. McNeil (2000) uses the standards movement during the 1990s to examine the issue of teacher response to policy and its effect upon teachers as a collective. She describes this process of teacher response to policy in education as “pedagogical gamesmanship”, meaning that teachers find ways to subvert the policies that do not match the needs of their students or local cultures, thus creating their own form of implementation. McNeil (2000) explored the effects on teachers and pedagogy of the pre-NCLB standards movement in Houston, Texas in *Contradictions of School Reform: Educational Costs of Standardized Testing*. More specifically, McNeil’s study (2000) considered several
issues 1) the effect of standards upon the curriculum process, 2) the process of state reform created by business leaders, and 3) the correlation of standardized testing with teacher quality and student learning.

During the dialogue with policymakers, McNeil (2000) found that the premise of the overall reform was that teachers were the problem with the quality of education, much like a poor worker detracts from the quality of a product. If “bad” teachers were removed from the equation, then the product quality or student achievement would improve. Therefore, “no policymaker expected teachers or students to provide expertise into what schools needed. No one was looking into schools for answers. After all, schools were the problem” (p. 153). Again, the discrepancy between policy and teachers continued due to a lack of a professional culture of teachers that could assert a place for teachers in the discussion.

Teachers, however, presented a different perspective regarding the development and effectiveness of the policy of the standards movement. Throughout discussions with both veteran teachers who had experienced reforms before and less experienced teachers, McNeil (2000) uncovered the lack of collective teacher input into the overall policy process. The standards movement, as begun in Texas, aimed to create a standard curriculum and a standard practice for transmitting that curriculum in order to equalize the teaching and learning process. This is what is commonly referred to as teacher-proofing a curriculum by creating a standard curricular script from which teachers read from. Neither cultural relativism nor the individual teachers are factors in the development of standardized curriculum or practice.
Teachers concluded that the effects of the standards movement, including the use of standardized testing as measurement of student achievement and teaching ability, de-skilled their practice and lowered the quality of learning. Moreso, teachers argued that by creating a minimum standardized curriculum that a new discrimination was fostered in education against students whose experience differed from the mainstream knowledge. For example, teachers had to compress the curriculum to ensure that particular knowledge was mastered within a certain time frame. This meant that teachers had little time to connect curriculum with student culture and thus, developed practice similar to the “banking system” (Freire, 1988). The latter describes an approach to learning that posits that students come to the classroom as empty vessels that are filled with information by teachers. The banking system of teaching disregards the knowledge and culture of the students not represented in the official curriculum thus creating power dynamics within schools that position these students as non-relevant. Teachers amidst the Houston standards movement were faced with the dilemma of transmitting the standard curriculum without time to develop respect for the diverse knowledge and history of their students - a practice that they believed contributed to successful learning.

In summary, the results of the standards reforms in Texas included exacerbating the exact problems the reforms were intended to correct: by increasing bureaucratic controls, these reforms inadvertently strengthened the very forces that are known to undermine teaching and learning, as teachers and students react against controls by limiting their own work….It also legitimati[zed] a language of accountability as the governing principle of public schools. (p. xiv)

McNeil (2000) concludes that this language, as a result of the accountability system, placed the power of education in the hands of a few rather than the public or the teachers, thus perpetuating inequitable power dynamics in the democratic process of schooling.
Teacher response to this policy manifested itself in two approaches - 1) either teachers utilized the standards set by the state in their classrooms, or 2) teachers facilitated the content in a manner that attended to issues of diversity and equity in the classroom. McNeil (2000) explains that teachers even went so far as to create dual lesson plans- one for the administration that centered on standardized curriculum and one that represented their view of teaching and learning. McNeil’s work (2000) serves as a representative example of teachers and policy implementation since the accountability measures in Houston were the model for the accountability measures of NCLB. In fact, then Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, who oversaw the enactment of NCLB, was superintendent of the Houston schools and President Bush was then governor of Texas during the time of McNeil’s study.

The challenges presented in the Texas discussion on teacher response to educational policy warrant further exploration of how teachers mediate the choices of practice and the policy process, particularly since the standards movement predicated the creation of the NCLB. It could also be argued that although the issues of teacher participants in this study are representative, the sample was drawn from magnet schools and thus, not transferable to the experiences of teachers in regular public schools. This dissertation respectfully built upon this call in the literature by further exploring teacher experience with testing policy, a component of the accountability legislation of NCLB in an urban public school.

Although the collective case study of this dissertation does not explore the widespread impact of policies upon a population of teachers such as in Houston, the following demonstrates the contributions of understanding a singular and salient narrative
of individual teachers and policy. The sample of this dissertation, however, is representative of the diversity of teachers in urban public school settings. I now explain the response of individual teachers to policy to construct another perspective toward policy implementation and further build upon the need for this study to expand the literature regarding teachers and policy.

*Individual Teachers, Policy, and Agency*

It is the capacities of teachers that make democratic education possible—that is, an education that enables all people to find and act on who they are; what their passions, gifts, and talents may be; and how they want to make a contribution to each other and the world. (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. viii)

It is important to explore the individual teacher response to policy for several reasons. First, the individual teacher experience with policy further situates the collective teacher response and experience with policy. Second, understanding the individual teacher experience contextualizes issues of practice that are emerging from policy in the classroom. This attends to the capacities of the teacher in democratic education. Third, the discussion on the individual teacher and policy adds to the discongruence between practice and policy as indicated in the overall literature.

As an individual classroom teacher, Hadden (2003) found that she struggled with similar issues of the teacher population explored in the Houston McNeil (2000) study. More specifically, Hadden was faced with the conflict of how to implement district policies, interpret these policies with her own cultural meanings and also respect the educational needs of her students. She described her experiences as a struggle between the “charter to educate and the mandate to train” that eventually concluded with an administrative reprimand in her employment record because she chose to “educate and
not train”. This discrepancy between teacher theory or practice of questioning practice (Freire, 1988) and district norms of standardization highlights the daily questions teachers ask regarding policies and the individual decisions they make in their classrooms reflective of their cultural understandings. Hadden (2003) demonstrates the need for policy as a whole to create a systemic structure for teacher involvement to avoid such individual classroom conflicts, which in turn, not only hurt the teacher but also the students. She asserts:

Teachers entered the profession with a firm belief in their charter to educate, in practice they find instead a mandate to train: to compel adherence to implicit and explicit behavioral norms; to demonstrate loyalty to business-promoted, state-sustained, traditional curricula; and to support bureaucratically imposed rules and regulations that include standardized testing and tracking. At the very least, these teachers are expected to remain silent in the face of their own ethical disagreements with the hierarchy that governs schools. (p. 243)

Hadden (2003) struggled with her eventual decision to stop being a “disciple of the system and [become] an agent of change”. Becoming an agent of change is a process of knowing that teacher education programs and critical theory advocate must happen in order to politicize teachers, develop teacher leadership and teacher community that will only improve teachers and teaching (Freire, 1988; hooks, 2003; Kohl, 2003; McLaren, 1994). It is unfortunate that to accomplish this, Hadden (2003) left the school in which the transgression took place and still questions whether or not it was the best choice for her or her students. This example of one teacher’s experience with the regime of policy and the implementation of policy in her classroom at the expense of her teaching and the students can speak to the lives of other teachers who grapple with similar questions. Hadden’s (2003) response to them would be to continue questioning the policy process and that “the only general transgression would have been to remain silent” (p.253). After
examining the need for a professional culture, and the collective and individual response of teachers to policy, I now turn to an exploration of the literature on teacher agency and teacher community amidst current policy.

Kohl and hooks: Teacher Agency and Community.

Similar to his earlier writings on student agency within the power dynamics of schools, (Kohl, 1967; Kohl, 1986; Kohl, 1994), Herbert Kohl (2003) turns his focus to teacher agency as mediated by current policies and power. He describes the current state of education as a time for “stupidity and tears” in that the structures within education and the concomitant policies are pressuring teachers to act stupid or conform in order to “assert power and conceal social, political, and personal agendas” (p. 6). He argues that the systems of power inherent in education and its leadership, i.e. policymakers and administrators, pressure teachers to use non-creative practices that conflict with what is best for how children learn and subsequently, teacher conscience. Like Hadden (2003) and McNeil (2000), Kohl (2003) claims that the purpose of such conformity is to perpetuate the hegemonic norms of official knowledge in the classroom- norms that marginalize many students based on race, class, and gender. Kohl (2003) refers to the curricular trend to standardize or “teacher-proof” the curriculum as evidence of this process. Through the standards movement schools adopt a standardized curriculum that has scripted lessons, much like a play, that remove the individual choice from the teaching process and construes the classroom as a theatre with students and teachers playing their appropriated roles. The end result of these policies is that teachers, like Hadden (2003) and those in Houston, face a dilemma of conscience and either 1) accept this process of conformity as an established norm in education or 2) struggle with the
preservation of their teaching selves and the “coming to stupidity and tears” that this struggle encourages in teachers.

Kohl (2003) further delineates this dilemma of conscience through the experience of a talented and enthusiastic bilingual teacher in California who had great success in creating learners proficient in two languages, their home language of Spanish and the mainstream language of English. Her experience is another example of the usefulness of exploring individual teacher experience with policy for policy and teaching. As California policies dictated, the students of this teacher were to be measured intellectually by a standardized test conducted solely in English. The teacher struggled painfully with the process of administering a test that she believed mislabeled her students as low because it used only the language of English and did not attend to the duality of their cultural identities. She also suffered when her students felt betrayed and abandoned when she could not answer their questions about the situation.

Kohl (2003) uses this teacher as an example of the choices individual teachers face when challenged with the realities of their classrooms and the conflicting directives of educational policy. He explains the struggle of teacher choice “with stupidity and tears” as the following - 1) foolishness of being, 2) acting stupid as a form of resistance, 3) vulnerability and 4) silent conspiracy. First, acting stupid as a form of foolishness positions the teacher as one who recognizes the process of conformity that she faces as a conflict of conscience and that regardless of action, will construct her as “foolish” in any aspect of schooling. If she acts stupid and conforms to policies, administrators see her as someone who does not question authority. However, this choice erodes individual membership with her fellow teaching colleagues who view her as complacent and
“foolish”. Second, acting stupid as sign of resistance is a view that positions the teacher as aware of the process and then using the resultant power dynamics to her advantage and for her students. She does this by making strategic choices about her image and thus, controlling how people view her. Third, acting stupid places a teacher in a position of extreme vulnerability. As the trust between colleagues erodes due to the pressures of conformity and the lack of teacher community, so does the quality of teaching as the teacher questions her abilities and choices, thus impacting her agency. Finally, acting stupid as a form of silent conspiracy positions the teacher as aware and active in the process of being stupid. She subverts the process by making it work within the power dynamics of the school as it undermines the objective of conformity. This view also sees the teacher as an individual in a collective movement- a community of teachers struggling with their agency and choice.

Kohl (2003) concludes that the choice of “whether to act and get into trouble while maintaining self-respect, or conform and feel stupid- this is a major struggle for thinking people” (p. 14), and that teachers either leave the profession because of the fear of becoming stupid or find ways to be subversive as described above in order to survive. More often than not, Kohl writes that teachers who do not take into consideration the social and cultural processes of policy and consistently fight against the policies without such awareness end up leaving the classroom. I am an example of this phenomenon. As an unaware teacher, I struggled with how to respect and honor diversity and equity in my classroom amidst the pressures to standardize both curriculum and practice. I became negative and frustrated both personally and professionally and consequently lost hope in teaching and my sense of agency. This began to change as I attended a doctoral program
part-time while I taught full-time in the public school. I did however, leave the classroom to pursue my general exams and collect data for my dissertation. It is only after a time of intense reflection and exploration of theory and corresponding pedagogy that my hunger to teach and passion of curiosity is renewed. As I write this dissertation, I have already applied to return to the individual classroom of public schools and develop research that seeks ways to develop a collective teacher culture and leadership that can ultimately contribute to educational policy in realistic and useful ways. I want to utilize research and practice as tools against stupidity and tears.

Similar to Kohl’s descriptions of becoming stupid as a strategic response to power dynamics inherent in policy, hooks (2003) argues that the development of a collective teacher community would strengthen both teachers and teacher agency. Built upon her writings on education and teaching as an act of love and freedom (hooks, 1994; hooks, 2000; hooks, 2003), hooks attributes the strength of teacher agency to a connection with community and asserts that the current lack of community in education subsequently hinders democratic education in schools. As a cultural and social act, hooks (2003), like Kohl (1994), posits teaching in hope since “hopefulness empowers us to continue our work for justice even as the forces of injustice may gain greater power for a time…educating is a always a vocation rooted in hopefulness” (p. xiv). However, hooks asserts that the disconnect that teachers experience in education between and among colleagues and others creates a threat to progressive education that can be averted through a re-establishment of community in education.

Progressive education advocates for teachers, a constant and honest reflection about assumptions, ways of knowing, collective dialogue and actions as a process of
learning and creating change. Moreover, it warrants that teachers and students alike avoid the binary social constructions of knowing that limit knowledge and social change. This means that teaching must build learning upon discussion that presents multiple perspectives and thus, connections to student lives and understanding of social differences. Because progressive education undermines the transmission of and thus, the power of hegemonic norms in schools, the sense of community within the teacher culture is pressured to conform to the policies of standardization. hooks (2003) adds “significantly the assault on progressive educators, and on new ways of knowing, was most viciously launched not by educators but by policymakers and their conservative cohorts” (p. 8) as evident through the reification of standardized testing and curriculum that limits creativity in practice. hooks concludes that through participation in a community of learners and leaders, that teachers can work for social justice and divert becoming a part of the system of oppression that so many have fought to overcome.

During discussion on race, hooks (2003) makes an assertion regarding individual responsibility for change that I believe has application for teacher response to policy. She argues against the belief that is not the responsibility of dominated people to educate others about themselves in order to transform cultural norms and create change. She asserts the theory that to create real change, dialogue involves all participants in action. Thus, dominated groups are challenged to cross borders imposed upon them in social and cultural ways to eradicate the limits imposed by such constructions. She (2003) argues that “if we, [the dominated group], want change, we must be willing to teach” (p. 76). The basic process of change returns to the act of teaching and teaching as an act of freedom and love. It is important, however, that throughout such action that those
involved in the change process remain true to their own convictions and awareness. This is as important to maintain as the end result of their efforts. hooks (2003) writes that:

one of the most intense political struggles we face- and greatest spiritual struggle- in seeking to transform society is the effort to maintain integrity of being...[and that] all of the work we do, no matter how brilliant or revolutionary in thought or action, loses power and meaning if we lack integrity of being. (p. 164)

Teachers can use this approach to creating change for themselves and their practice amidst current policy by maintaining this integrity of being through a call to community among teachers.

The aforementioned views of teacher agency and experience with policy contextualize this dissertation and its collaborative nature. Furthermore, this discussion on teacher response to policy, whether individual or collective, establishes the call for the development of a professional culture of teachers in order to create realistic and useful educational policy. This dissertation attends to the theories of knowing as described by Kohl (2003) and hooks (2003) and extends the literature on the individual and collective teacher response to policy (Hadden, 2003; McNeil, 2000) within the framework of NCLB. I now attend to the scholarly literature on NCLB and critiques of the legislation that situate the inquiry of this dissertation.

Scholarly Perspectives on NCLB

Critique of the Overall Legislation: A Construction of Cultural Context

Before presenting the specific literature on teachers and the policy of NCLB, it is necessary to consider the critique of the legislation in order to present a wider context for this study and its emergent themes of meaning. I now attend to several national views presented in the literature that delineate the emergent challenges of the legislation that
may or may not mirror the specific lived experience of the teachers in Center City
exploring the local context of the policy. This discussion may also provide a context
from which to better explore the local enactment of this policy as explained in chapter
four.

*NCLB as Privatization.*

First, it is argued that the legislation of NCLB is an effort to privatize public
education through its use of standardized tests as the sole measure of a quality school and
a quality teacher (Karp, 2001; Karp, 2004; Kohn, 2000; Wood, 2004). By using
standardized measurement as the sole criteria for success, the policy may in fact, lower
the quality of education for all students by limiting the curriculum to meet test
requirements. This in turn may also hinder teacher pedagogy to the point where the
private sector is seen as the solution. Furthermore, it is argued that the schools that serve
students from low-income areas will be the first to be listed as needing improvement by
the criteria of adequate yearly progress (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Karp, 2004; Wood,
2004). As a result, these schools will face sanctions that range from a loss in federal
funding, transfers of students to other schools, the financial burden of supplemental
tutoring, to restructuring or reconstituting school staff. Not one of these sanctions
supports the effort to improve the quality of education for students and thus, diminishes
the educational experiences of those students. Schools will be forced to focus on
teaching to the test and thus, limit all focus of schooling on that goal.

Wood (2004) claims that schools will remove anything that is not connected to
test preparation or the content areas measured by the tests—such as recess, fine arts and
community service learning. This will ultimately, as described earlier in McNeil’s (2003)
study on Houston schools pre-NCLB, lower the quality of teaching since teachers will be pressured to teach lessons that cover only test-taking skills and correlating curriculum, thus, ignoring the cultural or social needs of their students. These issues of teacher quality and practice are major goals of the legislation that as the critique ironically argues are undermined by the legislation itself. These criticisms are based on the assertion that as sanctions begin with schools not meeting adequate yearly progress, that the services of public school will be transferred to the private sector, as evident in the tutoring services component of the legislation.

*NCLB and Public Involvement in Schools.*

Second, Meier (2002; 2004) asserts that keeping the public in public education will be difficult with the accountability measures of testing within NCLB. Sizer (2004) recognizes the correlation between the development of our nation’s culture and the renewed purpose of schooling that NCLB indicates but warns that “as our culture changes, the shape of ‘public education’ should change with it, but in a way that always keeps the public in ‘public education’”(p. xix). Meier (2004), however, argues that this will be hindered by the structure of the policy. Therefore, she asserts that when schools are labeled failing and students are given the chance to move to a better performing school, that parental and student support and trust in public schools will be diminished as students move away from their communities. This will create larger discrepancies between schools, communities and student culture that Meier (2004) believes will lower student achievement and in turn, national gains in education. Meier (2002; 2004) explains that success in schools for all children depends on the level of trust policymakers and the public place in schools.
However, even when students are eligible to move from their school that “needs improvement” to a higher performing school as the law and Meier explain (2004), it is unlikely in the urban districts that there are enough spaces for those students to be accommodated due to the majority of schools on the needs improvement list (Neill, 2003). Sizer (2005) best summarizes the problems inherent to the structure of the legislation. He writes:

While NCLB aims to better the opportunities for the children of needy Americans, its provisions remain extensions of the existing bureaucratic system…it adds to the burdens on schools and families. Worst of all, it is astonishingly unimaginative. There is not hint that there may be a better, more interesting way to school our young citizens within a community’s public schools. Inconveniently, no two children and no two schools are alike. There is no obvious quick fix. (p. 1)

Meier (2004) argues that to avoid such problems embedded in the legislation that the control over schools must be shared more evenly with the local community in order to reflect the principles of public education. She acknowledges that the process of rectifying the discrepancies between policy and practice is unclear but the benefits of the collaboration are powerful for teachers and students alike.

Schools need to be governed in ways that honor the same intellectual and social skills we expect our children to master…At every point along the way we must connect the dots between our practice and democracy. It’s nice when ends and means can come together in this way, and it’s the most powerful form of education when they do. Will it be neat and orderly? Probably not. But democracy is and ever was messy, problematic, and it is always a work in progress. (Meier, 2004, p. 78)

A collaborative approach to governance would not only honor democratic ideals in education but also help maintain the public in public education that NCLB may inadvertently impact in a negative manner. I now attend to the issues of standardized testing and the accountability measurements of NCLB and their impact upon education.
NCLB Hinders Educational Efforts in Lower-Performing Schools.

A third critique of NCLB is that while the legislation aims to equalize the educational experience for all children, standardized testing and AYP exacerbate the inequities of marginalized students in schools because the tools pressure schools to focus on the statistical loopholes of the legislation and less on the task of education (Karp, 2004; Sizer, 2004; Sizer, 2005). Cohen (2000) argues that standardized testing emphasizes conformity instead of culturally relevance in education. He writes that:

The techniques of education, especially in rote and standardized learning and in the use of examinations, explicitly deny and conflict with the conveyance of particularistic values and criteria. Individual differences in personality, or family, or kin, and community backgrounds and traditions count for little, if anything, in the procedures of education. Instead, what is emphasized is uniformity. (p. 101)

Ladson-Billings (2005, January) comments that “the problem with tests isn’t that they don’t measure anything, it’s that they don’t measure everything!” Schools are not given alternatives to improving student achievement other than raising test scores since tests are the sole measurement of student learning. This in turn may create a cycle of teaching to the test and increases the inequity of quality practice. Sizer (2004) concludes that “NCLB narrows, and thus profoundly distorts the problem…[and that it] dodges the today’s major problems of educational excellence and democratic fairness” (pp. xxi-xxii). Darling-Hammond (2004) builds upon this argument by adding that the legislation as a whole does not address the issues that challenge schools in low-performing and low-income areas but instead impedes quality teaching and learning. She cites higher-class sizes, less district financial support and less-prepared teachers in lower-performing and low-income areas as obstacles to student learning that are not addressed in the legislation. She adds that:
NCLB as currently implemented is more likely to harm than to help most of the students who are the targets of its aspirations, and it is more likely to undermine - some would even say destroy the nation’s public education system than to improve it. (p. 4)

For example, schools that serve low-performing students, predominately students of low socio-economic status, are pressured to remove students from the testing schedules in order to avoid not making adequate yearly progress in any subgroup (Karp, 2004; Wood, 2004). Wood (2004) claims that efforts to remove students or transfer them to other schools during testing occurred on a widespread scale in Houston, Texas - the model for the standards and accountability measures of NCLB. If the students were no longer there, then their scores could not count against a school.

In addition, the aim of the legislation is that all students are to be proficient by the 2013-2014 academic school year. However, schools that are already producing high test scores but do not make adequate yearly progress are being labeled failing regardless of the fact that their scores may be above state or national standards (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Karp, 2004). This is another form of mistrust in schools. In fact, 95 percent of all students and students in the subgroups must test and improve their scores or the entire school is labeled as needing improvement. This pressures schools to focus on using students for their own structural gains instead of viewing tests as a possible measurement of student success in learning from which to improve pedagogy.

As an elementary school teacher in Ohio, I experienced that same pressure of student attendance during test week. I cajoled students and participated in school-wide organized efforts to motivate student attendance during standardized testing so that the numbers worked in our favor. I called students at home and reminded them to eat a solid breakfast before coming to school. I even called and woke students up who were
repeatedly tardy to school so that the numbers were strong in my classroom. Students
who behaved well during the test and showed up to school every day were entered into
daily and weekly drawings as school-wide incentives. When students asked to discuss the
impact of the tests upon their learning, I struggled with enforcing the school norms
encouraged by testing and not enabling any possible distractions that a honest discussion
might incur or with validating student concerns and ideas.

Adequate yearly progress (AYP) measures a student’s score against an established
state number on the test. Value-added assessment or the use of test scores to gauge
progress made within an academic year is the suggested replacement for the system of
AYP since it measures student gains from the developmental level of the student at the
beginning of the year. AYP simply measures student progress against a pre-established
standard. Furthermore, critics argue that while research proves that additional factors in
conjunction with teacher quality affect student achievement (Nye, Konstantopoulos, &
Hedges, 2004), NCLB does not address the other influences such as family income level
or language proficiency (Karp, 2004). This limitation of the legislation thereby, places
the responsibility for student test performance and academic achievement solely on the
schools and teachers.

*Adequate Yearly Progress Encourages Less Rigorous Tests.*

The fourth critique of NCLB is that the system of accountability based on federal
guidelines of measurement is slowly replacing the pre-existing state accountability
systems and thereby, encouraging the use of lesser tools of measurement rather than
building upon the strengths of the existing systems. Thus, it is argued that the state
produced tests were more challenging than the rote tests advocated by the legislation that
requires students to be “ranked and compared” (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Even in Center City, there is a debate among policymakers regarding the alignment of the established state test and the nationally recognized standardized test that is concurrently administered each academic year. The format of the state test considers synthesis of information and relies on an extended response format to measure student cognition while the national test currently employs a multiple-choice format. This test relies on students’ abilities to recall large amounts of content without making extensions of the knowledge. Consequently, teachers must limit the development of the curriculum to certain knowledge and not focus on the development of student connections with the content that would facilitate the development of higher-order thinking skills. Critics argue that this social practice fosters non-creative practice as teachers aim to incorporate test content skills into the curriculum. “One of the most perverse consequences of the NCLB Act is that many states formally lowered their standards in order to avoid having most of their schools declared failing” (Darling-Hammond, 2004, p. 16).

Darling-Hammond (2004), Karp (2004), Kohn (2004), Meier (2004), Neill (2004), and Wood (2004) advocate that the focus of the legislation broaden from the issues of accountability to include solutions that are appropriately funded instead of sanctions that exacerbate the problems of education that the law aims to address. For example, possible solutions would include the following changes in the legislation- dual accountability for policymakers and students, increased community participation in the accountability measures to ensure democratic principles in school governance, multiple forms of student assessment and structural supports for teacher development and quality (Neill, 2004).
From this understanding of the scholarly perspectives on NCLB and the emergent critique of the overall legislation, it is necessary to explore what issues are embedded in the literature surrounding the implementation of NCLB. This will help construct an understanding of the social enactment of the testing component of NCLB from the perspectives of the teacher participants of this dissertation. Noting what areas are of interest and possible concern to policymakers, scholars, and educators will also further inform the local perspectives explored in this dissertation.

NCLB Focus: Issues of Implementation of the Legislation and Public Awareness

Brief Overview of Legislation and AYP

The collective literature on NCLB demonstrates two main focuses- 1) building public awareness of the policy (Gonzalez, 2002; Lonergan, 2003; Mizell, 2003; McNeill, 2003; Neill, 2004) and 2) the current status and challenges emerging from the implementation of the largest federal involvement in state educational efforts (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Edley, 2002; Education Commission of the States, 2004; Gonzales, 2002; Keegan, Orr & Jones, 2002; Sunderman, 2003; Trahan, 2002; Wood, 2004). The major themes of NCLB are teacher quality, parental choice, less bureaucracy in education through solidifying federal funding and accountability measures to impact student achievement (see President Bush’s speech on 01/08/2004 and former Secretary of Education Paige testimony before the House of Representatives, 03/2001). These issues build upon the interpretation and implementation of the system of adequate yearly progress.

Adequate yearly progress is a standard that measures student achievement based on standardized test scores from year to year and determines whether or not a school is
making the appropriate gains in ensuring that all students will be proficient by the 2013-2014 academic school year. As defined by Lonergan (2003), AYP is the:

minimum levels of improvement in student performance that school districts and schools must make within a certain period. Each state must establish a baseline for measuring student progress using the higher of either the proficiency level of the state’s lowest achieving group or the proficiency level of the students at the lowest-achieving schools in the state. (p. 4)

This criterion then determines if a school is rewarded or sanctioned for its academic work as described in the next section.

As measured by AYP, schools that do not meet the accountability requirements of the legislation for two years will face sanctions and be labeled “needs improvement” (See Karp, 2001; Keegan, Orr & Jones, 2002; Lonergan, 2003; Meier, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, Sizer, & Wood, 2004; Neill, 2003; www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/education). These schools will then have to support student transfers to higher-performing schools in the district while making plans to improve achievement through professional development or other district efforts. Schools that do not make AYP after three years must then pay for student tutorial services for students within the subgroups. After four years of failing AYP, schools will be then labeled needing “corrective actions” that may entail replacing staff or the entire curriculum. After five years of failing AYP, schools can then be “restructured” meaning that the school may be reorganized as a charter school, staff eliminated or transferred or state or private takeover of administration. The premise of the legislation is that such sanctions will serve as a catalyst for educational improvement much like performance reports in the corporate sector.

The overall objective of NCLB in conjunction with AYP and sanctions is to raise student achievement for all students through the combination of increased parental
involvement, professional development efforts, solid curricular standards and accountability measures. Nevertheless, the challenges of implementation of these objectives are cyclical with the resultant public opinion of the law that in turn, impacts local and state implementation of policy objectives - thus demonstrating the sociocultural tenet that policy is a social practice (Sutton and Levinson, 2001). To better qualify the discussion of this dissertation, I focus on the issues of implementation in the literature rather than the need for public awareness of the policy.

Implementation and the New Federal/State Relationship

As indicated, the literature on NCLB focuses on issues of implementation and the emergent challenges of this process. One of the main factors affecting the implementation of NCLB is the newly created relationship between the federal government and state legislatures. This new relationship must attend to the issues of public schools, the purpose of schooling, teacher education, and policy efforts thus creating new approaches to and understandings of educational reform (Sunderman, 2003). Sunderman writes “NCLB is testing the limits of the federal system with a fundamentally different model - one that assumes that by centralizing rules, educational policy, institutions, and practice can be rapidly changed to accommodate new requirements” (2003, p. 1). Nonetheless, this uncertain relationship constituted through the legislation of NCLB presents numerous challenges of implementation that impact teacher education (Trahan, 2002), and existing state accountability programs and testing systems (Edley, 2002; Education Commission of the States, 2004; Pinkerton, Scott, Buell, & Kober, 2004; Sunderman, 2003). The discrepancies between state programs and the new federal regulations of NCLB evoke questions regarding the sustainability and
effectiveness of the law. The legislation also faces the challenge of balancing the task of achieving national policy objectives while also supporting state flexibility and autonomy in accomplishing those objectives.

The collective literature on NCLB considers state implementation of and compliance with the legislation (Pinkerton, Scott, Buell, & Kober, 2004) but does not focus on the specific impact of the policy on teachers and pedagogy. According to Pinkerton, Scott, Buell and Kober (2004) in *From the Capital to the Classroom: Year 2 of the No Child Left Behind Act*, states and districts are working hard with compliance but foresee future challenges with accomplishing the tasks of the accountability measures due to inherent funding issues. Many states and districts are struggling with fiscal budget crises that impede the timely success of several objectives—raising teacher standards by the 2005-2006 academic school year amid the growing threat of a teacher shortage (particularly in the urban areas), developing an infrastructure and expertise to manage the massive data necessary to comply with national accountability requirements and ensuring 100% student proficiency.

When examining the specific context of Center City in the above study, Pinkerton, Scott et al (2004) found that the discrepancies between state, district, and federal interpretation of implementation guidelines made compliance with the legislation difficult. As stated earlier, Center City is a rich example of school reform with its already existing measures representative of the accountability and school choice components of NCLB. The legislative requirements of NCLB, however, in some cases have undermined reform efforts already succeeding in Center City, thus making compliance with the federal law contradictory to the local efforts as evident in the following. When the
NCLB school choice option was enacted, more than 270,000 students in Center City during the 2003 academic school year were eligible for transfer to higher-performing schools. The reality was that there was only space for 1,165 students to actually move, thus making compliance with the federal law unrealistic for the urban district. To aggravate matters more, the plan of action for school choice that Center City relied upon had been approved and then later disapproved by the U.S. Department of Education, thereby creating more confusion about the process of policy implementation.

Moreover, the issue of teacher quality also created a conflict of implementation in that the state guidelines for teacher certification requirements did not specifically match the federal definitions of a “highly-qualified teacher”. This forced Center City to label many teachers as not highly qualified and send letters of declaration to parents. The district also questioned the federal formula used to measure adequate yearly progress. In response, the U.S. Department of Education deliberated with the state and district to establish a plan that afforded a high increase in student scores but incorporated variances in progress from year to year, not a static number. After the first year of implementation, the U.S. Department of Education withdrew its support for the state formula for AYP and required a static amount of progress demonstrated each year. The district administration summarized the issues undermining implementation of the federal legislation and current district reform as 1) the lack of written guidelines for implementation and 2) the changing of existing guidelines from the federal government. While the Pinkerton et al (2004) study sponsored by the Center on Educational Policy provided valuable data regarding the implementation of the legislation in Center City, it did not explore or address the impact of these policies upon the classroom teacher.
The literature also demonstrates the federal awareness of the emergent challenges of implementation of NCLB. The Education Commission of the States (2004) was awarded a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to explore the implementation status of NCLB in each of the fifty states using data from the first and second year of the legislation. In the final report entitled, *ECS Report to the Nation*, findings concluded that while there is much controversy surrounding the law (as indicated earlier in the text) that 1) states are making progress with implementation, and 2) that there is also some improvement in student achievement as measured by standardized tests within the accountability system. The report, however, lauds NCLB as a powerful tool for public education to achieve “two imperatives, one moral and the other economic; namely, that education is a civil right, and that a high-quality, high-performing education system is vital to maintaining America’s competitiveness in the world economy” (2004, p. vi). The reference to the correlation between public schooling and America’s participation in the world economy demonstrates the hegemonic view of NCLB that posits schooling as a form of economic proficiency. It is also an example of the influence the business model holds in the realm of educational policy.

During the state analysis, the ECS report explained that states vary in implementation of the law, thus, reinforcing the sociocultural theory that policy is enacted dependent on the social and cultural meanings of individuals and the power dynamics inherent to each state structure. Like Pinkerton, Scott et al (2004), the ECS findings conclude that most states are on track with implementation of the majority of NCLB requirements but that there is still work to improve the implementation of the legislation. The following issues remain a challenge - a lack of necessary technology
required for compiling a comprehensive accountability system, implementing “high-quality” professional development and assimilating the state and federal definitions and requirements for a highly qualified teacher. The ECS, nevertheless, engendered the following recommendations for policymakers wanting to reassess the implementation challenges of NCLB: 1) view NCLB as the latest federal effort to instill civil rights in public education, 2) include assessment of growth for all student achievement instead of solely measuring the four subgroups, 3) re-analyze the effectiveness of the system of adequate yearly progress to ensure that it accomplished its goal, 4) states should raise their criteria for highly-qualified teachers to match federal guidelines and 5) incorporate local and state autonomy into the management of accountability systems. It is important to note that the report does concede that many districts and states governments face financial challenges and subsequently, complete implementation of the legislation will prove difficult unless states and districts are afforded opportunities for collaboration.

On the other hand, Edley (2002) from the Harvard Civil Rights Project cites the absence of a clear implementation process among states as the key obstacle to the effectiveness and sustainability of the overall legislation. First, he warns that the civil rights principles that make NCLB an impressive effort to end educational discrimination may be threatened by the eclectic accountability systems among states and few strong guidelines of sanctions from the U.S. Department of Education. He argues that the small number of states that complied with the predecessor of NCLB, the Improving America’s School Act of 1994 as evidence of the inherent problems with too much flexibility in reform. Since the current legislation calls for reform measures that some states already had in place as a result of IASA, the NCLB requirements demand assimilation of these
programs with federal guidelines. However, Edley asserts that the federal government is already allowing much flexibility with state implementation that may undermine the principles of the legislation and cause further confusion with the implementation process. He urges a focus on the following three areas of the legislation to support the success of the implementation process—accountability, parental/public involvement, and management of resources.

Furthermore, many states need more time to establish the technology and necessary data systems needed to address these proposed issues of implementation. In addition to this need, the quick timeline of NCLB from enactment to initial sanctions hinders the state efforts to communicate information regarding student achievement and teacher credentials to the public, in turn, impeding the call in the literature for increased public involvement at the local and state levels. Second, Edley (2002) demands a rigorous standardized test that will provide clear and hard data from which to assess objectives of the law. This refers to the debate over whether a criteria-referenced test or a norm-referenced test is a more effective tool of measurement in NCLB. Edley continues that with a clear tool of measurement, states can then use test results to better create professional development efforts, provide technical assistance to the schools or plan intervention efforts. If the standardized tests that are used are not rigorous or clearly understood by states and districts, then the resources promised by NCLB will counteract the effort to improve education for minority and impoverished students. In conclusion, Edley (2002) writes that such incoherence between tools of accountability and implementation of the law harms the effectiveness of NCLB:

If the assessment systems are cobbled together in haphazard fashion, the entire NCLB effort to make inferences from score trends will simply
depart the realm of science altogether, and just become scapegoating-with-numbers. Junk science. In short, the Department’s regulations raise serious concerns, and they also raise the bar for the Department to ensure that states present substantial evidence that their assessment systems are valid and reliable for all students and for all intended purposes of those assessments. (p. 8)

It is important to note that even while Edley advocates better communication regarding the implementation process between federal/states governments and schools/parents, he fails to include the perspective of the teachers as a necessary component to improving the enactment of the legislation itself. As demonstrated throughout the literature on NCLB, this is a common view.

Another study that demonstrates the general focus in the literature on the implementation of rather than the teacher effects of the policy is Keegan, Orr, and Jones’ (2002) report Adequate Yearly Progress: Results, Not Process, prepared for the 2002 Fordham Foundation meeting entitled Will No Child Truly Be Left Behind? The Challenges of Making This Law Work. The authors explore the process of adequate yearly progress and argue its efficiency as a tool of measurement and method of enforcing implementation with the policy objectives. Keegan, Orr and Jones assert that while states should be allowed certain flexibility in implementation of accountability measures such as standardized tests, that the federal role is to follow through with sanctions if the states do not accomplish the policy goals. They continue that the requirements of NCLB build upon previous legislation, such as IASA or the Improving America’s School Act, and that the new requirements are not unrealistic for schools and states to meet. There is no discussion throughout the report on AYP and implementation issues regarding teacher effects or consideration for teacher input in policy implementation. In other words, this report is another example of how the literature does
not view current teacher perspectives or experiences with the policy as important to the reassessment or analysis of the implementation process. I now attend to policy discussion that examines the usefulness of teacher perceptions to the development and understanding of educational policy.

*Coming to Scale with NCLB*

As the literature on NCLB demonstrates, the focus on the implementation centers more on the generalizability of NCLB to states rather than the local impact of the policy. It appears that the local perspective is not viewed as a tool for policy development. It is this generalizability or transferability of policy that Elmore (2003) labels as an issue of “coming to scale”. This means that understanding how reform efforts impact individual districts/schools/teachers, and how these policies are successfully implemented in these instances needs to be central to the policy discussion of generalizing results. Moreover, if the success of policy is to be replicated on a larger scale then an understanding of local meaning and effects is important to the process of policy. He continues that the history of reform demonstrates that widespread reform or lasting reform must improve teaching practice in order to impact student learning. The challenge with replicating the success of isolated schools and teachers is that current reform such as the 600 page legislation of NCLB focuses on issues not involved with the questions of schooling and the specific beliefs surrounding how students and teachers construct knowledge. He writes that “the primary problem of scale is understanding the conditions under which people working in schools seek new knowledge and actively use it to change the fundamental processes of schooling” (p. 284) and that the contextual understanding of teaching and learning is as important as the decisions made in the classroom and in schools.
I add that since learning and teaching are both social and cultural processes, that an understanding of teacher experience with particular reform located in a theoretical framework will add to the legislative goal to replicate student success on a larger “scale”. This exploration can better inform policymakers of the inherent power dynamics of the policy and the resultant cultural norms transmitted to teachers. Both are effects that impact local understanding and implementation of policy. In addition, if the cultural and social practices nested in policy and teaching are more clearly delineated in research, then policy may note the importance of local meanings to policy objectives and the goal of generalizability of policy or “coming to scale”. As Elmore (2003) concludes, “the issue of coming to scale with good educational practice requires nothing less than deliberately creating and reproducing alternatives to the existing flawed institutional arrangements” (2003, p. 306) and that “our capacity to initiate and sustain reform has exceeded, to a considerable degree, our capacity to solve the problems that undermine the effects of reform” (2004, p.3). This inquiry is based on the assertion that if the institutional structures of policy incorporate teacher and local input as components in the construction and implementation of policies, that both teacher practice, student learning and policy would be more informed and successful.

In regards to the specific policy of NCLB, Elmore (2004) reasserts the need to include understanding of how policies affect teachers and students in his work, *School Reform from the Inside Out*. He argues that “the life of schools and classrooms has much to teach policymakers about the design and implementation of good policy” (p. 3). He delineates that policies would be best served by attending to the needs of the individual teacher and school by constructing “backwards mapping” of reform processes and
creating resultant reform “from the inside out”. For example, the issue of accountability in NCLB, as measured through standardized testing, struggles with the dichotomy between the demands placed upon teachers and the actual supports given to teachers. Elmore calls this an issue of reciprocity in reform. Similar to Levinson and Cade (2002) and Sutton and Levinson (2001), Elmore asserts that the social enactment of policies such as accountability measures is determined by the power dynamics of the school and communities in which teachers operate. He concludes that schools are not structured nor teachers and administrators prepared to deal with the pressures of these measures. This means that the dichotomy between practice and policy continues to grow.

Accountability in NCLB calls for consistent improvement in the quality of practice and student achievement through rigorous teacher quality and relevant professional development. Elmore explains that the development and the strategic use of professional development efforts are the key links to addressing the challenges of reform and practice. However, he advocates that a backwards mapping of accountability measures would help policymakers and scholars alike better understand the use of professional development to impact teacher practice and raise student achievement, both major objectives of NCLB. I assert that this understanding would also empower teachers and help them construct an awareness of their assumptions both personally and politically, thus, impacting practice and their implementation of testing policy. Through the development of teacher political selves and reflective practice, the policy process would also be impacted and dialogue could be strengthened.

Sunderman (2003) also advocates that to generalize and ensure success of the legislation, that consideration addresses the impact of NCLB upon local meanings and
local reform efforts. The discrepancy between state/district/local school implementation and the federal objectives of the policy determines the effectiveness of the reform. It is evident that the conflict of implementation impedes such development and policy success. Sunderman writes that the lack of a clear implementation process by the federal government for NCLB requires cooperation between local, state, and federal policymakers in order to substantiate the new federal role in education and ensure the success of the overall implementation process. He continues that the implementation process of NCLB will largely depend on meanings and priorities of state and local policymakers and the interpretation of NCLB by school officials and teachers. This attends to the usefulness of understanding teacher experience with the policy.

This dissertation addresses the gap of clear implementation of the policy as described in the literature by exploring the perspective of teachers at the local level. Moreover, this dissertation demonstrates the need for research to explore more specifically how teachers are affected by NCLB and how, in turn, this understanding can contribute to the overall aim of the policy— to better support schools and increase student achievement. “[NCLB] sets implementation timelines and defines a specific approach to testing to bring states into compliance with higher academic standards without corresponding attention to the mechanisms by which these strategies will influence teaching and learning” (Sunderman, 2003, p. 2). I add that an exploration of teaching and teachers informs any description of effective policy change because teachers are the premise of democratic education.

Although NCLB builds upon its predecessors, the Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994 and the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965, and focuses on similar
issues of equitable education, the implementation of NCLB and its affects are fairly young. Since the law was signed on January 8, 2002, useful data regarding its effects may not be rich or salient in some contexts. For example, schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress as measured by standardized tests for two consecutive years face sanctions. However, the extent or exact structure of these sanctions remains open to interpretation at the state level, as more guidelines are needed. Therefore, there may not be a large-spread impact over the last four years of these sanctions until more time has passed. The teacher participants of Center City have experience with accountability measures pre-NCLB and as such, can answer the need for current salient research that explores the impact of the standardized testing policy of NCLB upon teachers.

Conclusion

“…Organization means organizing with the people…the leaders cannot say their word alone; they must also say it with the people” (Freire, 1998, pp.178-179).

To build upon these representative examples from the NCLB literature, I add that better understanding and development of teacher experience with the process of NCLB implementation would fill the need to address the local effects of the policy. In turn, an understanding of teacher perceptions could not only expand the literature but also strengthen policy effectiveness and address the civil rights issues of the legislation. The premise of NCLB is to improve education for all students regardless of race, class, ability or gender. This would be strengthened by inquiry that troubled the policy process and the specific context of testing within NCLB by affording teachers the opportunity to reflect, learn, and dialogue about these issues and how their practice is positioned by and with-in each. In turn, teachers could then use this newly constructed knowing to improve their
practice and better attend to issues of diversity and equity in their classrooms, thus better attending to the objectives of the policy.

This dissertation aims to provide such an understanding for teachers and others through exploration of teacher lived experiences with the main assessment tool of the legislation, standardized testing, in a large urban school district representative of other urban experiences. As indicated in the discussion on the literature surrounding NCLB and its effectiveness, states vary in their approaches to implementation based on a discrepancy between the federal objectives of the NCLB and the state challenges with implementation. This means that further exploration of the policy implementation at the local level could provide a clear and useful picture of what supports are needed to facilitate state and federal collaboration. If the federal government has a clearer knowledge of the local challenges and experiences of this policy, then it will be able to better support state and local reform. This dissertation and its focus on teacher experience with testing policy of NCLB can provide such a context.

However, it is also pertinent that this dissertation help scholars, policymakers and teachers alike clearly understand the variance between teacher positionality to this legislation and how it impacts practice in order to create more supports for the teachers at the local context of the policy. Traditional policy studies construct policy as a linear process while this dissertation demonstrates the interdependence of each context upon each other by illuminating the local process of policy enactment from the perspective of the teacher. From this understanding, district, state and federal governments can begin to design appropriate supports for teachers and a space within the policy itself.
Such description of teacher experience also benefits scholarly contexts. Since research demonstrates that student achievement has a strong correlation with teacher quality and practice (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004), then an understanding of how the issues of implementation in the classroom are enacted and impact practice would illuminate both policy and teacher concerns, inadvertently impacting student achievement. This qualitative research aims to gleam understanding from the social and cultural processes of human beings as active participants in society. Exploring the theories that locate this study in conjunction with this historical legislation would benefit scholarly discussion.

The literature demonstrates that policymakers and educational leaders are focusing on the issues of implementation that emerge from the new relationship between the federal and state governments constituted by the legislation of NCLB. The discussion is framed within the question of how to reconcile state systems of accountability, teacher credentials and thus, teacher education and tools of measurement with federal guidelines (Courson, 2005; Sizer, 2005; Toppo, 2005; Weisner, 2005). As indicated earlier, there is a consensus in the literature that educational progress is being made under the legislation but that constant reassessment of state progress and the tools used for compliance should remain central to the federal efforts.

NCLB affords some flexibility for state implementation with the legislation, albeit the threat of sanctions for noncompliance urges a rapid timeline for state action. This, in turn, creates problems of communication between schools/districts and schools/parents since the accountability data gathered is challenging to disseminate in a timely and useful manner. Policymakers would be served to not only reassess the progress of the
legislation from the lens of state implementation but also to explore the interaction of the state and district efforts with the practice of teachers. A study examining the social enactment of NCLB and its impact upon teachers and pedagogy would illuminate what supports are needed to ensure success. Even President Bush (2004) during a speech celebrating the second anniversary of the signing of NCLB explained that local understandings and interpretation of the law ensure its success. He asserted that when local leaders create reform that works based on their local needs and of course, within the framework of the legislation of NCLB, that the aims of the legislation begin to get accomplished. President Bush commented that:

You don’t want a one-size-fits-all education approach. You want a—the best education reform comes from when the local people decide to reform, when your principals reform, when the people running at the state level reform, when businesses and local community leaders say, wait a minute, we’re not happy with the way things are, let’s change for the good of the everybody. (p. 5, See President Bush’s speech, January 8, 2004 at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004)

The president’s comments reiterate the premise of democratic education- that real change begins with the people and incorporates the people. However, his comments did not name teachers as local actors in the reform efforts. This study aims to fulfill that void in the policy and literature.

The literature on NCLB also elicits further inquiry into structural relationships and encourages collaboration between federal and state actors. This focus aims to ensure the success of the legislative goals without including the perceptions of the key actor of the policy, the teacher. Exploring human response and understanding of this legislation, specifically the testing component that is at the core of the accountability measure of NCLB would benefit policy, academia and practitioners.
A collaborative study between researcher and teachers can contribute to eradicate this eclectic knowledge regarding teachers and a space in policy. This dissertation will attempt to begin such understandings within the framework of NCLB. It will contribute to the theoretical understandings of the implications of power upon teacher experience as enacted through the policy of standardized testing in the federal legislation of NCLB. While exploring how policy becomes enacted in various cultural settings, dialogue from this study aimed to encourage further teacher reflections that may consequently, improve teacher quality and research usefulness. Demerath (2002) advocates that purposeful research helps the local community and school view themselves clearer. He adds that such exploration can help the community better understand policy while also constructing an understanding of how educators view their world and research. I build upon this assertion that through such understanding of the social and cultural constructions inherent to learning and teaching in schools that teachers may create a new sense of leadership and political action from which to develop a collective professional culture and in turn, better implement and eventually create educational policy.

I want to also build upon the assertion that teaching is the way for change as a relevant point for the call for this dissertation on teachers and testing policy within NCLB. Since the practices and policies of education typically limit teachers whether as individuals or as a collective, then teachers must be “willing to teach” to change the situation. Teachers must be willing to reflect, dialogue, and establish a solid sense of community from which to create real action in policy. They must be willing to as argued by hooks (2003), “make the personal political” and I add, “make the political personal”. Through the teaching community, teachers can “maintain their integrity of being” (hooks,
2003) and avoid “stupidity and tears” (Kohl, 2003). When teachers work toward a critical consciousness (Freire, 1988; hooks, 2003; Kohl, 2003), name the pervasiveness of power and reflect on their agency, then acting stupid will not permeate the democratic process of education. One of the assumptions driving this inquiry into policy and teachers is that that when individual teachers begin this process of not remaining silent through a collective dialogue and create a real professional culture, that the policy process will begin to take notice of the benefit of teacher involvement. Thereby teachers, as a collective, can then better contribute to policy rather than simply reacting to its objectives. This dissertation serves as a beginning for such change and insight into the culture of policy and teaching.

Dialogue based on collaborative research, however, can also explore how the power of regulations and pressures of high-stakes testing impact teacher practice and how teachers, in turn, incorporate the policy into the specific local culture of their classrooms. Such purposeful research can also further the sociocultural approach to policy or understandings of how policy is enacted at various levels as a cultural practice. The diverse intersections of meaning and power within policy are a cultural response to the changes of schooling (Carroll, 1992; Levinson & Cade, 2002; Shore & Wright, 1997) that teachers deserve an opportunity to reflect upon, contribute theoretical knowledge to and actively participate in. Giroux and McLaren (1989) write that:

What is needed, if schools are truly to make a difference, is a language of reform that is born of a socially and morally insurgent imagination, one that...challenges and engages the educators that chose to appropriate it, and at the same time, that provokes those interested in educational reform to rethink and reshape the specificities of their experiences as teachers...with respect to the aims and purposes of present-day schooling. (p.xxx)
This study attempted to create such professional conversations for teachers to rectify their experiences and realities with the culture of policy in the framework of testing policy of NCLB. These experiences are described at length in chapter four. The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act is the first federal legislation to carve a large role for the federal government in the traditional state field of education. This study builds upon the literature calling for exploration of implementation issues of the legislation to explore how teachers respond to and position this federal push in public schools.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

“Through policy, the individual is categorized and given such statuses and roles as ‘subject’, ‘citizen’, ‘professional’, ‘national’, ‘criminal’ and ‘deviant’. From the cradle to the grave, people are classified, shaped and ordered according to policies, but they may have little consciousness of or control over the processes at work” (Shore & Wright, 1997, p. 4).

As described in chapter one, the aim of this collective case study was to explore how urban teachers experience the standardized testing policy within the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act in order to better understand how such policy is enacted in the classroom and what discrepancies may exist between teachers and the new federal legislation. More specifically, the study focused on the following questions as co-constructed through extensive time with participants and in the research site. These questions reflect both local teacher issues and researcher interests:

1. How do teachers experience standardized testing within NCLB?
   a. How do teachers change or assimilate testing policy within practice?
   b. How do teachers push back at the testing policy through practice?
   c. How does this process impact teacher ability to respect issues of diversity and equity in the classroom?
2. What cultural norms are transmitted around standardized testing policy?
3. How does teacher voice get enacted and heard at the school level?
   a. What structures of school governance exist to facilitate teacher voice?
   b. How much is teacher voice heard regarding testing policy at the school level?
4. How can research create and support a political space for teacher growth and development?
Therefore, the methods used to explore the lived experiences of teachers and policy needs to describe the cultural and social context of these meanings. Concurrently, such description must also include an exploration and naming of the school power dynamics that teacher participants participate in and are impacted by through such social interaction.

Since the phenomena of teacher experience with testing policy within NCLB was the issue of interest, the inquiry approach needed to construct a deeper understanding of the case or particular experience of five teachers. Stake (2000) explains that when a researcher explores more than one case to investigate an issue, it is called a collective case study. This means that the “case is of secondary interest, it plays a supporting role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else” (Stake, 2000, p. 437). Stake does however, emphasize the importance of the case and its data by stating that the case study is both the process of inquiry and the product of inquiry. Describing teacher lived experiences, as a social and cultural process was vital to the inquiry as the example of the enactment of testing policy. Therefore, the case of teacher experience and the phenomenon of testing policy were equally important to understanding. A case study approach that enabled thick description and insight to both teacher perspectives and the policy enactment facilitated a thorough exploration of the topic and emergent questions. In addition, the use of the collective case study approach also facilitated the theoretical locations of the topic and researcher. This was done by providing teachers with the opportunity to reflect, dialogue on these reflections and new meanings and then incorporate action or praxis into their personal and professional practice. This cyclical process of growth advocated by Freire (1988) and described in detail in chapter two was
possible through the space constructed through collaborative methods of the research as described in length in this text.

General Methodological Location: A Brief Overview

The design of this dissertation was a collective case study using ethnographic methods and feminist principles of research that described the experiences of five urban elementary and middle school teachers during the second year of the implementation of standardized testing as a measurement of school success within NCLB. It is important to note that although the legislation is called the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, it was not signed until January 8, 2002 due to the attacks of September 11, 2001. President Bush felt that the widespread educational reform legislation would be better served after attending to other national issues. Therefore, the 2003-2004 academic school year of data collection was the second year of policy implementation.

According to Stake (2000), a collective case study as used in this dissertation explores “a number of cases in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition” (p. 437). The overall goal is to use dialogue and reflection to explore meanings of and behind the policy within each case and “to make explicit what is implicit and tacit to informants and participants in the social settings being studied” (Spindler, 1982, p. 7). The methods, as explained in the following text, aimed to create findings that speak to local meanings and local needs. By making the connection between the actual experiences of the teacher participants to the testing policy itself, Watkins (2002) explains that it is possible to create a “critical self-consciousness [that] can expose ideologies that underlie the structures and procedures that have kept schools the places that they are, place that sort and de-skill rather than a place for learning” (p. 228). This
study aimed to construct such a space that afforded teacher reflection of such processes that affect individual experience and consequently, teacher practice. The following text will delineate the methods and methodology chosen to facilitate inquiry and incorporate theoretical assumptions with the topic explored. I begin with an exploration of the theoretical framework of the study.

Sociocultural and Critical Theory Framework: Teacher Lived Experiences with Standardized Testing Policy

Since the nature of teacher lived experiences depends on the social construction of knowledge shaped by power relations and the cultural meanings teachers place upon such constructed knowledge, qualitative research methods support both the theoretical nature of the topic and the resultant exploratory collaborative research design. The nature of qualitative inquiry is supported by interpretative/constructivist paradigm from which sociocultural approach to policy emerges. In my interpretation, critical theory and feminist principles form a branch from such approach that enhances exploration of human nature and learning. Glesne (1999) describes the ontological nature of such a paradigm with the following:

Interpretivist…paradigm, which portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex and ever changing. The ontological belief for interpretivist, therefore, is that social realities are constructed by the participants in those social settings. To understand the nature of constructed realities, qualitative researchers interact and talk with participants about their perceptions. The researchers seek out the variety of perspectives. (p. 5)

The epistemology of such paradigms holds that realities are contextualized and interpreted as the research develops, thus further grounding interpretations in local meanings and cultural history.
In other words, giving consideration to the social, cultural and political experiences of teachers as they experience testing policy deems appropriate in this dissertation study. Glesne (1999) continues with stating that qualitative and interpretivist inquiry enables open interpretation as the research develops allowing the “researcher to approach the inherent complexity of social interaction and to honor that complexity, to respect it in its own right. To do justice to complexity, researchers avoid simplifying social phenomena and instead explore the range of behavior” (p.6). As teachers interpret testing policy within the school culture and within their own personal and professional experiences and meaning constructs, educational policy and teacher practice is a cultural and social process laden by teacher agency and testing policy. Traditionally, teachers develop such awareness and knowledge of testing policy through reaction to school mandates regarding testing policy and the overall legislation of NCLB. Construction of such knowledge and meanings is mediated by social and cultural individual history.

The interpretivist/sociocultural assumption that knowledge is socially constructed and mediated by cultural norms and interpretation provide an appropriate groundwork for this research. The assumptions of critical theory add that such social meaning and constructs are grounded in asymmetrical power relations that determine the meanings an individual has access to or positionality toward and how the meanings are interpreted and re-interpreted. Therefore, the diverse theoretical approaches of this study and combination of research methods naturally emerge from the openness of qualitative inquiry to explore human meanings and experience (Glesne, 1999). Kirsch (1999) adds to the stated belief that the social and cultural nature of the enactment of policy in various contexts by teachers mediates the necessity of qualitative inquiry since “qualitative
researchers typically situate their work in its historical and cultural context and acknowledge the complexity and diversity of human experience” (p. 6). It was this challenge of describing and understanding the “human experience” of teachers within the testing policy through the lenses of sociocultural and critical theory within the social, cultural and political context of standardized testing and educational policy that laid the focus of the study.

_Ethnographic in Nature Only_

I believe that before more connections can be made between theoretical locations of the study and specific methods used, it is important to note why I do not call this dissertation an ethnographic study. Although much qualitative inquiry in education has been labeled as ethnographic due to the tenet that education is a cultural practice, this dissertation does not appropriate the label of ethnography for several reasons. First, while the focus of the study is the exploration of cultural meanings of testing policy for teachers and their responses to such policy meanings, this study does not as Willis and Trondman (2000) advocate ethnography to be one in which theory creates a critical focus on the centrality of culture in all data. Second, while this dissertation design and methods borrow ethnographic principles of research such as thick description and participant observation, it does not employ extensive, being more than a year in the research site, long-term engagement in the field. As Spindler and Hammond (2004) write, ethnography employs long-term engagement in the field as a form of validity of findings. This study actualized over the time period of March 2004 to October 2004 - a period of eight months. The time period was chosen strategically, however, to mirror teacher perceptions of testing as the two rounds of standardized tests were implemented - one in
March and the last in May. It is important to note, however, that while the anthropological lens was not employed according to the practice of that field, certain practices and approaches were co-opted, as is often the practice of qualitative research.

**Collaboration as a Natural Approach**

To align with the guiding epistemological assumptions of particular schools of thought within critical theory and feminist research principles, the methods of this study were collaborative and participatory in essence to rely on dialogue and reflection to co-construct texts that mirror the reality of the teacher participants. Collaboration helps the researcher establish rapport and community with the participants (D’Andrade, 1984; Sipe & Constable, 1996) through which to examine their truths and the political nature of the research and its findings. This dialectic space also enables participants to examine the social complexities of their reflections and their perceptions of power dynamics. Freire (1988) argues that people can be reflective when they are positioned as actors and not as subjects of a study. Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) write “no pristine interpretation exists—indeed, no methodology, social or educational theory, and discursive form can privilege position that enables the production of authoritative knowledge” (p. 286). Collaboration allows researchers to work toward avoiding such privileging and instead, better include teachers in the decision-making process of a study.

Collaboration can also ensure that control of the study is shared between participants and researcher. It is necessary to discharge the socialized notion that the researcher must control inquiry. To accomplish this, the researcher must be prepared for the emergent nature of the inquiry, how participants position the researcher throughout the study, and the vulnerability that the process places upon the researcher (Clifford,
1990; Dillard, 2000; Glesnse, 1999). This awareness helped connect theory with the lived realities of teachers in this dissertation in order to examine policy as a practice along with teacher agency. Such connection between participant reflections and social practice can also encourage reflection on the beliefs behind policies and help begin communication to address this enactment (Levinson & Cade, 2002). Dialectic research as the focus of this study can help as Willis and Trondman (2000) write “social actors increasingly become more agents of their own will, but within some sociological frame, somehow understood, conditioning and setting its limits of possibility- changing the social within the social” (p. 10).

The participatory methods chosen for this study enabled the researcher to share power with the participants, respect the local culture, and construct findings that reflected the emic voice along with the etic perspective. Levinson and Cade (2002) add that such “participatory research methods…are an effort to privilege the voices of the subjects by providing a platform for subjects to define issues as they see them” (p. 25). Accordingly, the methods may also shift and evolve throughout the study depending on the needs of the participants and the social context of the school. For example, when I first gained access to the researcher site, I knew that some components of the federal legislation of NCLB mirrored the accountability reforms in Center City. As I gained more access to the school culture, the teacher participants were concerned with the issues of teacher quality and standardized testing surrounding an impending teacher strike. Therefore, methods shifted at various times depending on the urgency of the teacher dialogue and their opportunities for reflection. Daly advocates the importance of placing the value of the inquiry over the rigidity of methods as I aimed to in this study.
The tyranny of methodolatry hinders new discoveries. It prevents us from raising questions never asked and from being illumined by ideas that do not fit into preestablished boxes and forms. The worshippers of Method have an effective way of handling data that does not fit into the Respectable Categories of Questions and Answers. They simply classify it as nondata, thereby rendering it invisible. (as cited in Belenky et al, 1986, p. 96)

Since located in sociocultural and critical theory with feminist research principles, this study used the intimacy that participatory methods offer to create a thick description and enable the critical collective case studies to intertwine the lives of researcher and participants. It aimed to respect all forms of interaction and avoided classifying “nondata” as not connected to the inquiry. Fine and Weis (2000) also urge researchers to use participatory methods to name the inherent power dynamics of research and understand the political and social power that methods generate throughout a study. They explain that “methods are not passive strategies. They differently produce, reveal, and enable the display of different kinds of identities…within some sociological frame, somehow understood, conditioning and setting its own limits of possibility- changing the social within the social” (p. 118). The collaborative methods used in this study aimed to illuminate such power dynamics and emergent, blurred identities of researcher and participants.

Feminist Standpoint Principles as Methodology: Relevance and Usefulness to Inquiry

While the sociocultural and critical theoretical lenses allowed the inquiry to be both descriptive and reflective, feminist principles of research added a more in-depth look into teacher lives and experiences with testing policy. It is important to understand the consideration given to such principles before an explanation of specific research design to understand the overall approach and constructed findings.
Feminist research principles are not a particular set of methods used in the research approach but instead are ethical principles employed during the process (Kirsch, 1999). Kirsch (1999) describes that like most qualitative inquiry, feminist research concerns itself with issues such as representation, reciprocity and researcher rapport. She continues to explain the characteristics of such research as the following: 1) collaborative, 2) naming the socio-historical factors that shape individual worldview, 3) reflexive, 4) responsible for and aware of the consequences of research, and 5) troubling the limitations of research approach.

Attending to the affective aspects of a participant’s life and gathering data in the situatedness of lived experience are also examples of feminist research principles that establish rapport, researcher access and salience of the data. When a researcher respects the emotionality of a situation and the person involved, then she builds trust and respect with the participant. Also viewing the situatedness of lived experience or opportunities for data gathering that are non-traditional, such as a conversation standing next to the participant’s car after-school or a discussion in the hallway supervising students in the bathroom, construct an in-depth look at the topic of inquiry. Although participants cross identity borders dependent on the power dynamics of a situation, observing and gathering data from the situatedness of an experience provides participants with the opportunity to become comfortable with the borders of participant/researcher. Establishing trust and rapport is a goal that should begin at the beginning of a study as Janesick (2000) advocates given the ethical considerations and the purpose of qualitative research to explore meaning within the social and cultural. She explains that:

Access and entry are sensitive components in qualitative research, and the researcher must establish trust, rapport, and authentic communication
patterns with participants. By establishing trust and rapport at the 
beginning of a study, the researcher is better able to capture the nuances 
and meanings of each participant’s life from the participant’s point of 
view. This also ensures that participants will be more willing to share 
everything, warts and all, with the researcher. Maintaining trust and 
rapport continues through the length of the study and long after the fact.
(p. 384)

In addition, feminist principles of research add that while epistemological 
knowledge is socially constructed and based on power relations, the principles utilized in 
this approach enhance the information learned and stories told during research. With 
greater access to participants and a research site, feminist principles guide the ethical 
considerations that should be incorporated in any process of inquiry. This also 
contributes to the scholarly work of the research by producing salient and robust data. 
Kirsch (1999) concludes that the line between epistemological and ethical consideration 
is blurred and that “in short, researchers, guided by feminist principles are likely to ask 
‘better’ questions, which in turn, can lead to ‘better’ answers” (p. 12). How these 
principles add to gathering of knowledge and trustworthiness criteria will be furthered 
explored in a later section on ethical considerations.

To gain emic perspective and name the etic subjectivities, I had to acknowledge 
that as Glesne (1999) advocates I became the main research tool. My interactions with 
participants, co-constructed access to teacher culture, questions asked of participants and 
others all influenced the nature of the inquiry, researcher rapport, and the construction of 
truths. While it is necessary to gain access to understand the complexities of social 
interaction, feminist principles of research afforded me a space from which explore the 
topic but to also examine the ethical component of the power dynamics within the 
learning process of research and what context my history brought to the topic.
Since my goal was to explore teacher meanings of testing policy, I needed access to teacher culture in order to understand teacher meanings used in dialogue and reflection during the research process. This afforded me the opportunity to gain understanding and to ground interpretation as the research developed in local meanings, thus co-constructing theories of meaning grounded in the social and cultural contexts of the teachers. Lauridsen (2003) adds that such “embedded and final interpretation of data and analysis is needed to consider multiple meanings and interpretations, in conflict and alignment with one another, to ultimately determine the essence of meaning of the various voices and stakeholders involved” (p. 67). Using feminist principles to determine the research design not only supported the ethical and collaborative nature along with the empirical data of the inquiry but also the multiple voices and meanings within data findings. I will now detail the research population of the inquiry before discussing specific methods used to establish grounded theory of teacher experiences with-in testing policy of NCLB.

Research Population

The exploration of teacher lived experience with-in the standardized testing policy of NCLB is an important issue for all grade levels and content areas. In the context of this study, however, teachers from grades 3-8 were invited to participate to construct a clearer understanding of practice and policy in the elementary and middle school years. More specifically, teachers that represented grade levels affected by the already established grade promotion policy in Center City were invited first to provide salient data regarding standardized testing and educational policy. Teachers from non-promotion grades were later invited as well.
The district of Center City Schools serves as a rich source for research on policy, teacher practice and teacher voice due to its history of reform efforts and current administrative and cultural challenges facing a large urban school district in the Midwest. Center City Schools also has a large teacher population, strong union presence, decentralized school governance, and experience with accountability measures that mirror the challenges urban schools face in an effort to improve student achievement through the legislation of NCLB.

Center City Schools serve a diverse student population of 436,048 students, more specifically 276,572 students in grades 1-8. 20.8 % percent of the total state student population is served in this district within 613 schools. Based on student economic data, the district student population is classified as urban with 84.9 % listed as low-income. The ethnic make-up of the student population is disaggregated as follows- 56.3 % African-American, 37.2% Hispanic, 9.1 % Anglo, and 3.1 % Asian with 14.5 % categorized as Limited English Proficiency. 24,584 classroom teachers are given the responsibility of educating the aforementioned student population. It is important to note that the school district also employs members from several alternative teacher education programs, such as Teach for America, in order to fill some certified positions, a reality indicative of the growing teacher shortage in urban school systems.

While exploration of teacher experiences, testing policy, and teacher voice is deemed important in all grade levels and content areas, such an undertaking would be unrealistic and possibly not relevant for classroom and scholarly understandings. Understanding teacher experience calls for a robust exploration into teacher meanings and cultural knowledge that would not be served with a large research sample.
Therefore, the sample for this dissertation was chosen from the above research population to qualify general teacher experience. Although the context of one school and a sample of five teachers, as argued before, is “small…my perspective is wide” (Wolcott, 1982, p. 5). I now delineate the specifics of the research site and sample.

Research Parameters: Setting and Sample

The urban school selected as the research site mirrors the district student demographics and teacher population. To respect administrative requests and teacher participant identities, the name of the school has been changed and will be referred to as Diversity Place School or DPS in the resulting text. Diversity Place School is a K-8 school serving a student population of 1,032. Over twenty different countries are represented and nineteen various language spoken among the student population. This means that the student population is drawn from an incredibly diverse local community that in turn creates a diverse school community. It is important to note that the number of 88% total students at DPS receiving free or reduced lunch is above the district average of 84% and the state level of 41%. The ethnic make-up of students mirrors the diversity of the district student population with more Hispanic student numbers- 68% Hispanic, 11% African-American, 11% Asian, and 10% Anglo.

The research sample of five teachers was derived from a combination of convenience, intensity and snowball sampling methods. The initial contact at the research site is a former student teacher of mine that taught in my language arts classroom during the 2000-2001 academic school year. While constructing the dissertation proposal, I contacted this teacher to share research interests and inquire about possible relevance to her work. She then agreed to participate in the research study and
offered to introduce me to school administrators to begin gaining access to the research site. After administrative permission was granted, the now participant/contact introduced me to colleagues and helped me gain access to staff in-services, lunch meetings, and social events during the fall of 2003. At each event, I had the opportunity to explain the purpose of study, develop understanding of local interest and relevant topics of concern and explore the context of policy and teacher culture at DPS.

As the conversations ensued and the foundation for researcher rapport and school culture access began to develop, the importance of potential participants being “teacher leaders” developed as a local priority through conversations with staff, teachers, parents, and administrators at the research site. Thus, potential participants were asked their views regarding teacher leadership and its relevance to practice and school culture. The co-constructed criteria for participant selection to represent teacher leadership at the school site reflected local expectations for teachers by fellow teachers.

The final sample comprised of five teachers- two from grade levels that relied on test scores to determine student promotion, two from grade levels that did not rely on test scores for student promotion, and one from special education that did rely on test scores in one grade for student promotion. Participants not only represented various grade levels but also represented two subcategories of assessment in NCLB - bilingual education and special education. In addition, the sample included the following characteristics - years of teaching experience, levels of education, racial location, gender, content area focus, and socioeconomic status (i.e. class membership). To honor the emergent nature of research and the issue of representation central to feminist principles, I strove to include each participant equally throughout the research.
Such participants provided both their own information-rich cases and a salient collective case study without extreme positioning (Patton, 1990) since each was at varying points in their career development, active in different facets of the school culture, and were relatively uninformed of the current developments of NCLB but experienced with the accountability measures of Center City school district. Patton (1990) explains that it is important to remember that “the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information-richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with the sample size” (p. 185). This purposeful sample was selected for such feasibility and theoretically rich capabilities. As further described in chapter four, each teacher participant was able to expand the researcher’s understanding of the political nature of teaching (Schwandt, 2001) and the realities facing urban school teachers experiencing the standardized testing policy of NCLB, thus providing an intensity-rich and purposeful sample. I now turn attention to the methods used to triangulate the data and construct a thick description of the phenomenon and topic of inquiry.

Triangulation of the Data

Triangulation of the data is the process through which a researcher validates the truths of the inquiry or the validity of the findings (Glesne, 1999; Schwandt, 2001). It is the manner in which a qualitative researcher checks to see if the techniques used throughout data collection actually answered the questions that framed inquiry. Schwandt (2001) adds that “triangulation is a means of checking the integrity of the inferences one draws” (p.257) and broadens the definition to include multiple methods,
theoretical approaches and data sources. Glesne (1999) asserts that “triangulated findings contribute to the credibility”(p. 152) of the data gathered.

Triangulation was implemented during this study with the use of multiple methods of data collection and the two complimentary theoretical approaches - the sociocultural and critical paradigms. The methods utilized in this study to explore teacher experience with standardized testing within NCLB were interviewing, participant observation, and document collection. Each of the methods were conducted concurrently throughout the research process in order to as Lauridsen (2003) encourages, keep the researcher grounded in the data corpus. She continues by arguing that triangulation also helps the researcher remain cognizant of the issues of representation in the study, meaning that the multiple perceptions of the participants are presented in the findings rather than a binary explanation of a specific assertion.

The focus of this study on teacher experience mediated that the researcher understand the context of the data to construct thick description and generate findings that represented local meanings of teachers. Triangulation is more than simply using three methods or two theoretical approaches to the topic; it is also an ethical practice that aligns with the feminist principles of this study to make the understanding of teachers more robust.

Although triangulation is a practice of credibility similar to the positivist notion that there is a right and wrong way to construct knowledge, the use of it within this study is relative to the meanings co-constructed by researcher and participants. In other words, I do not aim to use triangulation to assert that the participants and I have created an absolute story or truth. I consistently reiterated throughout the research process that 1) I
do not provide an expert status of the topic explored, and 2) the final construction of the research process would be a partial truth since all knowing is political and personal at the same time, thereby making it impossible to construct a single truth or absolute findings. Nevertheless, I acknowledge the use of multiple methods of data collection, or triangulation, to build the narratives of teachers and help them name the social, cultural, political and power processes within those experiences. Triangulation extends beyond a regulatory practice of qualitative methods to establish credibility of findings to become a constitutive tool of representation (Lather, 1997). This serves the lives of teacher participants because the data gathered contributes to their reflections and actions taken as a result of the research process. Since teachers are rarely afforded the opportunity to reflect and analyze their own lives, triangulation ensures that there is more robust evidence from which to begin reflection and dialogue as gathered from interviews, participant observation and documents. I will begin with a description of the use of interviews as the first tool of triangulation.

Methods of Data Collection

Interviews: Purposeful to Clarifying Local Views

“I interview because I am interested in other people’s stories. Most simply put, stories are a way of knowing” (Seidman, 1998, p. 1).

Exploring and understanding teacher experience and meaning-making of testing policy within NCLB was the central focus of this dissertation. To align with the tenets of sociocultural and critical theory regarding the social construction of knowledge determined by power relations and cultural meanings, interviews were a method chosen for its ability to gain access to salient information to better construct and co-construct data based on local meanings. To align with feminist principles, interviews were a
constructive tool for data gathering because it enabled the researcher to get closer to participants and actually interact and listen to them (Kirsh, 1999). In other words, the researcher was able to better ground questions and observations in local meanings when interviews enabled deeper access to participants and their knowledge.

Glesne (1999) describes interviewing as a process of “making words fly” to build rapport and understandings. She explains that interviews are a powerful method that further contextualize meanings because the researcher develops listening skills that will serve further inquiry:

The opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see is the special strength of interviewing in qualitative inquiry. To this opportunity, add the serendipitous learnings that emerge from the unexpected turns in discourse that your questions evoke. In the process of listening to your respondents, you learn what questions to ask. (p. 69)

I add that through this process the researcher is able to also learn about local meanings that eventually assist in co-constructing the final data findings.

Schwandt (2001) defines interviews as “a particular kind of person-to-person encounter between researcher and researched that entails ethical considerations” but adds that the process is a “kind of discursive, narrative, or linguistic event unfolding in a specific sociopolitical context.” (pgs. 135-136). Schwandt agrees with Glesne that such an approach better contextualizes the meanings of the questions asked and the responses given.

Although there is a wide range of methods and methodology within qualitative research to guide ethical practice; I chose the concurrent theoretical framework and feminist principles to better establish balance between researcher and participant social interactions. Interviews, as a research tool, were then a natural tool for inquiry since they
can not only better ground questions and data but also assist researcher/participants to answer the task of naming positionality posited by Greene (1978). She writes:

We are functions of a culture…the realities we construct…mean what they mean because we have internalized common ways of thinking about them and talking about them…but at the same time each of us looks upon the common world from a particular standpoint, a particular location in space and time. (p. 24)

Interviews can evoke personal reflection and meaning making through the questions asked and the extra perspective offered by the researcher/listener. They help researcher and participants better understand the standpoints of meaning from which participants approach inquiry. Interviews also help illuminate the multiple layers of meaning of participant lives because they are:

Embedded in a variety of contexts - in the life histories and social networks of the participants in the events, and in the broader societal circumstances of the events, including the relevance of the ethnic, social class, and cultural group membership of the participants for the ways in which they organize their conduct together in the recorded event. (Erickson, 1986, p. 145)

Marshall and Rossman (1989) add that while constructing such understanding if power is shared and co-constructed through interviews, then the researcher may be able to collect additional data on-site during interviews through interpretation of body language and the stories that emerge from conversation. Narratives construct, according to Eisenhart (2000), a “social, cognitive, and emotional process in which one works to interpret the past, construct the present, and launch the future” (p. 374). Interviews are the tools used to construct such interpretations.

As Fontana and Frey (2000) assert, interviews are also opportunities for data gathering that serve multiple purposes. They continue that interviews build researcher rapport, further develop researcher and participant roles and shape participant knowledge
as meanings are reflected upon, constructed during interviews and assimilated into new meanings. “Interviews are not neutral tools that of data gathering but active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results” (p. 646). Through such social practice, the researcher builds the emic or insider perspective of the phenomena as Pelto and Pelto (1978) advocate to locate data in local meanings.

Although the information gathered from interviews centers on the emic perspective and depends on the personal assumptions and values of participants that mediate the social construction of knowledge, it is necessary to also utilize the etic perspective of such information to ground the data in both theory and social practice (Glesne, 1999). This is especially salient to the exploration of teacher experience with testing policy in that teachers are often too overwhelmed by the daunting tasks that they are charged with each day to be able to separate experience from personal meanings. The structure of the school day simply does not support such reflection and makes participation in research a valuable tool for teachers (Ladson-Billings, 2004; Temes, 2002). There is not sufficient time built into the daily structure of schools to support teacher dialogue because as Ladson-Billings (2004) comments “everything in the school conspires against the teacher”. Erickson (1986) adds that institutional structures are not assembled in such a way that there is even an audience to direct teacher thoughts or reflections and thus the lack of teacher involvement in research and policy demonstrates a “relative powerlessness of the profession outside the walls of the classroom” (p. 157). Therefore, the etic role of the researcher, while employing feminist principles of access, works against such limiting structures in education to create a space for teacher voice to develop and be heard. Such outsider perspective also adds an important layer of
reflection to the interaction during interviews and the resultant understanding constructed with the participants. Interviews, once again, are a natural tool for such dialogue, reflection, and critical inquiry.

To comply with the feminist principles of ethics/methods and the goal of obtaining robust or thick description of participants’ lives, informal and formal interviews were held throughout the study. In particular, unstructured and negotiated texts served as the format for interviews in this study. I will begin to explain the purpose of informal interviews and how they constructed the emergent research.

To gain understanding of teacher experience and local school culture towards standardized testing policy, informal interviews were held frequently, roughly once a week at the beginning of the study. These interviews helped co-construct the questions for formal interviews held at a later stage in the inquiry. Since building rapport is an on-going process (Glesne, 1999), these conversations occurred in various sites in order to develop understanding of participant positionality within the school culture as participants mediated their identities dependent on the environment. Informal interviews encouraged participants and researcher to view the practice as more than simply a single conversation but rather as an on-going reflection and discussion through which meaning was constructed, reflected upon and extended.

*Interviews as a Political Space for Individual Development.*

Interviews, as a process and a practice, allowed the creation of a political space for both myself as the researcher through which to explore and share meanings and participants to share, name meanings and ask questions reflective of newly constructed
knowledge. Fontana and Frey (2000) describe such a space as socially mediated and contextualized in that:

Interviewers are not invisible, neutral entities; rather, they are part of the interactions they seek to study and influence those interactions…Interviewers are not the mythical, neutral tools envisioned by survey research. Interviewers are increasingly seen as active participants in interactions with respondents, and interviews are seen as negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents in that they are shaped by the contexts and situations in which they took place. (p.663)

As rapport developed between participants and myself, the manner in which interviews were conducted became more integral to the emerging roles we each performed and the borders of identity crossed during such interactions. It was important to consider the tone and manner in which questions were asked to interviewees to avoid alienating participants from the research process and consequently, silencing their responses. As Lauridsen (2003) writes:

Interviews are a vehicle to elicit systems of meaning about phenomena [and that] the interviewer needs to consider the social context of the interview, and involve the interviewee communicating their interpretation, perspectives, and meanings. The interviewer needs to ask for clarification and verification of the responses while affording consideration to the manner in which they attempt to gain clarification, verification, and additional information…The interviewee needs to feel valued and involved in the process, not just a ‘subject’. (p. 77)

While qualitative inquiry, and more specifically the theoretical locations of this study, dictate that interviews be conducted in a respectful manner (Devault 1999; Harding, 1987; Kirsh, 1999; Reinharz, 1992) it proved to be a difficult task to actively listen and validate participants’ response without adding my interpretation of the topics discussed. For example, the focus of this dissertation was teacher experience with the standardized testing policy component of NCLB. The research site was an urban school in a large
A midwestern town struggling with the challenges of educating students from a myriad of cultural histories. Students came from disparaging impoverished economic backgrounds. The teacher participants dealt with the socio-economic context amidst accountability measures that mediated student promotion and teacher quality based on test scores. Therefore, the participants of this study were experienced with standardized testing and its impact upon student lives, teacher practice and school culture. However, they were not as familiar with the use of standardized testing policy within NCLB. This warranted that the interviews conducted during both the initial data gathering and later formal interview stage were passionate and openly political. It was a challenge to elicit such responses and encourage reflection upon the passionate views without adding my own meanings.

While there is no single approach to researcher behavior during interviews, Reinharz (1992) advocates that feminist principles of research warrant “researcher disclosure” or active participation to create a real dialogue between researcher and participants. This means that the interviewer shares thoughts and reflections but also carefully attends to being a respectful listener. In fact, I argue that the participants extended meanings and enhanced the inquiry process because of my interaction and the resultant collaborative nature of the interviews. By using my responses during the interviews as a tool to validate participants responses and meaning-making, I strove to construct interviews as a process that Seidman (1998) writes “affirms the importance of the individual without denigrating the possibility of community and collaboration” (p.8). In hindsight, I question whether or not these participants would have ever allowed me to perform as the neutral interviewer since collaboration was the premise of the research.
Interviews also helped teacher participants formulate their own roles in the research process from which they began to actively participate in the inquiry more and thus, construct a role for me in their classrooms as a participant observer. Such experiences served as the negotiated context that framed the questions asked during succeeding interviews. Once an interview occurred, I reflected through the writing practice of a researcher journal upon the multiplicity of voices that emerged from the discussion, possible meanings those positions mediated and what the participants may not have said as well. This created a space for initial reflection, further dialogue and continued questioning to validate not only the “what” of the narrative shared but also the “how” and “why” (Fontana & Frey, 2000). This is a form of reflexivity deemed important because the method of interviewing fostered rapport and reciprocal understandings of researcher and participant negotiated roles.

Questions that were posited during formal interviews varied slightly between participants depending on specific issues that had emerged from prior individual discussions. For example, after spending time in each participant’s classroom, attending social events with the collective group, and having many informal interviews, I began to observe and hear what particular issues about testing policy mattered most to the individual teacher. In turn, I used this information to establish a common core of unstructured questions but then added a specific section of questions for each participant to further explore the individual experiences and gather thick description. From there, the formal, open-ended unstructured interview questions were formulated.
**Interviews as a Tool at Diversity Place School.**

The specific formats and manner in which interviews were conducted are delineated in the following discussion. First, interviews with each of the five participants were open-ended to elicit as Fontana and Frey (2000) describe “understand[ing] the complex behavior of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry” (p.652). To further ensure that participants were not limited in their responses, the interviews were conducted at the time designated by their schedules. Due to the frequency of school meetings held before school and the volunteer coaching that several participants did after-school, the majority of interviews were conducted during teacher prep time, a period consisting of thirty minutes three time a week. Depending on specific time constraints of teacher schedules, interviews were conducted over the span of several days. This was indicative of the incredible time demands placed on teachers as evident during each interview when students, parents or fellow teachers often interrupted. Not one interview conducted throughout the entire study did occur without interruption. The location of the interviews was the participants’ classrooms or in the case of the administrators, their offices. As explained earlier in the text, questions were co-constructed, exploratory and descriptive to help participants construct reflective narratives about their classroom cultures, personal and professional selves, teacher agency, and the relationship of testing policy to each of these components.

Second, several informal interviews and three formal interviews were conducted with each of the five participants. One formal interview for each administrator, including the vice-principal was held during summer school. The time frame of each interview was
as follows: informal interviews lasted from 5-65 minutes and formal interviews from 60-150 minutes.

Three, interviews were held strategically surrounding the implementation of the two formal standardized tests conducted in Center City to construct an interpretation of teacher perceptions pre-and post testing. Using interviews as a research tool at various stages of inquiry supported a clear delineated beginning, middle and end of teacher stories. For example, the first round of formal interviews was conducted prior to the implementation of the state-standardized test. The second round occurred in between this time period and the implementation of the national standardized test given in May. The last round of formal interviews happened in early October to gauge teacher attitudes and feelings at the beginning of the school year with a new group of students and test scores in from the previous class. The strategic planning of formal interviews constructed a situational understanding of how teacher meanings and reflections developed and compared over time during the academic year. It is important to note that numerous informal discussions did occur throughout the time parameters of the research to further construct connections between teacher interpretations and social meanings of the testing policy.

Fourth, each of the three formal interview sessions was documented via a tape recorder. This formal practice evoked an interesting power dynamic between researcher and participants and resulting ethical dilemmas for the researcher. It was established that at any point or time during the interview process, the participants could request that the tape recorder be turned off if there was specific information that did not want “officially” documented or if they were simply uncomfortable. To respect and honor participant
relationships and feelings of ownership throughout the interview process, participants were also given the transcripts of each interview and asked to review the text to edit material that was perceived incorrectly, add information to better explain the topic or extend the points made during the interaction. This process of member-checking although intended to be a form of collaboration and as such demonstrate participant voice and control in the research process, also confused and intimidated some participants.

During one such experience, a participant reviewed the transcript and then researched library materials on testing procedures and national reform efforts so that she could sound more “professional” and “educated” in order to do the research “right”. Even though I had thought I had a solid rapport and trust with this participant as an equal collaborator, she still approached interviews and research as a construction of the absolute truth and me as the expert. This position was difficult to deconstruct despite the methodology of the study and the reality, that regardless of methods and the supporting theories behind those methods, I still had little control over how people positioned these practices. As the interviewer/researcher, I had no control over the histories that the participants brought to the process and eight months of collaborative research and open-ended interviews would not immediately change these well-grounded participant views. On the other hand, the administrator of Diversity Place School chose to not conduct a member-check of the formal interview because she “trusted me”. This administrator commented, “It’s what I said on the tape during the interview, right?” I still left the transcript with her over a weekend but she opted to not edit or review the text. These experiences demonstrate that research is not a neutral event or process as people construct strongly embedded perspectives toward what is knowledge and how that can be
truly known based on traditional paradigms. Through the method of participant observation, as explained in the next section, I attempted to challenge these assumptions by establishing collaborative practice throughout the data collection process and consistently presenting myself as a partial knower, not the expert.

Participant Observation: A Process of Observation and Becoming in Context

While the design of this research study does not claim to be ethnographic, the purpose and methods are ethnographic in nature with its exploration of culture and the focus on issues of reciprocity and usefulness of the research to the participants and school community. This is yet another example of the blurred practices found in qualitative research. I will now delineate why the use of participant observation, a commonly used ethnographic practice was relevant as the second method of data collection used in this collective case study to explore the social and cultural contexts of teacher and testing policy with-in NCLB. But first, it is important to construct a brief overview and purpose of ethnography to gain a context for the use of participant observation in this study.

Willis and Trondman (2000) define ethnography as inquiry that uses theory to create a focus on culture in all data. Walford (2003) also broadens ethnography to include the researcher as the main research instrument, a focus on the high status for the participants’ realities and perceptions within the study, collaboration with participants in the analysis of findings, and an emphasis on the particular. The overall goal of ethnography is as Spindler (1982) describes “to make explicit what is implicit and tacit to informants and participants in the social settings being studied” (p. 7). Levinson and Cade (2002) further explain that ethnography is contextualized observation, interviewing,
and social actions that altogether is cross-cultural, holistic, and comparative between the political context of the policy studied and the individual.

Anthropological methods, and more specifically, ethnographic methods can explore the intersections of meaning and power within policy as a cultural response to the changes in the purpose of schooling (Carroll, 1992; Levinson & Cade, 2002; Shore & Wright, 1997). Such methods can contribute to the transformation of schooling by constructing an optic through which schools can see patterns of meaning as they are reproduced. Carroll (1992) describes the usefulness of such methods in research because they enable “anthropologists [to]…serve as effective outside resources to educators as they work in their schools, to identify existing roles, rules, and relationships, and expectations that must be changed to achieve new results” (p. 191). Anthropologists can be a mirror to the community they explore and help foster dialogue from which that community can better understand the emic view of reform (Carroll, 1992; Demerath, 2002). Demerath (2002) adds that anthropology, particularly ethnography, can construct a clearer understanding of how policymakers and educators view the world and how they see the work of research. He advocates that such research foreground the needs of the participants.

Hess (1992) comments that such practices can best describe the context of inquiry and empower findings. He writes that:

One of the strengths of ethnographic research is its ability to describe what is actually happening as policies are implemented, why various actors in the implementation process are acting as they are, either to make the implementation process successful or to frustrate it, and how these actors are doing what they are doing. (p. 238)
Such description can demonstrate how policy cannot be politically neutral by demonstrating that “culture has now become a matter of debate about representations and the complex relationships that individuals take up in relation to them” (Yon, 2000, p. 9). Therefore, culture is no longer viewed as an objective or static text that governs behaviors but a constant, fluid, evolving process. Using anthropological methods such as participant observation can then describe how actors within a policy use the power of that policy to mediate certain truths throughout the implementation phase - the focus of this study. I now further explain the practice of participant observation to establish its usefulness for this study.

*Participant Observation as a Way of Knowing.*

Participant observation builds upon the method of interviewing in that it constructs a context for the data gathering and meanings constructed by participants. It provides the social context from which to both analyze meaning and also construct relevant interview questions that serve as Glesne (1999) writes to “connect to known behavior, and their answers can therefore be better interpreted” (p. 43). It also serves as an ethical instrument that influences researcher/participant and researcher/site rapport (Glesne, 1999; Reinharz, 1992). According to Reinharz (1992), “feminist participatory observation values openness to intimacy and striving for empathy” (p. 68) from which to better develop the emic voice throughout the study. Levinson and Cade (2002) argue that participatory methods create a context for researchers to privilege the emic perspective and afford the participants opportunities to “define issues as they see them” (p. 25). This not only builds rapport and trust but also develops thick description from which to better illuminate local meanings.
Participant observation is defined as both an epistemology, a method and a methodology (Schwandt, 2001), in that it is a way of knowing for the researcher to contextualize the meanings of the inquiry, a tool for that knowing, and a theoretical reason for using that approach. Schwandt (2001) explains that as a method, the researcher observes the context of study and partially “becomes” a member of that culture through observation, interpretation, and on-going analysis, as evident through the constructed role as a “partial knower”. As a methodology, it is an approach to data gathering that coincides with the focus on culture as a social practice through which to interpret participant behavior and meanings within their locale. For the purposes of this study, participant observation is viewed as a method of data gathering and an epistemology.

Glesne (1999) asserts that participant observation as a practice should not be done on the people but viewed as a way to learn from the people. While feminist principles add that research overall as a process should not only be done on women but also for women and includes oppression of all people (Kirsch, 1999), I thereby conclude that the exploration of teacher experience warrants participation observation in order to learn about the power dynamics inherent to teacher lives. However, Glesne (1999) continues that “the main outcome of participant observation is to understand the research setting, its participants, and their behavior. Achieving this takes time and a learner’s stance” (p. 45). In other words, the researcher must be constantly aware of and open to the personal subjectivities that may influence observations, analysis and positionality of the researcher in the cultural context of the setting. The researcher must “check his or her ego” to keep the research focused on the participants’ lives and purpose of the study. This, in turn,
also constitutes the role of the researcher in participant observation and the description of power dynamics inherent to the research site and research process.

Lauridsen (2003) adds that the act of participant observation is a social and cultural practice in that:

Participant observers come to a situation with a conscious awareness of their own realities and bias, as they attempt to interpret situations to determine how the actors or participants interpret and make meaning of this situation or reality. Participant observers are looking for both implicit and explicit meanings and rules, as evidenced by behaviors and/or spoken dialogue between participants or the researcher and participants. Identifying implicit and explicit meanings and rules is accomplished by the researcher serving as both an insider and an outsider simultaneously. (p. 80)

Feminist principles of research that embrace trust, situatedness and interaction enable the component of friendship to the layered role that the researcher embodies throughout the study (Kirsch, 1999; Reinharz, 1992). The logistics of participant observation in the study and such constructed positions and blurred roles will be later discussed in the text.

*Parameters of the Participant Observation.*

Participant observation began in an informal manner at the start of the academic year from September 2003 through February 2004 when participation was given to the researcher by the principal of Diversity Place School to spend time at the school and “do research”. This time was spent learning about the local community, school culture, student population, and teacher culture. From observations in staff meetings, hallways, the cafeteria and the teachers’ lounges, participants’ were recruited for the study. Therefore, initial observation did not limit itself to the purpose of the study but to also establish researcher rapport and understanding of the local context.
Once official engagement began, participant observation in varying settings with teacher participants took place from early March 2004 throughout the end of the academic year in June, during Summer School in June, July and early August, and concluded in early October 2004 with the start of a new academic year. Observations occurred roughly three to four days a week depending on the testing schedule, special school events and teacher meetings. Efforts were made to equally observe participants each week to ensure appropriate representation. This was often difficult regarding the schedule of the special education teacher who was also a first year teacher and also fulfilling the newly created role of athletic director. Since the teaching practice of inclusion was being newly incorporated at DPS, this teacher participant’s schedule varied and often changed daily in location and time. Therefore, many informal observations and interviews with this participant were held to supplement.

As stated earlier, building rapport and gaining access is an on-going process throughout the research process (Glesne, 1999). Therefore, the settings of observations included a wide range of contexts to encourage such development. These include the following examples: the individual classroom, school cafeteria, school events such as plays, professional meetings such as in-service days, team meetings, local school council meetings, hallway conversations, and social events such as happy hours, holiday parties, and races in which researcher and participants both walked. Once the academic year ended in late June 2004, observation occurred in summer school classes for students who did not pass the standardized test and could not automatically progress to the next grade level in Center City. While this promotion policy is not directly tied to the testing policy of NCLB, it does add to teacher experience with testing policy as a tool of reform and
effect on teacher practice. It is important to note that only three teacher participants taught summer school and this limited the collective timeline of participant observations. However, social events with the other participants offered salient experiences from which to reflect on behaviors and meanings of the testing policy. I now attend to the role of participant observation in the collaborative nature of this study.

*Participant Observation: The Co-Constructed Positionality and Role in Teachers’ Lives and Classrooms.*

Because this study was a collective case study of the lives of five participant teachers, the continuum of participant observation role (Glesne, 1999) was performed at varying times in each classroom context. While Glesne (1999) suggests a wide range of identities performed as a participant observer, Schwandt (2001) clarifies that a participant observer experiences the tension between the “dual citizenship” of academic and participant. The roles I performed included both descriptions. Moreover, the level of participation and the manner of that participation constructed for me by the teacher participants were also contingent on how each positioned the role of a researcher in the classroom and the purpose of research to teaching. This construction of space and purpose in the individual classroom was also constituted by the participants’ views and reactions to my multiple identities as veteran teacher/collleague, friend/confidante and educational researcher. I also believe that what each participant needed from me at the time naturally dictated the power dynamics and how they positioned me in their classrooms.

For example, one participant who agreed to participant in the research with an understanding that I would be introduced to the students on the first day to establish my role as observer and not a component of their evaluation, never introduced me to her
students, regardless of class section, time of day or point in the academic year. In this classroom, I was the complete observer. In some ways, this positioning of me as an invisible member of her room confused me regarding issues of rapport and appropriate interviewing. However, this participant shared some of the most powerful and passionate views toward the research process and testing policy in the study. However, my role as a silent observer was tested when this teacher stepped to the door one day while students took a test and I observed two students cheating. When I shared my observation with her, I reiterated that I struggled with telling her or not and thus infringing on her teaching. She wanted to know that type of information.

Three of the participants positioned me as a combination of complete observer and complete participant with more of the latter practice in the classroom context. These teachers would invite students to share ideas with me in the classroom and asked for my help when monitoring cooperative group activities or when the number of students overwhelmed the goals of the lesson. Classroom size for one participant was 35 students with both special education and regular education students engaged without any additional instructional supports. One participant asked for me to continually read novels to her students since I had been a language arts/drama teacher and she felt a better oral reader than her. Another participant involved me in classroom interaction as a form of student engagement since his students struggled with attention and as I discovered much later, found me physically attractive so thus behaved more when I was present.

One participant, however, constructed a constant active role for me as a complete participant throughout the length of the study and afterward. She at first, tried to use me as an evaluator of her teaching methods and when I reiterated my role as a collaborator,
not a judge, she began to use our discussions as a format from which to reflect on the quality of practice. This participant also taught third grade and in this developmental context, her students were openly curious, affectionate and welcoming to other adults in their classroom community. I would also argue that since these students were all from other countries, specifically Hispanic countries, they were passionately curious about me as a person, my language and customs. This teacher ate lunch with her students. This participant had her students break cafeteria sitting rules and mix seating with a special education/resource class to facilitate social interaction. She invited me to join her at lunch and when I did not sometimes participate, the students admonished me and asked questions about my whereabouts. When I ate lunch with them, they asked questions regarding my personal life, my athletic interests, why I ate certain foods (protein shakes and carrots) and drank sports drinks. There was a constant interest in my choice of water, smartwater, since the students literally translated the title and thus, positioned me as more of a leader. This teacher participant encouraged this participation and when I could not come, told me that the students and herself included, missed me.

Another example of the blurred researcher identities that occurred during this complete participant observation was in the context of classroom instruction. This participant openly asked for my social interaction during lessons and in particular instances had me lead lessons. In fact, when her mother was seriously ill, she left the classroom for an hour as I oversaw math homework and read a book to the class. As the students challenged my new position and I struggled with classroom management, I realized that my abilities to understand the challenges of teaching were outdated. This was a humbling experience for be as a researcher and as a practitioner. This teacher
along with her students collected money to purchase me a terrarium and an embroidered shirt that said, Diversity Place School, solidifying her positioning of me as a complete participant in her classroom and thus, school culture. Her summer school students also presented me with cards, poems and a signed soccer ball for my role as a complete participant. Even as I visit the site today, although less frequent, these students give me hugs and ask how my “homework” and “book writing” is progressing. And even during phone conversations with the teacher participant to co-interpret findings, I am asked when I am returning as I reiterate my need to write our story. The lessons learned from the collaborative nature of our relationship throughout the research itself were a major theme of discussion and reflection during interviews and daily talks. The blurred identity of researcher/complete participant observer was an issue of intense personal reflection for me as evident in my researcher journal because this relationship defied normative expectations in traditional research practice. I believe, however, that the co-constructed rapport and researcher role in this classroom added to the thick description of the data and the confidence of the participant with the research itself.

The school also positioned me as a complete participant observer when administrators asked me to serve as a proctor during the second round of standardized testing when the school could not afford additional substitutes to cover classrooms. Classroom teachers were not allowed to administer or proctor their own classrooms during any given standardized test. This meant that two different individuals had to be assigned to each classroom taking the standardized tests given at Diversity Place School and also throughout Center City.
As explained in this section, participant observation serves as a way to observe and learn about the setting of the research, the lives and cultural norms of the teacher participants, and the power dynamics inherent in each social and cultural context. It is a constructive tool regardless of the level of participation in the field—complete observer to complete participant. This practice afforded the researcher to examine behaviors, reflect on meanings, and use interviews to connect meanings to social and cultural contexts and co-construct findings. While research and teaching are both cultural and social practices, participant observation served as tool for both researcher and participants to reflect on those processes and further explore the topic of inquiry. I will now explore how document text analysis complimented the two previous data collection strategies and further contributed to the triangulation or credibility of the findings.

Document Analysis: Texts from Teacher Participants and Diversity Place School

As the third strategy of data collection, document analysis served to further contextualize the data in conjunction with the use of interviews and participant observation. Triangulation is the process of establishing credibility of findings and data gathered during research by providing multiple perspectives to the topic of research (Glesne, 1999; Schwandt, 2001). Each method of data collection affords another perspective of the lived experiences of the participants and contributes to the multiple layers of the cultural and social processes of teachers’ lives thereby adding evidentiary warrant to the assertions made in the findings.

As previously stated, document analysis not only contributes to the credibility but also the thick description of findings and in doing so becomes another tool to support the teacher stories and lived experiences. While exploring the social and cultural experiences
of teachers’ lives in terms of testing policy within NCLB, documents served as a reflection of the school and teacher culture as evident in the messages and issues discussed and transmitted through each document. Schwandt (2001) construes a “text as an object suitable for analysis” (p. 250) and can be analyzed for both form (the how) or content (the what). Glesne (1999) classifies documents as tools that not only strengthen credibility of the data but also clarify understandings from interviews and participant observation that may warrant further interview questions. She describes document analysis as useful to the research because it affords the researcher another layer of meaning to the topic of inquiry.

[Documents] also provide you with historical, demographic, and sometimes personal information that is unavailable from other sources…Documents and other unobtrusive measures provide both historical and contextual dimensions to your observations and interviews. They enrich what you see and hear by supporting, expanding, and challenging your portrayals and perceptions. (pps. 58, 59)

Hodder (2000) build upon the purposefulness of documents in conjunction with other methods since documents are the “mute” evidence of the tension between the context of the word/writer and the meanings of the reader/receiver of the document. Analyzing documents, then, means that the reader/researcher views the language as a question of what meanings were attempted to be conveyed and what meanings were actually constructed from the interaction of text and reader. The challenge is as Hodder (2000) writes to look at documents from Diversity Place School and remember that “in both texts and artifacts the problem is one of situating material culture within varying contexts while at the same time entering into dialectic relationship between those contexts and the context of the analyst” (p. 705).
While documents do serve as another tool of data gathered and thus, a layer of meaning of the culture of inquiry, they also only provide one perspective, although an important one, to the partial knowing or understanding. I would agree as Lauridsen (2003) argues, however, that “documents are open to interpretation, making their analysis conditional and bias, but still worthy of examination on their own accord” (p. 83).

The focus of the study, teacher lived experiences, means that documents from both the school and teacher are deemed worthwhile to establishing a context for cultural, political and social meanings and actions. The aim is to situate teacher experience within the broader context of the school culture to evoke robust data and dialogue. More specifically, documents from the school to home, and school to teacher are evidence of local meanings and demonstrate issues of importance to the school and local politics. Therefore, school newsletters, informational brochures and administrative memos were sources of data. Documents from school to teachers constructed another layer of school culture and how teachers may or may not be positioned within that culture. Finally, documents from teacher to teacher and teacher to students evoked understanding of how teachers view the broader meanings of school topics and situate their individual agency.

Specific examples of documents were school memos to teachers, teacher letters to parents and students, agendas of school governance meetings such as the Local School Council and the Professional Personnel Leadership Committee, student notes to researcher, and informational memos regarding testing implementation. Exploration of how these documents positioned teachers and their responses contributes to the collective analysis within chapter four since “cultural documents also shape norms; they do not just reflect them” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 151). In summary, it is important to note that
documents not only built the growing body of evidence for teacher experience with
testing policy within NCLB and their assertions made through dialogue and reflection but
also added another layer to the multiple meanings enacted in social and cultural contexts
of the school that might serve other teacher experience.

Data Analysis

“Paradoxically, the chief usefulness of the interpretative research for the improvement of
teaching practice may be its challenge to the notion that certain truths can be found, and
in its call to reconstrue fundamentally our notions of the nature of the practical in
teaching” (Erickson, 1986, p. 158).

Data analysis is the process of making meaning of the phenomena through careful
examination and interpretation of the data corpus, or body of data. The data corpus on
how teachers experience standardized testing policy within NCLB derived from
information collected through interviews, participant observation and documents.
Moreover, the data gathered was robust and salient, making the process of data analysis
an important component to the research process for teacher participants and others.
Through the process of interpreting or analyzing the data gathered, the researcher and in
this case, along with several participants, construed “empirical assertions through
induction” (Erickson, 1986) in order to share teacher narratives of standardized testing
policy and their lives.

As there are numerous theoretical approaches employed in qualitative research,
there are numerous approaches to interpreting data. Since understanding teacher lived
experience evokes understanding the social and cultural processes that mediate teachers’
lives and assumptions within a systematic broader context, qualitative data analysis
focuses on the inductive approach to construct findings of the phenomena in question
(Glesne, 1999; Lauridsen, 2003; Schwandt, 2001). In fact, Schwandt (2001) defines qualitative research analysis as both an art and a science in that interpretation is a:

Variety of procedures that facilitate working back and forth between the data and ideas...To analyze means to break down a whole into its component or constituent parts. Through reassembly of the parts, one comes to understand the integrity of the whole...[However some argue that] interpretation is an art of understanding...that is not fully definable in terms of procedure. (pp. 6, 7)

As Glesne (1999) posits, qualitative research analysis entails sorting through the data gathered to explain social and cultural meaning, create theories to support those meanings and connect the participant stories to those meanings. The process, does not start however, in a linear fashion after data collection is complete but is an on-going process from the beginning stages of the research (Glesne, 1999; Kirsh, 1999; Lauridsen, 2003; Reinharz, 1992, Schwandt, 2001).

Feminist principles of research argue that along with member checks, that the interpretation of data findings be co-constructed with participants to validate meanings and perpetuate collaborative methods (Devault, 1999; Harding, 1987; Kirsch, 1999; Reinharz, 1992). In addition, this approach acknowledges the “balancing act” of interpretation that the researcher faces since the researcher crosses and inhabits the borders of the scholarly world of a discipline (education in this case) and the world of the particular research context (Devault, 1999). Kirsch (1999) explains, however, that by adhering to feminist principles that researchers may face certain dilemmas of interpretation making it a constant effort to reassert and honor feminist ideals. She continues that as the researcher/etic examines the data corpus and the meanings constructed through the research process from fieldnotes, interviews, and researcher reflexive journal, that time constraints of teacher participant lives may inhibit
interpretation and the development of the emic perspective, making it a delicate process of collaboration.

Data analysis in this study followed the following negotiated process of interpretation between art/science, scholarly demands/teacher interpretation and the connecting etic perspective that thread itself through all of the aforementioned. Analysis or interpretation began at the start of unofficial and then official engagement in the research site through fieldwork questions and validation of such interpretation with participants. The reflexive researcher journal further served to clarify this process and meanings. This also began the grounding of the meanings in the data corpus and not solely in the perspective of the researcher and thus, contributed to the establishment of an emic (Pelto & Pelto, 1978) perspective. This process of moving between the data and emerging meanings continued throughout the data collection and data interpretation. The researcher constructed analytical memos to self, analytical monthly reports to participants and then organized the data in analytical files to further structure interpretation (Glesne, 1999).

However, it is important to note that co-construction of the final findings did not include all participants due to individual participant choice. Two of the five participants involved were not receptive to collaboration due to severe time constraints that arose from their new roles of involvement in the school. In other words, participation in the research moved the participants to construct new roles for themselves in their school culture that in turn made it challenging for them to actively participate in the data analysis.
To first align with the construction of general themes or codes of data (Glesne, 1999), the data of this study were categorized and organized from the analytical files according to general/global themes or patterns of meaning. The specifics of these themes naturally will be discussed in length in chapters four, five and six. As each general theme emerged from the data, the overall codebook served as a guiding structure to warrant further examination. Throughout several additional readings of the data and its codes, connections or specific local themes emerged to further construct local meaning and data synthesis. Furthermore, a rereading of the data was also done to search for discrepant cases of the assertion and establish “key linkages” between patterns of meaning (Erickson, 1986). To attend to the ethical trustworthiness practice during the interpretation process (Lauridsen, 2003), the participants were consulted often regarding the data meanings and afforded opportunities to clarify researcher interpretation. In fact, as a result of such collaboration, new local and specific themes resulted that better mirrored the realities or truths of the participants, thereby making the research more clear in the description of teacher lived experiences and reciprocal in purposefulness.

I present the aforementioned understandings of the data analysis to argue that as Lauridsen (2003) asserts, this process relied on a combination of etic and emic perspectives that were grounded in the data. First, the data analysis included the individual researcher perspective to generate themes, reflect on meanings and make connections of the local meanings to the broader social and cultural context. Second, this interpretation was done concurrently with a focus on the emic perspectives that were grounded in the data itself. This combination of perspectives afforded data analysis to be
inductive as defined by Lauridsen but also respectful of local meanings and aware of the researcher/etic effect.

While terminology of the analytic tool may vary, qualitative research embodies an inductive approach to analysis that is grounded in the data corpus, remains true to the data corpus, and continually returns to the data corpus. Granted, computer software programs exist to aid the qualitative researcher, but many qualitative researchers adapt them to their own purposes. (Lauridsen, 2003, p. 92)

Using the researcher introspection as the primary tool coinciding with participant dialogue and contribution to the meanings replicated findings embedded in the data and appropriately situated in teacher meanings of testing policy. It allowed me, as the researcher, to move back and forth between the data and locate the interpretation of data findings in local meanings. I now turn to the practice utilized through the research process that facilitated trustworthiness of the data.

Trustworthiness Criteria

In order to illuminate how teachers experience and respond to standardized testing policy within NCLB, it was vital that the ethics of the study remain central throughout data collection and analysis. It was important that the researcher respect local knowledge of schooling, standardized testing, policy, and teaching to produce findings that reflected local understandings and empowered participants. As a veteran teacher, I understand the vulnerability that comes from allowing another individual into the classroom. Teachers must accomplish numerous daily tasks all within a finite amount of time. As the political climate becomes more complex, teachers are given more ancillary responsibilities. It is a cycle that does not easily support teachers and their efforts. I did not want the research process to hinder teaching practice or reflection in any manner for the participants. Therefore, the ethical considerations were foregrounded throughout the proposal, data
collection, and analysis stages of the research. This warranted that I was honest and aware of the power dynamics that emerged during the study and the resultant relationships. I had to examine my personal assumptions and subjectivities regarding teaching, testing policy, and NCLB to uncover cultural meanings and patterns of meanings based on the emic perspective and the layered context of the etic perspective.

Boas reminds the researcher that:

If we chose to apply our own classification...we may combine forms that do not belong together...If it is our serious purpose to understand the thoughts of a people, the whole analysis of experience must be based on their concepts, not ours. (as cited in Pelto & Pelto, 1996, p. 54)

I add that while the emphasis of the research must be predicated on the emic perspective and that all knowledge is cultural and social, and as such mediated by power, then the etic perspective of the researcher provides an important context of understanding if done ethically. Therefore, the focus of trustworthiness was emphasized through the following practices in the research process to guide such etic/emic balance.

First, I included myself in the research process and examined my subjectivity throughout data collection through dialogue with participants, member checks of data findings, reflections on fieldnotes, and a researcher reflective journal. The aim of such practices was to honor the complexities of sociocultural/critical theory and feminist principles of research by constructing a partial knowing and attending to whose knowledge was being represented at all times. The journal helped clarify the power structure and positionality that emerged within the study and the political choices made by both myself, as the researcher and also the participants. It also helped clarify understanding of the data and create stronger collaboration with participants (Hess, 1992; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000; Kirsh, 1999; Reinharz, 1992). Harding (1987) argues that
such reflexivity and the embraced researcher role is integral to data analysis as well. She writes that:

The beliefs and behaviors of the researcher are part of the empirical evidence for (and against) the claims advanced in the results of the research. This evidence too must be open to critical scrutiny no less than what is traditionally defined as relevant evidence. (p. 9)

The aim of examining such researcher reflexivity is not to silence the emic voice and create a biased truth (Peshkin, 1988) but to recognize that truth is nested in many contexts (Harding, 1987). As such, the research process is a political and personal endeavor.

Second, as a veteran teacher who misses the classroom and as a young academic exploring the world of theory and practice, I had to carefully examine subjectivity to ethically cross the fluid borders of self/teacher, self/researcher, and self/collaborator. It is evident that I have particular assumptions regarding pedagogy, classroom culture, and policy that if used ethically strengthen insight into the study. But to contribute to such truths of the study, these assumptions had to constantly be positioned in a manner that honored the experience of participants and school culture as replicated in practices such as interviews and participant observation.

Peshkin (1988) explains that unnamed subjectivity can “filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement” (p. 17). Through reflexivity, Dillard (2003) urges researchers to pay attention to the purposeful or spiritual nature of self and research. She asserts that:

Any energy spent in reflection on the spiritual nature of our actions as researchers might be fruitful in transforming research into practice that also places the spiritual development of humanity as its central purpose…I believe that we should begin to see the words that we use as an invitation
for all involved to become more fully human through our research and teaching. (pps. 1, 7)

Foley (2002) warns, however, that such reflexivity not examine the other-self relationship of researcher and participants in binary terms but as a varied and fluid process. “Greater reflexivity will not turn out to be the silver bullet that slays the dragon of misrepresentation” (Foley, 2002, p. 163).

Third, the prolonged engagement of the study, a total of six months unofficial and six-month official engagement, enabled the described practices to create thick and robust descriptions that aided in evidentiary warrant of findings. This time period contributed to the establishment of strong rapport between researcher/participants and researcher/school culture. This enabled the researcher to respect issues of reciprocity in the research process in conjunction with teacher participant and school needs.

Fourth, member-checks of interview transcripts and some fieldwork notes added to the goal of trustworthiness of the study to qualify researcher subjectivity and co-construction of findings with participants. This practice helped separate the emic and etic perspectives of teacher experiences with testing policy because as Schwandt (2001) writes, the researcher is “part of the setting, context and social phenomena he or she seeks to understand” (p. 224). Analytical memos (Glesne, 1999) were also shared with teacher participants at the beginning of the study as a tool for trustworthiness and data understanding but stopped when participants expressed a lack of time for reading the memos. Discussion and reflective dialogue then replaced the analytical memos to ensure active participant roles and to ground the emerging themes and patterns of meaning in the data. Although the absence of a written text was one less distraction for teachers’ time, I argue the reflective dialogue, as a form of trustworthiness required an intense passion and
effort. Greene (1991) describes the tension that such vulnerability and reflection places upon teachers. “I believe that teachers willing to take the risk of coming in touch with themselves, of creating themselves, have to exist in that kind of tension; because it is always easier to fall back into indifference, into mere conformity, if not into bad faith” (Greene, 1991, p. 10).

Finally, Lather (1997) judges the trustworthiness of a study in terms of the credibility or the manner in which the study transformed the participants. She advocates that the extent by which the researcher troubled power dynamics inherent to the research process is another measure of credibility. Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) agree with Lather’s emphasis on transformative action by writing that the credibility of findings are measured by “the degree to which [the] research moves those it studies to understand the world and the way it is shaped in order for them to transform it” (p. 297).

With consideration of this study, several factors demonstrate the transformative credibility. Each participant utilized this experience to construct new meanings that when enculturated into existing constructs, led to various forms of action. One participant who argued that collaboration among teachers was necessary to foster teacher growth and improve practice but did not participate with her teaching team, now attends and participates in team meetings and activities. Two participants, both Anglo, who at first did not claim that their own racial identities impacted their roles as teachers, now acknowledge and are exploring their own racial assumptions and identities as an extension of their practice. One participant who stated that the testing policy would push her practice and there was no changing the process right now, is currently the new union representative at Diversity Place School. Two participants who stated that their lack in
school governance structures was due to their time commitments to their students have now decided that instead of reacting to standardized testing policy, they must be involved and are attending school meetings. This would warrant that practices during and after data collection were not only ethical with their centrality on the emic and participant needs but also empowered participants to create forms of change in their realities.

Conclusion

In summary, the methods of interviews, participant observation, and document analysis contributed to the layered meanings of local understanding and enactment of the testing component of NCLB in particular urban classrooms. Through adherence to the tenets of sociocultural/critical theory and feminist principles of research, the lived experience of teachers within the testing policy of NCLB constructed a salient description that honored partial truths and local knowledge. These theoretical locations and subsequent methods described co-constructed a contextualized understanding of both policy and practice that illuminated the fields of politics and academia through messy, thorough and honest inquiry. As Lauridsen (2003) adds, “qualitative research does not occur in a step-by-step format, where one component is devoid of influence by or on other components” (p. 98). It was the goal of this study to organize the theoretical premise of the topic and methods chosen to create a bricollage of knowing that fostered reflection and praxis (Freire, 1988). This was accomplished for both researcher and participants as described in the following chapters.
CHAPTER 4

TEACHER STORIES AND ASSUMPTIONS: PRACTICE GETTING PUSHED BY AND PUSHING BACK AT TESTING POLICY

What would you say to the policymakers?

I would say that they need to get into a classroom and be realistic and see the kids, see where they’re [the kids] at realistically. –Daisy (interview, 5/28/04)

This challenge to policymakers from a teacher participant is in response to the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, that aims to equalize public education for all children - regardless of race, class, ability, or gender. This goal is to be met through the combination of decreased bureaucracy in funding supports, increased parental control in schools, rigorous teacher quality, and strict accountability measures. More specifically, the premise of the legislation is that by raising certification requirements for teachers, there will be highly qualified teachers in all schools. And with less bureaucracy embedded in federal funding opportunities, states can use this money to create and sustain professional development to support those highly qualified teachers in their efforts to facilitate successful learning for all children. The federal and state government will then measure student achievement through standardized test scores to gauge
teacher/school effort. When scores do not demonstrate adequate yearly progress, parents will have the choice to move their children to higher-performing schools. Teacher quality, professional development, parental control and accountability - these are the basis of the largest federal reform effort in public schools.

While the literature demonstrates a focus on the specific implementation issues surrounding this legislation, the reality is that how policy is enacted at each level is militated by social and cultural understandings. This means that it is as important to explore teacher experience with this policy and its constructs as it is to reassess the implementation of the legislation and the developing relationship between federal and state education structures. The human component is the key link to understanding the dynamics and nested contexts of this legislation. It is prudent to give consideration to the teacher experience with standardized testing since this is the foundation of the entire legislation.

This chapter will focus on ways that teacher practice was pushed and in turn, also pushed back at the testing policy. The discussion will explore the particular ways that teacher practice responded to the testing policy in an effort to highlight the enactment of the testing policy in the local classroom. Furthermore, the chapter will address the structures that work together to impact teacher agency or individual perceptions of ability to create change regarding testing policy. The following themes begin the discussion:

1. Teachers support accountability efforts as a start to improve practice but view standardized testing as a constraint to good teaching. Teachers believe that testing should be one component, not the sole criteria, of assessment.
2. There are four general teacher adaptations to testing policy that impact practice. They are apparent through the following: 1) school environment and teacher culture; 2) teacher practice as a social response; 3) curriculum selectivity as a response to teaching to the test; and 4) teacher relationships as negotiated and renegotiated through the testing policy.
3. The pressures of the testing policy hinder teacher efforts to respect multiple student cultures and issues of diversity and equity. These constraints evoke particular dilemmas of teaching special education and bilingual students in a response to the testing policy.

Policy, Teachers/Practice, and Research: Three Intersecting Circles of Education

These patterns of understanding as described above can be symbolized in the form of three intersecting circles as shown in Figure 4.1. Each circle represents a component of education present in the testing policy that influences teachers and practice. The first circle represents the act of policy. Within this circle are the following - external demands of policy and local meaning of policy. The middle circle represents the teacher and practice. Inside this circle are the teacher, professional assumptions, and personal worldview. The section of these two circles that intersects represents the interaction of teachers/practice and policy and specifically include teacher self/meaning-making of policy, teacher practice getting pushed by policy, teacher practice pushing back at policy and resultant dilemmas of testing and bilingual and special education.

The final and third circle represents research and its use to teachers and policy. Inside the research circle are the components of collaborative and critical research that promote praxis (Freire, 1988) as a way to create purposeful research. These steps are reflection, dialogue, questioning, and again, reflection. The section of the research circle that intersects with the teacher/practice include the affects of this interaction as real action based on theory and practice, collaboration between teachers and researchers, and evolving teacher worldview.
I will first present a brief background of each participant to demonstrate his or her standpoint at the beginning of the inquiry. Next, discussion will focus on teacher practice as pushed by testing policy of NCLB and ways that practice pushed back as examples of teacher agency in response to the testing policy. This chapter will explore the intersection of the middle circle, teachers and practice, with the policy circle through the lens of practice. The conclusion will contextualize the ways that teachers exercise their agency through practice by exploring the participants’ perspectives on the following issues: testing policy, the collective legislation of NCLB, the process of educational policy, and professional development efforts. These views emerged from constant reflection and dialogue throughout the research process. I begin with the introduction of the teacher participants whose narratives construct this inquiry.

Teacher Participants

“We must dare in order to say scientifically, and not as mere blah-blah-blah, that we study, we learn, we teach, we know with our entire body. We do all these things with feeling, with emotion, with wishes, with fear, with doubts, with passion, and also with
critical reasoning. However, we never study, learn, teach or know with the last only. We must dare so as never to dichotomize cognition and emotion” (Freire, 1998, p. 3).

The general description of the five teacher participants serves as a basis from which to recognize the connection between cognition and emotion in their narratives and lived experiences as advocated by Freire (1998). It is through a knowing of teacher participant social and cultural locations that this text can situate their narratives and what aspects of these that might transfer or be purposeful to others, whether policymakers, academics or practitioners. Along with the use of standardized testing in NCLB, test scores in Center City are also used to determine student progression to the next grade level at grades 3, 6, and 9. If a student’s score is below a certain level, he or she must then attend summer school and in August retake a standardized test in order to move on. Furthermore, test scores also play a large institutional role at grade 7, although not in the form of an official policy. Students who score above average on the standardized test in seventh grade are then invited to test in eighth grade for the selective high schools in the Center City. Teacher participants represent several grade levels in order to explore these experiences from various perspectives.

From the grade level, description of teacher participants will include the following specific information - racial and gender location, years of teaching experience, type of educational background and class membership. Each participant either chose a self-selected pseudonym or opted to be described in a general manner such as a middle school teacher or a seventh grade teacher. Participants were also consulted on what information should or should not be included in their descriptions in order to honor their requests for anonymity and participation in representation throughout this text.
The following table 4.1 summarizes participant relevant background in order to locate participant practice, agency, and perceptions of practice and policy as developed later in the chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Years of Tchg. Exp.</th>
<th>Content Taught Std Promotion?</th>
<th>Included in AYP?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>All Subjects Bilingual</td>
<td>Some students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabel</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Lang Arts Social Studies</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bianca</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umberto</td>
<td>7/8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>Some students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.1 Participant Information**

*Daisy: Third Grade Bilingual Class*

I would like to be a positive role model to the students, being Hispanic….to the gentlemen and the to the girls because a lot of us think that we need to have somebody to depend on that we can’t take care of ourselves and that’s not true. We can take care of ourselves. Just because we’re women doesn’t mean…that we have to hang on to somebody…for, for, just to have somebody no matter what type of person he is. (Daisy, interview, 6/07/04)¹

The first participant is the third grade/bilingual teacher, *Daisy*. Daisy is a Hispanic woman and a veteran teacher with sixteen years of teaching experience and a Masters in Special Education. She has taught various grade levels and also served as the school counselor at Diversity Place School. Daisy classifies her upbringing as lower

¹ Participant quotes are identified as to the speaker and date; quotes drawn from tape-recorded interviews are identified as “interviews”; data from field notes or documents listed as such.
middle-class urban. Since she is the third grade bilingual teacher, all of her students are Hispanic and considered limited English learners. Daisy’s students are divided between the 0-3 and the 3+-year period of new English learners. This means that when a student from another country is in Center City from 0-3 years, he or she takes a different standardized test than the predominately English speaking students. However, some of Daisy’s students’ scores do contribute to the NCLB measurement of adequate yearly progress.

*Isabel: Fifth Grade Language Arts/Social Studies*

These girls who have the…I’m going to finish high school and at eighteen I will start having babies and I definitely, I definitely, put my plug in with NO, NO, NO, you will finish high school and then you’re going to finish college and then you’re going to live on your own…I tried to drill that into their heads… because I see these girls who think that start having kids in high school that’s fine but that’s what I want to dissuade them from. That’s part of the reason I want to do soccer, that’s part of the reason I give my time to Girls on the Run in the fall and spring and to basketball because if it provides an out for one of these girls…then it’s served it’s purpose. (interview, 5/27/04)

The second participant is the fifth grade teacher, *Isabel*. Isabel is an Anglo-European woman in her late 20s. She has four years of teaching experience and dual certification in regular and special education. Isabel was pursuing her Master’s degree in Education at the beginning of the research process and afterwards, began working on the process for national board certification. She has served as a special education teacher at Diversity Place but has been in the regular classroom for the last four years. Isabel teaches the content areas of language arts/social studies and the majority of the fifth grade special education students are placed in her room because of her training and ability to

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2 The terms bilingual and limited English learners are used interchangeably throughout this chapter since the participants defined both as students whose native language is not English.
differentiate instruction to varying student levels. She teaches in the after-school-reading program and volunteers as a coach for the following athletic programs-Girls on the Run, basketball, and soccer. Isabel classifies her upbringing as “straight-up middle class and Catholic.” It is important to note that while the standardized test scores from Isabel’s fifth grade students do not play a factor in grade progression or retention these scores do contribute to the school measurement of adequate yearly progress for NCLB.

*Bianca: Sixth Grade Social Studies*

I just think that teachers need to be aware of what they say, how they treat students because they just need a heightened awareness [acquired through] conversation (interview, 10/4/04). [The students are] …they’re really good kids, really good kids. (field notes, 3/15/04 said teary-eyed)

The third participant is the sixth grade teacher, *Bianca*. Bianca is an Anglo-European woman who pursued teaching after a successful career in the corporate world. She also has a Masters Degree in Education and two years of teaching experience. Like Isabel, Bianca volunteered as a coach for the running program, Girls on the Run and basketball. She classified her upbringing as “middle-class suburban”. Although she teaches in a grade level in which standardized test scores determine student retention, she teaches a content area that does not count for measurement- social studies. Reading and math are the sole content-areas that are measured for both NCLB criteria and the Center City student promotion policy.

*Susan: Seventh Grade Social Studies*

I think that [my identity as an African-American woman] has a great impact because of the things that I have endured in personal experiences. I’m able to be more open and understanding to children…Many of the children that we teach come from various countries and when they come here they experience various forms of discrimination…stereotypes for certain nationalities and for GIRLS [emphasized]…it helps push me…to
do everything I can as an educator to understand that they have great
worth. (interview, 6/10/04)

The fourth participant is the seventh grade teacher, Susan. She is an African-
American veteran teacher with 27+ years of teaching experience. She currently teaches
social studies and a daily session in the after-school reading-program. In addition to her
teaching degree, Susan has a degree in Fine Arts. She describes herself as a Catholic-
Muslim. Although her content area and grade level do not count for student promotion,
hers students’ scores determine the high school invitations in eighth grade to sit for
standardized tests that substantiate selective high school enrollment. Her content area is
not a measurement of adequate yearly progress for NCLB.

_Umberto: Seventh/Eighth Grade Special Education_

[Being a male]…doesn’t get me access. It makes people immediately
suspicious of me. When I first walk in, I’m a white man. I’m the enemy.
After they talk to me for five minutes and they hear me and they see what
I’m doing, then everything changes. Then it’s an avalanche the other
way. The support is overwhelming…. [otherwise]…they assume I’m
George Bush. They just assume it. (interview, 5/27/04)

The fifth and last participant is the seventh/eighth grade special education teacher,
_Umberto_. Like Bianca, Umberto comes to teaching from a different career path.
Umberto is a professional musician with three albums. Like his students, Umberto has a
learning disability that in his case fostered his motivation to become a teacher. He was a
first year teacher during the time of inquiry. Since he did not have a certificate in special
education and the latter is an area of teaching shortage in Center City, Umberto enrolled
in a district program that supports new teachers as they pursue graduate studies in special
education. This experience affords him a unique perspective as a teacher while he leads
in the classroom and struggles with his own learning disabilities as a graduate student.
Umberto described his upbringing as “Irish Catholic upper-middle class”. He also speaks three languages - English, Spanish, and Italian and is one of only three male teachers at DPS. His students’ scores are important for several determinants- the eighth grade high school testing invitations and adequate yearly progress. While being male and new to teaching and the reform of testing in NCLB, Umberto brings a different location from which to explore the issues of this inquiry.

The above description of teacher participant social and cultural locations situates the ensuing discussions and narratives as each explored, reflected, and made meaning of testing policy within NCLB. As each teacher participant brought his or her experiences to the act of teaching, these meanings also determined the interpretation and response to policy that influenced his or her sense of agency and thus, classroom practice. Teacher agency describes the teachers’ perceptions of their abilities to create change, (Bourdieu, [1977]1992). In the framework of teacher practice and testing policy, teacher agency was demonstrated in the ways that teachers found openings in the testing policy and enacted their practice according to personal ideologies.

The following description of teacher experience with testing policy will focus on how teachers employed individual agency through their practice, particularly ways that their practice was pushed by the testing policy and ways that practice pushed back. To better situate these specific practices, consideration is now given to the school environment and teacher culture that constituted teacher practice with testing policy.
“It’s difficult to remain an intelligent person.” Teacher Practice, Testing Policy and Teacher Agency

The exploration of how testing policy impacted teachers and practice indicated a two-fold layer or step of understanding that emerged from the intersection of the two circles of policy and practice. Within the process of teacher enactment of testing policy, there were two processes that constructed teacher process as constituted by teacher agency. First the testing policy was an external factor upon teacher practice. It was external since teachers do not have a direct role in the creation of testing policy and therefore, are disconnected from it. Second, teachers then interpreted testing policy and reinterpreted these meanings based on individual truths and incorporated this knowledge into their practice. It was through this process that testing policy both pushed at teacher practice while teachers also found ways to push back at the testing policy.

Since the process of being pushed and pushing back is a social practice, the description of how teachers accomplished this will be addressed through and across the data to demonstrate the intersection of each and how teacher efforts were examples of teacher agency. The particular ways that teacher agency was impacted through testing policy is summarized in figure 4.2 below.

Before beginning the exploration of particular ways of teacher practice with testing policy, several terms and concepts must be further defined. First, teacher practice will encompass more than the traditional understanding of lesson plans and teacher presentation of materials. For the purposes of this discussion, practice will also include teacher choices made regarding materials, presentation style, the order and content covered, teacher approach to student relationships, and teacher views toward the role of a
teacher in the classroom. The focus now turns to the school environment and teacher culture that framed teacher practice and agency amid testing policy.

1. School Environment and Teacher Culture
   School activities as interruptions to practice or ways to collaborate?
   Teacher stress level as affected by implementation and timing of testing
   “We get inundated with paperwork. It becomes too much.” – Daily time constraints on teacher practice

2. Teacher Practice as a Response to Testing Policy
   Constraints in developmentally appropriate instruction with testing- Ways that teacher practice was pushed.
   Ways that teacher practice pushed back at the constraints in developmentally appropriate instruction with testing
   Teacher scripted instruction in summer school – Ways that testing again limited developmentally appropriate practice and practice pushed back.
   Difficulties in teaching culturally relevant practice: Test scores and student culture

3. Curriculum selectivity as a response to the pressures of testing policy
   Privileging of content areas over other content
   Disjunction between test preparation materials and the student developmental levels

4. Teacher relationships as negotiated and renegotiated through testing policy
   Teacher team relationships as functions of testing policy pressures:
   Collaboration or competition?
   Teacher relationships with students outside the classroom as a form of teacher agency through testing policy

**Figure 4.2 Taxonomy of ways that teacher practice is impacted by the testing policy of NCLB**

*School Environment and Teacher Culture*

“If testing wasn’t an issue, we could actually…teach.”
“Yeah, teach our children.”
(non-participant teachers, field notes, 3/19/04)

Within the school environment of Diversity Place School, teacher participants were positioned by and also positioned the testing policy through certain practices. These
social and cultural practices not only encompassed the school environment but also fostered the school teacher culture. While teachers brought their own individual meanings and truths to this collective teacher culture, the school environment and the social practices that created this environment served as the framework for teacher culture and in turn, individual teacher practice. This meant that as teachers navigated the challenges of teaching in their own classrooms amidst testing policy and local meanings of the policy, they were also influenced by the social and cultural norms of the collective teacher culture and school environment. It is important to give consideration to the practices that constructed the school environment and teacher culture in order to situate teacher practice and agency within testing policy. I begin with exploration of the school activities that impacted teacher practice and ways that teachers were pushed and found ways to push back.

_School Activities as Interruptions to Practice or Ways to Collaborate?

As indicated in school documents that describe the academic and co-curricular programs at Diversity Place, there were many school activities in addition to classroom instruction that altogether constructed a student’s education. Since the student population at DPS is diverse and representative of the economic demographics of an urban school, there were also services provided to address the social and physical needs of students. While these school efforts to bridge education to the local community are considered appropriate and normal functions of an urban school, these programs also impacted teacher practice in several ways.

First, the challenge of providing language instruction in dual languages along with preparing students for standardized testing meant that bilingual students were removed
from the regular classroom of some teacher participants in order to develop language
skills and support regular classroom instruction. DPS offers two avenues of academic
support for bilingual students that impacts teacher practice. Spanish classes were offered
to the students to facilitate learning in dual languages of Spanish and English and help
preserve the first language of Spanish. Spanish teachers came to the room of teacher
participants to teach Spanish classes with the exception of Umberto’s special education
classroom and Daisy’s bilingual class. While teacher participants were supportive of the
need to develop language skills, the logistics of this program meant that class instruction
was interrupted at various times throughout the week and practice had to adapt to this
schedule.

For example, on days that Spanish class occurred, Bianca had to rush through the
social studies lesson for her first class in time to meet the schedule. In other words,
students were rushed through activities that other classes had adequate time to
accomplish. It is important to note that even though Bianca’s practice was pushed by this
effort to develop language instruction and help students’ scores, she took the changes in
stride. She expressed frustration but did not complain about the situation because she felt
that team teaching with the Spanish teacher was “great” and actually helped facilitate
better writing skills for her bilingual students (field notes, 4/12/05). I attribute this
positive attitude of the teacher participant to her flexible professionalism that centered on
student needs. Furthermore, prior to her teaching career, Bianca had been successful in
the corporate world and experienced with managing people to accomplish a common
goal.
Bianca viewed teamwork as a necessary component of educating students and when logistics of the Spanish classes compressed her practice and thereby, the social studies curriculum, she worked harder to work with the Spanish teacher, include her content standards and address student needs. Her positive approach to leadership and collaboration worked for not only her students but also her relationship with her colleagues as evident in the positive comments made by other teacher participants. For example, Daisy shared that since she became aware of Bianca’s teaching through research discussions that she now had a desire to dialogue with her (field notes, 3/9/04). The nature of new teacher relationships due to testing policy will be further explored in the section on teacher relationships created by testing policy. Bianca employed teacher agency when she approached the interruption to her practice as an opportunity instead of a problem to overcome, thereby demonstrating how school activities through testing policy pushed at teachers but also how teachers found ways to push back.

Isabel demonstrated a different example of teacher agency in response to Spanish classes. She collaborated with the Spanish teacher to continue Spanish classes during student center time in language arts. This meant that the Spanish teacher and Isabel ran small group instruction on literacy skills while other students worked in learning centers throughout the room. While this is a definite example of teacher practice pushing back, the content area that Isabel taught in may have also facilitated this collaboration. For example, it may have been easier to integrate the content of Spanish and language arts rather than social studies with Spanish.

The second example of how school activities impacted teacher practice through testing policy was through the pullout program provided for bilingual students. While the
aim of this program was to foster knowledge again in two languages, it was also to prepare students to take the standardized tests, according to some teacher participants. In this instance, bilingual students who were in the United States less than three years were sometimes removed from regular classroom instruction to offer small group instruction. This activity or program pushed at teacher practice in particular ways.

For example, when students were removed from classroom instruction for this support, teacher participants struggled with maintaining student interest and consequent engagement in learning activities. Bianca had to either limit the activity planned to foster understanding between home culture and content or speed through the lesson without proper attention to the whole needs of her students. Therefore, even though her content area is not required for AYP or student promotion, testing policy through this school activity positioned her practice. She explained that:

letting kids get pulled out, the other thing is that it does detract from creativity, what can happen in the classroom from the teachers and from the students because in preparation for the test, we might do geometry, that might be extended for a few days, the kids will have, a very interesting project but that might stop to move on to the next topic...in these cases, they lose out on a very well-rounded education. (interview, 5/17/04)

As Bianca mentioned, it was difficult for some teachers to help students see the benefits of classroom activities and content learned if they could not be there. It is also necessary to the description to explain that teacher perceptions of this program varied among participants since the program goals seemed to vary dependent on grade level. Isabel, however, could not remember the times that students were removed from her classroom throughout the year.
Time constraints also made it challenging for teacher participants to provide the same learning activities for bilingual students involved in this program. For example, during the testing period for bilingual students in the country less than 3 years, students were removed at random times from Bianca’s classroom for a time period of roughly three weeks (field notes, 3/17/04). Another factor affecting teacher practice through school environment was the level of teacher stress due to testing implementation and timing throughout the academic year. I now explore how these aspects of testing constituted practice throughout the academic year.

**Teacher Stress Levels as Affected by Implementation and Timing of Testing.**

Even though teachers at DPS had opportunities to express ideas regarding testing policy through several school governance structures such as the school/parent committee or teacher professional committee, it appeared that teacher stress levels were directly affected by the implementation and timing of testing. The testing timeline occurred in two rounds as follows: the state standardized test was administered in March and the national test administered in May. The school year ended roughly the third week of June and summer school began for those students who did not pass the test according to Center City policy in early July.

At the beginning of the school year, teacher participants varied in their responses to the role that testing policy played in their stress levels and practice. Teacher response through their stress levels demonstrated how individual meanings of the policy and personal ideologies combine to situate and determine teacher practice and agency. The timing and implementation of testing policy at DPS influenced teacher selves in several ways.
For example, at the beginning of the academic year, teachers used test scores in diverse ways to locate their practice through testing policy that would push at practice and also get pushed back. The decisions in turn, constituted teacher stress. Since many of her students were below the 3-year mark for bilingual students and did not have to be included in AYP or student promotion, Daisy did not rely on test scores to gauge practice. She explained that due to this testing policy, her practice and consequent stress level were not directly impacted. She was also hopeful about student potential for learning and test performances at the beginning of the year (field notes, 10/4/04). It is important to note that some of Daisy’s students were considered for AYP and thus, impacted by testing policy. Even though Daisy did not directly attribute her stress level to the testing policy, I argue that the many activities that she engaged in to effectively do her job such as parent nights on test stress and meetings with the special education parent support group, were all impacted in some way by the testing policy. In turn, her long hours spent after school and before school to prepare for and participate in these activities constituted her stress level.

Susan commented that she used the scores at the beginning of the year to locate student abilities and determine what skill areas should be targeted in her instruction (fieldnotes, 3/23/04). Umberto, however, did not look at or even discuss test scores as a viable influence upon student learning. Isabel explained that at the beginning of the year test scores played no role in her stress level instead it was the challenges of the job that impacted the stress of teachers.

Throughout the academic year, teacher responses changed as the test implementation impacted their stress levels and subsequent practice. As the first round of
standardized testing approached in March, Isabel admitted that testing increased her stress level because she was concerned for her students’ success. She shared that “I don’t even want to know about testing policy because it makes me mad” (field notes, 3/23/04). In the middle of the research, Isabel did name that the testing policy, while not a direct impact on her practice, did add stress and uncertainty at times to her personal and teaching self. She commented that she often went back and forth in a struggle with her confidence on how well her students would perform on the tests, in other words, validating their learning in terms of the policy, and consequently, her teaching. She shared her anxiety immediately after the first round of testing in March, “I did think seventeen times today back and forth that my kids will pass, no fail, no pass. But they always do well” (field notes, 4/30/04).

After the second round of standardized testing, Isabel’s stress level increased as she expressed anger toward the testing policy that determined AYP and student promotion based on two fifty-five minute test sections. She shared “I think that I’ve become passive-aggressive and refuse to teach to the test…We’re all trying to get to the same spot for the same reason but I’m just going about it my way” (field notes, 5/12/04).

During the second round of standardized testing at DPS held in May, Bianca expressed the impact that testing had on personal selves and stress level of teachers. During this administration of testing, I served as a proctor in Bianca’s room while she administered testing in another room according to district protocol that separates teachers from their homeroom to control test validity. After this experience, I complimented Bianca on the focus and attitude of her students toward testing. She became teary-eyed and responded with “Yeah, they’re really good kids.” She later explained that she was
nervous for them regarding testing and wanted them to do well (field notes, 5/4/04). This vignette demonstrated that as testing implementation progressed, teacher stress levels were directly impacted because of their concern for their students.

After this last round of standardized testing in May and after much reflection and dialogue in the research process, Daisy finally admitted that testing implementation and timing played a role in teacher stress level. She explained that “Right now, I think, I feel good about it. I’m glad that it’s over, you know. And I think the kids don’t feel so much stress. I think I don’t feel that much stress right now and I’m anxious to see the scores” (field notes, 5/28/04). She had changed her view toward testing policy and teacher stress as indicated earlier.

Umberto shared that he was nervous after the final round of testing because he wanted his students to do well. Because he was also a first year teacher during the research year and due to his personal beliefs toward testing, he had not discussed testing with his students at all. Through discussions in the research process, he became aware of how this practice may have impacted his students’ performances and subsequent evaluations through testing. By May, he was nervous about the ramifications of this decision and his stress level was elevated as compared to before testing. When asked how the testing policy impacted his personal self and stress level as a teacher, Umberto described his new awareness by saying that:

In the overall scheme of things, I feel no pressure about these tests cause I find them meaningless. However…as a professional educator IF the students don’t perform well I’m in BIG trouble. So, suddenly these things, these tests that I haven’t cared about my whole life, now I really have to care about…I want my students to care in a right way. Not fear of failure but a chance to show what they know. And so I definitely say that the anxiety is living in the back of me. (interview, 10/4/04)
This comment demonstrated his new awareness of the testing policy upon his teacher self.

It was apparent that as a function of the school environment, the timing and implementation of testing pushed at teacher stress levels. In turn, teachers exercised their agency in the following ways: either ignoring the testing policy, becoming nervous and increased stress levels or getting angry at the reality of the policy as a form of measurement.

Lastly, the time constraints placed upon teachers’ daily jobs as directed by school environment also impacted teacher stress and practice. While the particular ways time hindered practice will be explored in its own section, it is important to consider the ramifications of the ancillary teaching responsibilities as part of the school environment. I conclude with discussion of how daily time constraints impacted teacher practice and positioning of testing policy.

“We get inundated with paperwork. It becomes too much.”

Daily Time Constraints on Teacher Practice

The increasing demands of ancillary responsibilities for teachers created time constraints on teachers. Fried (2005) described that the ever-changing managerial demands placed upon teachers along with school structures constructs teaching and learning as a “game of school” and limits practice due to lack of time. In other words, teachers are continuously asked to do more in addition to teaching during the regular school day. This means that accomplishing these tasks, while usually minute but many compress instructional time and impact teacher practice. For example, teachers

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3 Non-participant teacher comment- teacher committee meeting, field notes, 3/19/04.
participants were asked at various times to complete such paperwork involved in school management like attendance records, lunch count, collect lunch money, complete paper surveys related to a number of school issues, coordinate schedule requests and prepare for building visits from the fire marshal. According to a non-participant teacher, “teachers don’t have enough time to do it all. We keep adding and we don’t take away. It’s overwhelming and as a classroom teacher, it’s too much” (field notes, 3/19/04).

Each of the teacher participants demonstrated frustration with the lack of time to accomplish what they needed to be an effective teacher. As one participant described “In the mornings you’re really busy, in the morning, that time frame from 8-8:30, you have seventeen things flying at you and your preps are a myth.” In fact, teacher participant Daisy, commented that if schools wanted their teachers to focus more on practice and professional collaboration, that the paperwork demands should decrease (field notes, 3/9/04). She had just spent her one preparation period of the day completing an on-line survey compiling teacher technology training and added “I’m just trying to keep up” (field notes, 3/19). Daisy concluded that more teachers would be encouraged to take on additional tasks vital to school and community relationships that in turn, benefit student learning, if they did not have so many daily time constraints (field notes, 4/30/04).

However, to attend to the daily time requirements, some teacher participants came to school earlier than required by their contract to meet these demands and others waited to after-school to complete the paperwork. Isabel created a fifteen minute routine in the morning during which students unpacked, began silent reading, and waited for school announcements while she completed what paperwork was necessary (field notes,

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4 The name of this participant was kept out at the request of the participant when the comment was made.
9/11/03). Daisy worked on what paperwork demands were given to her each day also during the time before school announcements as her third graders organized last night’s homework and wrote in their journals in response to a question on the board.

In summary, several factors within the school environment and subsequent teacher culture at DPS affected teacher practice and teacher selves that in turn, impacted teacher agency. First, school activities that were extensions of the school’s mission to bridge community and school were also impacted by testing policy. In turn, this meant that teacher practice was pushed by these activities but also that teachers found ways to push back through their positioning of the activities. Second, teacher selves were pushed through the impact of teacher stress levels as pushed by the timing and implementation of testing policy.

Lastly, teachers responded to the time constraints placed upon them with creative and flexible routines incorporated into classroom culture to help manage paperwork. While the majority of the daily paperwork demands placed upon teachers were not directly tied to testing policy, there were numerous meetings and compilation of testing data that was expected of teachers. Each of these social and cultural processes involved in the school environment encompassed the teacher culture from which teacher participants made decisions regarding their practice and testing policy. It is the specific ways that teacher practice was pushed and pushed back at testing policy that the next section explores.
Teaching Practice as a Response to Testing Policy

As indicated in chapter two, the classroom remains the one arena in which teachers can be directly involved in the enactment of educational policy (Marshall & Beck, 1992; Temes, 2000). Teachers are usually not afforded opportunities to create educational policy besides teachers’ unions and therefore, are typically reactors to instead of active contributors to policy. In turn, how teachers employ testing policy in their classrooms is largely dependent on their cultural meanings and ideologies and the ways that teacher agency responds to the meanings of testing policy within these understandings. Thus, teachers negotiate and renegotiate policy as a social and cultural practice (Cade and Levinson, 2001).

The testing policy within the federal legislation of NCLB is no exception to the social practice of educational policy. It is the exploration of how teachers employed their agency through classroom practice in and through this policy that is the center of this discussion. Moreover, it is the particular ways that teacher practice was pushed by and pushed back at the testing policy that constructs this exploration of the social practice of policy in schools. I begin with the ways that testing policy constrained the developmentally appropriateness of teacher practice and how teachers struggled with meeting the whole needs of the students. Within this framework, I will also examine the ways that teachers were pushed and ways that teachers found openings to push back at testing policy through their practice. In conclusion, I consider teacher difficulties in implementing culturally relevant practice amid testing policy. I turn now to the constraints of meeting the whole needs of students through developmentally appropriate instruction with testing policy.
Constraints in Developmentally Appropriate Instruction with Testing: Ways that Teacher Practice was Pushed.

Developmentally appropriate instruction describes instruction that meets the developmental needs of the child including social, physical, emotional, moral, and intellectual. In order for teachers to cover the material needed for testing by early March, this meant that the curriculum was compressed and practice skewed to a fast pace as perceived by some teachers. Regardless of the level of teacher awareness of the testing policy and its impact on their practice, all participants acknowledged that without testing, they would take more time with activities and make further connections between the curriculum and student levels and cultures. As teacher practice and policy enactment are dependent on individual meaning, student learning is also predicated on personal experience. This meant that not all students’ learning needs were met with the fast pace of the curriculum and instruction. Therefore, teacher practice struggled with meeting the whole needs of the students and responded to this push of practice in several ways.

First, some teachers relied heavily on rote memorization of test skills to prepare students for the testing rounds. Trained in the fine arts, Susan openly named that her practice would include more discovery or project-based instruction if testing policy did not exist. Susan stated that she does teach to the test and is frustrated with the discrepancies of meeting student needs and the pressures of standardized testing and NCLB. She summarized the impact this process has upon herself and her practice with the following “It’s a struggle to remain an intelligent person while you’re teaching [with test pressures]” (interview, 3/023/04). Similar to Kohl’s (2003) description of passionate teachers forced to “stupidity and tears” and Fried’s (2005) label of this process as the
game of school, Susan’s comment demonstrated how testing policy limited teacher agency by constraining her feelings of hope and power and in turn, limiting her practice.

The tests played a unique role in her grade level as compared to other teacher participants. Like other participants, her students are included in the measurement for adequate yearly practice. Unlike other participants, her students’ scores did not determine student promotion to the next grade. Also unlike other participants, her students’ scores did determine their participation in sitting for eighth grade high school tests that rank students for attendance into selective, non-neighborhood high schools. Thus, the pressure of testing policy had a very real impact upon the future of her students.

Her students routinely completed practice tests and took notes during teacher-directed instruction on how to develop reading comprehension skills and clear arguments in writing (field notes, 5/4/04). Other social studies learning included reading the textbook chapters, completing review questions, and discussions on how to alleviate stress so that students could perform better on the tests. This, however, created a conundrum as she lectured the students on how to relax but as a teacher was dealing with the pressures of test performance on herself and her practice. She shared that “It’s not a concern, it’s a struggle” (interview, 3/25/04).

Susan added that the struggle to meet student learning needs despite testing policy made her “feel powerless to help kids feel like they have a choice in their destiny” (field notes, 3/25/04) and that she is “disappointed that we still limit student achievement with tests even though we introduce new theories about differentiated styles of learning. We have a contradiction [in education]” (interview, 3/23/04).
In discussion with a colleague during a classroom observation, Susan declined an invitation to collaborate in a cross-grade project but answered “after the tests, after the tests, we can do that” (field notes, 5/7/04). This demonstrated how the timing of testing constituted teacher choice and order of learning activities. For example, after the last round of testing finished in May, Susan had students research such social topics such as freedom, homeland security or gender rights in order to construct a persuasive speech for classroom debates. Select students then debated these issues against the eighth graders. These were not conservative topics to cover in instruction or curriculum, thus, demonstrating that although the majority as Susan described of her practice was adapted to the requirements and timing of the tests, she found ways to push back at the testing policy of NCLB. However, these efforts were largely constrained by the test timeline.

In addition, Susan attended to student goals for high school more passionately after testing since she had flexibility in the school timeline. She held several class discussions surrounding personal and academic goals with students for high school preparation and encouraged students to accept their differences and not look at them as limitations. Not only did testing policy push Susan to adhere to test skills and content, it pushed at her relationship with students in the limitations she faced regarding time in her classroom. While Susan found a way to push back through practice during the history fair projects, it seemed that when testing was over, she was more able to address the developmental needs of her students.

Second, other teachers argued that testing policy did not push at their ability to provide developmentally appropriate practice at all while I attribute this belief to a lack of opportunity for reflection on practice in the daily structure of the school. If teachers
were not afforded opportunities for such reflection, it was unfair to expect a conscious awareness of the interaction of testing policy with practice. For example, at the beginning of research, Daisy believed that her practice did not change due to testing policy since her bilingual students’ scores did not count for student promotion. She also responded to initial questions about culture and identity in her classroom with the realization that she had never thought about it that way before (interview, 3/17/04).

Since Diversity Place School had raised their overall test scores throughout the last two years prior to the research, Daisy felt that the testing policy within NCLB had not impacted her practice. As indicated in the daily use of test preparation materials in her classroom, I argue that Daisy’s practice was pushed by the testing policy in the assimilation of such materials into her practice. While the use of test preparation materials will be further explored in a later section, Daisy expressed concern over the developmental inappropriateness of the math content of these materials but continued to include them in her practice because “those are the rules” (field notes, 5/28/04).

During a discussion over teacher agency, Daisy explained the rationale for her teacher agency. She believed that it is important to “follow the rules” because if a teacher was embroiled in conflict over practice issues, then she could not be there for her students and in turn, the students would suffer (field notes, 6/30/04).

Furthermore, testing policy impacted Daisy’s emphasis on developing language skills in classroom practice. Since she was the bilingual teacher, all of her students were at various levels of English proficiency, meaning that not only was Daisy responsible for the third grade standards but she was also responsible for fostering development in two languages- a powerful task for both teacher and students.
Daisy explained that since the test scores measured students’ success in direct ways eventually, she believed that with English language skills her students would achieve more. She acknowledged this connection between testing policy and her practice toward the middle of the research process. She added that without testing, “…we would do more hands-on [learning]” (interview, 5/28/04). This is an example of how the testing policy pushed at her practice and limited her ability to meet the whole needs of her students.

Another teacher who believed that the testing policy did not impact practice was Umberto because he felt that he ignored testing. During reflection and ensuing dialogue on testing policy and NCLB, he admitted that his decision to completely ignore testing policy and NCLB was based on two factors—his first year of teaching, and his own personal traumatic experiences with standardized testing as a student himself. At the beginning of the research process, Umberto felt that it was more important to build student self-esteem rather than focus on one piece of their learning.

He argued that since he did not discuss testing at all, that the testing policy had no impact on his practice and ability to provide developmentally appropriate instruction. I argue otherwise. As the special education teacher, Umberto had two roles. One he was responsible for supervising the inclusion of his students during certain content areas. This meant that at various times, he served as a support teacher to his students while they were in the mainstream classroom. Two, he provided small group instruction in his own classroom for the seventh and eighth grade special education students. Susan was one of these teachers whose classroom followed the inclusion model. During observations, Umberto followed the format in this classroom by supporting the practice employed by
the regular education teacher. Since Susan admitted that she struggled with meeting the developmental needs of her students amidst testing, Umberto, in turn, supported this practice and had his practice pushed by the testing policy.

Furthermore, when Umberto was asked how his practice would be different if there were no testing policy, he shared “OH MAN! OH DUDE!!! We would like…we would be living what we are learning. We would LOSE ourselves in the French Revolution. We would LOSE ourselves in like, we’d have costumes, we’d have town meetings. We OH MAN, we’d go wild” (interview, 5/27/04). This comment indicated that Umberto came to understand that by ignoring the testing policy, he was in a sense, being pushed by it through the extent of creativity in his practice (interview, 5/27/04). Since creative practice often worked to meet the developmental needs of special education students as indicated in the section on practice pushing back, his practice struggled with testing policy and overall student needs.

As the research process evolved, Umberto acknowledged the impact of his response to the testing policy upon his students. He shared “I have not addressed the issue of testing with my kids. I made a mistake. It’s like a basketball coach who focuses all on winning and never discusses defeat with his kids. They then don’t know how to deal with it when it happens” (interview, 5/27/04).

Finally, Isabel believed that she was able to limit the impact of testing policy upon her practice and in turn, provide instruction that was developmentally appropriate for her diverse range of student levels and cultures. She focused on implementing learning activities that were modified to student developmental levels and language needs such as listening centers and varied literature. She commented that as she gained more
experience as a teacher, she better grounded her practice in the needs of her students and not the demands of the testing policy. Isabel explained “if anything, that damn test has made me do less test preparation [in my practice]. I see no validity in it, no best practices at all” (interview, 4/5/05). When asked how she was able to continue to do, in her own words, “her own thing” and still have students test well, she replied “it’s because I have their attention...[and] I know what works” (interview, 5/27/04). She added that if her students did not test well, that she might not have the complete support of the administration to continue differentiated practice due to their own pressures to raise collective student scores.

*Ways that Teacher Practice Pushed Back at the Constraints in Developmentally Appropriate Instruction with Testing.*

In addition to the ways that testing policy constrained teacher practice and ability to provide developmentally appropriate instruction, teacher participants also found ways to push back at the policy and meet student learning needs. Some participants were openly aware of these choices in practice and others did not name these activities at any time during reflection or following dialogue on resultant power dynamics and policy. For example, Susan exercised her agency by incorporating student involvement in the research/project-based district wide history fair (field notes, 4/5/04). However, she did not name this as an example of her resistance to the testing throughout data collection. Students were given topics related to the history of Center City and instructed in research and writing skills to create a display and research paper on the issue. She spent classtime supporting student collaboration on these projects and giving teacher feedback on the
structure and validity of student arguments. Again, this was a way that she found an opening in testing policy to assert her freedom through practice.

When Umberto taught in his own classroom, it seemed that testing policy did not directly impact his ability to provide developmentally appropriate instruction since he relied on active learning strategies that attended to student abilities and interests. For example, he utilized drama strategies to help his students of varying skill levels better connect to the curriculum and foster their engagement in the classroom (field notes, 4/7/04).

He also assigned students roles of state senators and practiced review of the Constitution as each “senator” debated facts on the Senate floor following protocol of debate. Umberto added that since his students were actively engaged in learning that he feared what a low performance on standardized testing would do to their self-esteem. He argued:

They’ve never felt smarter in their lives, and this is the first time they’ve had academic success…This means that it is very delicate in how they will respond if they don’t do well on the tests because they’ve started to care about testing. It’s like hitting the wall in running…what do you do but hopefully run through it. (interview, 5/27/04)

These reflective questions and examples of practice is evidence of how Umberto was able to push back at the testing policy and find ways to employ practice that was developmentally appropriate and respectful of his views of teaching and learning, thus respectful of his agency.

Umberto also demonstrated the usefulness of reflective practice developed through the research process as he questioned how to incorporate testing policy into his classroom at the end of the research process. This was, in a sense, a teacher trying to find
ways to push back at the policy by making it fit teacher practice. He no longer ignored
the testing policy as a teacher and a human being. He described the changes in practice
in the following ways:

    Well, I’m making sure that what are the words that are used on the test,
how does that, what does this test even look like?…So like how is it
constructed? Even giving them tests that LOOK like the test [in format]
so I’m giving a chapter quiz on colonial America in social studies and the
questions are from the book, they look like they would on the test, and so
they get comfortable. (interview, 10/4/04)

This comment demonstrated his new awareness and positioning of the testing policy
through his practice as he shifted his activities to include discussion and practice for the
tests in a manner that respected student levels.

    In conclusion, teacher participants varied in their awareness of testing policy and
practice as evident in the ways that practice was pushed by and pushed back at testing
policy. One teacher openly named the challenges of fostering developmentally
appropriate practice grounded in students’ needs. Others, however, denied the impact of
testing policy on practice but demonstrated that testing practice compressed lessons and
therefore, student learning. Finally, all teachers found ways to push back at the testing
policy through their teacher agency as evident in the construction of learning
opportunities for their students that met student learning modalities. Before unpacking
how testing policy challenged culturally relevant practice, consideration must be given to
how testing policy was enacted through teacher practice in summer school.
Teacher-Scripted Instruction in Summer School: Ways that Testing Again Limited Developmentally Appropriate Practice and Practice Pushed Back.

It is pertinent to this narrative to also consider teaching practice and its ability to meet the whole needs of students during summer school. Summer school occurred at the end of the research and reflective process. Therefore, it seemed that teachers were more comfortable naming choices and power dynamics inherent to teaching, learning and testing policy. The curriculum for summer school was teacher-scripted, meaning that there was a distinct format to be followed each day in the classroom. Administrators and district personnel randomly checked in teachers’ rooms to gauge curriculum.

At this point of the research, Daisy was aware of the mundane routine the teacher-scripted curriculum created and student response to this process. She also indicated her feelings of frustration toward the irrelevance of the curriculum to her students. She commented that just when students were feeling disconnected from school, they were forced to endure rote learning during the summer that adds to their isolation from learning (field notes, 7/8/04). Although she followed the curriculum the majority of class time, Daisy asked for supplemental ideas to the curriculum and planned team-teaching activities with the researcher. Thereby, she was again pushed by the testing policy but also pushing back.

In contrast to her practice during the academic year, Susan openly pushed back at testing policy during summer school. In her own words, she worked within the program objectives but based activities on the reading levels of her students to make learning relevant (field notes, 7/26/04). When asked why she felt comfortable doing this, she contributed the change to the different context of lower class size and less pressure from
testing policy during the summer. She explained that both she and the students had been frustrated with the scripted curriculum and that reorganizing it to the needs of the students not only helped with their engagement but also her interest in the materials.

As indicated by this discussion, except for one participant, teacher participants generally struggled with constructing their practice in ways that met the whole developmental needs of their students concurrently with raising test scores. Some teachers were aware of how their practice was pushed by this challenge of the testing policy but it is important to note that all did not name their actions of pushing back at the testing policy. Teacher practice was pushed by the testing policy through the compressed timeline in several ways- teacher directed instruction with lecture to “cover” materials quickly, increased use of test preparation materials and an increased rate of completing activities without extension activities.

Furthermore, teacher participants also pushed back at the testing policy through practice by including active learning strategies and cooperative learning activities to meet student developmental needs. It is also evident that even though the testing policy played a different role during summer school aside from NCLB measurement, teachers had their practice pushed and pushed back again in their responses to the teacher-scripted or “teacher-proofed” summer school curriculum. These examples evince how teacher agency was enacted while grounded in both teacher meanings/individual needs and student needs. This discussion on the challenges of providing developmentally appropriate instruction, as a form of teacher agency will now attend to the difficulty teachers faced in providing culturally relevant practice.
Difficulties in Teaching Culturally Relevant Practice: Test Scores and Student Culture.

Similar to the discussion regarding developmentally appropriate practice, teachers cited a lack of time and limited perspectives present in the curriculum as the main factors impacting teacher ability to facilitate culturally relevant practice. Teachers cited the lack of time as a prime reason that it was challenging to present diverse perspectives in their materials used during learning in their classrooms.

Susan explained the pressure to cover the required curriculum by test time as a prime limitation on both practice and content covered throughout the year. She indicated that the traditional style of her practice barely incorporated the diverse home cultures of her students because of testing. She felt torn between what she knows to be good teaching that attends to local culture and what she must do to help students perform and thus, be successful on standardized testing (field notes, 3/12/04).

Although teachers were again faced with a social practice that limited teacher agency and practice, teacher participants found ways to push back through their practice. This is another indication of the flexibility and creativity these individuals brought to their classrooms and school environment. For example, Daisy argued that the test preparation materials teachers are encouraged to implement in their practice often misused language from other cultures and thus, perpetuated singular conceptions of student cultures. When she encountered these language issues, she pointed out the word to her class and discussed other definitions that might influence the meaning of the story or the actions of its characters (field notes, 4/30/04), thereby using open discussion with students as a way to push back at the constraints on culturally relevant practice.
Bianca responded to the need for multiple perspectives in her social studies classes through interdisciplinary teaching with other teachers and classes as well as presenting supplemental materials for students to read in class. This was evident in her constant carrying of library materials to her classroom (field notes, 3/17/04). Like Bianca, Isabel shifted the curriculum but not the standards to foster culturally relevant practice. As the language arts teacher, she frequently spent her own money on literature that represented the culture of her students (field notes, 9/17/04). This meant that she presented students with a diverse range of materials and perspectives in her classroom. Umberto responded to these challenges regarding culturally relevant practice by openly discussing social and cultural differences with his students (field notes, 4/5/04).

Although Susan openly named her struggles with respecting student diversity, she often incorporated popular culture into her lessons as an effort to help students better represent themselves in classroom learning (field notes, 4/5/04). For example, she had students create collages that represented cultural issues that they believed to be unfair as a precursor to discussion on constitutional rights. This was also done before the first round of testing. Even though the timeline of testing heavily impacted her practice, Susan found ways to push back and thus, exercise her agency.

While teacher participants reflected and questioned the ways that testing policy pushed at their practice regarding culturally relevancy, they did not name their actions of pushing back at any time during the research process. I believe this is because teacher participants were uncomfortable with being construed as negative teachers. Throughout the research process, whenever a teacher participant expressed frustration about a situation or an issue of teaching or school, except for Susan, he or she always apologized.
shortly afterward to me for the previous comments (field notes, 3/15/04, 4/05/04, 6/15/04). When I reiterated that they were encouraged to express themselves in any manner they needed to, teacher participants responded that they wanted to be proactive for change and not be simply negative. Negativity was a characteristic of a useless and ineffective teacher and viewed as a detriment to the school/teacher culture and to good teaching.

In summary, teachers struggled to construct culturally relevant practice despite time constraints caused by daily job demands and a compressed curriculum. However, while practice was pushed in some ways by this difficulty, teacher participants again found ways to respect student diversity and culture amidst a lack of time and test pressures. This was done with open discussion with students, supplementing test preparation materials with a wide range of perspectives on similar concepts, and through collaborative teaching that constructed interdisciplinary learning. The discussion now turns to an exploration of how testing policy encouraged curriculum selectivity. From there, the focus will turn to the teacher relationships that were negotiated and renegotiated through the testing policy.

“You can’t meet the kids where they are.” Curriculum Selectivity as a Response to the Pressures of Testing Policy

Before unpacking the ways that curriculum was impacted by testing policy, it is necessary to define the term curriculum according to teacher perceptions. Curriculum included the content area such as science or math, the specific skills and knowledge a student should know and demonstrate within that content area according to state standards and test requirements and the materials used to accomplish these objectives.
Curriculum was not used as a static concept isolated from teacher meanings and classroom culture but as an evolving practice based on negotiated meaning between testing, teacher meanings, and student needs. I turn now to explore how testing policy privileged certain curriculum.

Privileging of Content Areas over Other Content.

The testing policy within NCLB impacted curriculum through its sole focus on measurement in the content areas of math and reading. This means that as time progresses and the legislation has greater impact upon schools through sanctions and school ranking, reading and math are becoming privileged content areas over other subjects. In the classroom, this curriculum takes precedence over content that is not tested. This is an example of the practice of testing policy pushing curriculum.

For example, Daisy acknowledged the impact of testing policy upon curriculum by stating that she reorganized the curriculum in order to meet test demands. She shared that testing policy “limits the curriculum since we are preparing for the testing…You can’t meet the kids where they are because you have to push them to be at a certain point by testing time” (interview, 3/17/04). In other words, she predominately focused on the two content areas that were counted for standardized testing measurement and spent less time on the areas that are not included. She also felt that reading skills could be taught in an interdisciplinary manner so that if reading development was strong, her students could work faster through the other non-tested content areas after testing. At the end of the research, Daisy stated that the emphasis on reading and math skills in the curriculum also helped develop the language needs of her bilingual students because “the kids really need to have that tool” (interview, 5/28/04).
Even though Isabel felt that her practice and curriculum implemented state standards and was grounded in student levels, she commented that curriculum was shifted somewhat because of the need to cover certain skills by test time. For example, she explained that if testing policy was not a factor in schools, she would spend more time with writing skills but since grammar and other mechanical issues are not measured by tests, they focus on “getting their ideas out” (field notes, 5/27/04). She shared the struggle between doing what she believes is best for the students’ learning and helping them be successful in the testing system. She commented that “I kinda go back and forth, not really, I mean, there are certain things that we do because I’m like okay, we have to at least practice for the test, but things in this room are more driven by where we’re at” (interview, 6/15/04). This would be an example of teacher agency and curriculum pushing back at testing policy.

Furthermore, the selectivity of reading and math also undermines the importance of non-tested content areas since they are not deemed worthy of testing by the federal legislation and therefore, perceived as not as important to student learning. Teacher participants who did not teach in the content areas tested by NCLB and for student promotion in Center City felt that students and parents respected their subject matter less than reading and math (field notes, 5/18/04). Bianca shared that she tried to ignore the cultural lessons that testing policy portrays regarding her content area of social studies (interview, 11/4/04).

More specifically, testing policy positioned the curriculum of math and reading over other areas and in turn, transmitted cultural norms that undermined the importance of learning and teaching in the non-tested areas. While some teacher participants tried to
incorporate curriculum in an interdisciplinary manner to push back at the categorization of their curriculum, other teachers felt that reading and math skills should be emphasized more in order to better support learning in other areas. I now turn the discussion to the ways that test preparation materials created a disconnect with student levels of learning in some teacher participants’ experience.

*Disjunction between Test Preparation Materials and Student Developmental Levels.*

Not only did the implementation of test preparation materials add to the compressed curricular timeline, it also presented teachers with the challenge of connecting these materials to the student developmental levels. Based on several classroom observations and interviews, it appeared that some test preparation materials were not well matched to the developmental levels of students. For example, Daisy shared her frustrations with the level of questions and language used in the test materials (field notes, 4/30/04). She felt that the language of the test preparation materials was culturally biased in that the words used to represent other cultures besides mainstream Anglo culture were not easily translated from one language to another. In other words, her students were not only being wrongly assessed because the questions were not developmentally appropriate but also confused by the vocabulary.

She countered the frustration and low confidence this produced in students by raising their own academic expectations through the use of higher-level literature in her practice. While she did utilize test preparation materials frequently, she pushed back at the disconnect this practice encouraged between students developmental levels and curriculum through an emphasis on high expectations for her students. This
demonstrated the love of learning that Daisy instilled in her students through high expectations for their learning while also attending to the test requirements. This is again an example of teacher agency.

Other examples of the disconnect between student developmental levels and test preparation materials were apparent in Susan’s room and as the inclusion teacher, subsequently Umberto’s room. While Susan had students take practice tests several times throughout the year and also took class time to help students study for these tests, it seemed that students were frustrated with the questions and level of the materials (field notes, 5/7/04). In turn, when Umberto’s students brought these activities to his classroom for support, they expressed anger at the time required for them to understand the materials (field notes, 3/25/04).

It is also important to consider teacher agency within testing policy through the social practice of teacher relationships. I now explore how teacher relationships were impacted by testing policy and the ways that teachers negotiated and renegotiated these relationships.

Teacher Relationships as Negotiated and Renegotiated through Testing Policy

As a social and cultural process, teacher relationships with grade level teammates, other teacher colleagues, and students were an important function of teacher culture and school environment. And as a social practice, these relationships were predicated on numerous factors such as teachers’ view of individual self and teaching, local meanings of teaching, and school power dynamics among others. Teacher relationships, along with the other components of teaching discussed in this chapter, were constituted by testing policy enacted through teacher agency. This meant that the social and cultural process of
teachers lived experience with testing policy included how teachers interact with their colleagues and how testing policy impacts this process. It is important to consider teacher relationships through testing policy for several reasons.

First, understanding teacher relationships as negotiated and renegotiated through testing policy helps describe the status of teacher community that is crucial to supporting and developing teacher empowerment and practice. As noted in chapter two, reform predicates its effectiveness on the enactment of policy objectives which are implemented by the teacher in the classroom (Elmore, 2004). If teacher relationships are supported and developed through teacher community (Kohl, 2003; hooks, 2003), then it serves to understand how this community is impacted by testing policy and what supports are needed to facilitate its sustainability.

Second, teacher relationships are another social practice that can impact teacher practice through collaboration or competition as mitigated by testing policy. It is important to understand how teacher relationships impact individual teacher practice to also explore what supports are needed to empower and develop teacher leadership. I begin by exploring how testing policy pushed at teacher relationships with teammates and colleagues.

Teacher Team Relationships as Functions of Testing Policy Pressures.

I will first explore the communication between teacher teams and administration through testing policy and then address how teacher team relationships also constituted practice. As stated earlier, the administration at Diversity Place School was lead by a former teacher who located her leadership in the classroom experience. Teacher participants were often appreciative of the principal’s efforts to attend to individual and
teacher team needs as evident in her efforts to communicate with teams. For example, during an in-service on a software program that would track student test scores for teacher diagnosis of student learning needs, the principal commented to the collective group of teachers, “I don’t want to waste your time so let’s talk about how this can support your practice” (field notes, 11/7/03). Another teacher colleague (non-research participant) turned to me and commented, “that’s why I love this woman. She treats us like professionals, not like peons” (field notes, 11/7/03). This is an example of the principal’s efforts to respect teacher knowledge and facilitate real dialogue through teacher relationships.

Each week teams met once during a common preparation period similar to a whole school teacher staff meeting. During this time, one teacher recorded the issues discussed and questions asked in a binder that was later passed to the office for the principal to respond to in writing. Some common themes from team meeting were as follows: how to meet the developmental and cultural needs of bilingual students amidst testing pressures, how these students could receive more instructional support, what social services existed and teacher frustration with the lack of these services and the inclusion of special education and bilingual student scores in accountability measures (document analysis, 6/12/04). The principal in turn, wrote comments back to teacher questions or met individually with teacher to discuss the comments and teacher needs. Furthermore, the principal established an “open-door” policy to all teachers to privately discuss needs, concerns, or questions (document analysis, 6/15/04). Teacher participants shared that this invitation to communicate was another example of the principal’s effort to establish a teacher community at Diversity Place School.
Teacher teams, in turn, also served as small entities within the larger school teacher culture. Team meetings among other social interaction between teammates, were positioned by and also positioned the testing policy in different ways. For example, Daisy felt that “NCLB encourages more competition rather than collaboration” (field notes, 3/17/04) among teachers in a team. She also shared that while she believed that teacher collaboration was an important way to improve teacher practice and respect for difference, she felt that the pressure to raise test scores hindered true collaboration. Therefore, she rarely participated in her own team meetings but instead collaborated with teachers in other grade levels. It is interesting to note, however, that after the research process ended, Daisy began to attend the weekly team meetings and now actively collaborates with her teammates despite the testing pressures.

Isabel explained that while there was a subtle feeling of competition among both teacher teams and the collective school teacher culture to be an effective teacher and produce test scores, that it was a “friendly competition” and not generalizable across the entire school culture. She chose to collaborate in a variety of ways among her own team and across the collective teacher culture.

Teacher team relationships through testing policy also impacted teacher practice as evident in the experiences of the social studies teacher Bianca. One might assume that since her curriculum was not included in the testing measurement for both NCLB and the student promotion policy for Center City that her practice or team relationships were not impacted by testing. I assert that her relationship with her teammates impacted her practice in two major ways. First, Bianca viewed collaboration between teachers as an important way to improve practice and support community which in turn, would help
teachers better serve the students. She indicated that as a team player, she wanted to support her colleagues as much as possible while also covering social studies standards for her students.

However, since her teammates taught in the content areas measured by testing policy, their pressures often impacted her relationships with students. Bianca continued throughout the research process to facilitate these relationships with teammates in positive ways even though her practice was impacted by them being pushed by the testing policy through the culture of her classroom. For example, students often came into Bianca’s classroom and complained about the workload given in reading and math to improve test scores. Not only were students upset and stressed, they were angry. In fact, students came to me during a classroom observation and asked me to intervene with Bianca’s teammates (field notes, 5/4/04). Since Bianca was respectful of her teammates but also wanted to attend to the students’ emotional and intellectual needs, she allowed them a safe space to express their frustrations in her classroom. However, she established clear boundaries for these discussions so that they were productive as opposed to simply negative. She stated to her students that “that the math teacher is trying to help you be better prepared with math. If you have a problem with a teacher, you need to be responsible and speak with the teacher yourself, then with your parents and the teacher together” (field notes, 5/12/04).

Second, Bianca’s teacher relationships through testing policy also impacted practice through the level of student engagement in her classroom. Since the students’ anxiety levels toward learning and testing appeared high, they often came into her room with little energy and motivation. This was evident in Bianca’s expressed frustration on
how she could better motivate and thus increase student engagement in her classes (field notes, 3/17/04). It was important to note that Bianca herself kept her comments positive regarding this social process as evident when she stated “I’m concerned with the job I’m doing” (interview, 3/15/04).

Third, besides student anxiety toward testing impacting Bianca’s practice, her curriculum was also slightly affected. Therefore, Bianca afforded a unique perspective on teacher team relationships and practice through testing policy. For example, the math teacher on her team asked her to review math skills at various times to reinforce and support her efforts with testing policy. Since Bianca wanted to support her teammate, she took time out of her instruction to review math skills before testing. Bianca added though, that this action was not only predicated on her willingness to be a team player but also in her desire for her students to do well on the tests for both AYP and student promotion. Since testing was the key to their academic success according to policy, she wanted them to be successful. And to support reading skills, Bianca incorporated reading and test-taking skills into her regular practice.

These examples of how teacher relationships are constituted through testing policy demonstrate the importance for teacher community but also how teacher agency was pushed through team relationships through testing policy and also pushed back. I focus now on the ways that teacher relationships with students were negotiated and renegotiated through testing policy.
As any teacher knows, teacher relationships with students outside the classroom influence rapport with students in the classroom since teachers are better able to locate practice in student learning needs and interests. I argue that teacher participant relationships with students were based on teacher desire to better serve their students despite the limitations they felt with time, practice and curriculum in the classroom due to testing policy. Therefore, these relationships with students outside the classroom were a form of teacher agency.

For example, Umberto explained that he believed if teachers took more time to spend with their students outside the classroom, they would see them in another light and develop another relationship with students that would benefit their learning and in turn, teaching efforts. He also added that the teachers might have fun in the meantime (interview, 5/27/04). Umberto attributed his involvement in the athletic programs at DPS as a way that some of his students came to trust him. This served as a form of teacher agency as Umberto developed his practice and abilities as a teacher more successfully despite the limitations of the testing policy.

Isabel added that when she spent time with her students outside the classroom whether in coaching soccer, basketball, Girls on the Run, or teaching after-school, she saw them more as whole people and not just students in front of her. Bianca coached Girls on the Run and basketball with Umberto and Isabel. She explained that the relationship with students helps the kids and in turn, grounded teacher practice in real
positive ways. For example, she explained that the time spent with the girls, in particular, helped her better attend to their gender roles in the classroom since she knew them better.

Susan also taught after-school and led the African dancers that she described as a way to share more of herself with her students and encourage student self-expression, which is challenging to do in the classroom because of testing. Daisy also was involved with students in the weekly classes of Latin Dancers. This was a group of eighth graders who practiced and performed various Latin dances to highlight their culture and also individual talents for the school and community. She shared that not only did she enjoy getting to know the students outside the traditional role of teacher and student but also enjoyed watching students take pride in their own culture.

Teacher relationships with the administration, teammates, and students were all ways that teachers negotiated and renegotiated the testing policy. The benefits of how these relationships through testing policy can also improve the school relationship in the community will be delineated further in chapter seven.

This section examined how teachers and their practice were positioned by and concurrently also positioned the testing policy through particular practices. The enactment of testing policy through teacher lived experience as constituted through various structures and social practices demonstrated the importance of local meanings in the social and cultural context of a classroom. Each description illuminated the ways that teachers are expressing their agency through the testing policy. This chapter describes the tensions between the reality of the testing policy upon the practice of teachers and the questions and themes that emerge from the intersection of policy and teacher/practice as explored in the two circles at the beginning of the chapter. It is also evident that teacher
practice was impacted by the testing policy regardless of grade level or content area, thus supporting the assertion that regardless of the level of sanctions of NCLB upon a school, the policy is already constituting teaching and learning at the local level. I now connect the ways that testing policy unfolded in teacher practice, school environment and curriculum to teacher perceptions of testing policy, policy itself, the legislation of NCLB and professional development efforts to contextualize teacher experience with testing policy.

Teacher Participant Views Toward Issues of Educational Reform

These issues of teacher lived experiences with testing evoke the essence of qualitative inquiry - to understand human experience and knowing as social practice (Glesne, 1999). Discussion will now focus on teacher views toward testing policy, the legislation of NCLB, and the general policy process itself. A summary of their general response toward each issue is included in conjunction with their words to illustrate local meanings. Teacher comments are presented in contrasting sides of the paper to model the dialectic nature of this inquiry. I begin with teacher attitudes and views toward testing policy itself.

*Teachers and Testing Policy: “Who’s writing it? Not the teachers!!” (Bianca, field notes, 3/15/04)*

Bianca’s comment best summarizes teacher participants’ feelings of frustration and disconnect with the testing policy of NCLB. This section will elaborate on teacher participants’ general views toward the specific testing policy within NCLB and its impact upon teachers and practice. From this, the focus will turn to the business model of reform in education and the effects of its use of testing policy upon special education according
to teacher perceptions. I conclude with teacher participants’ critique of the sustainability of the testing policy itself.

**Accountability Through Current Testing Policy Does Not Create Positive Change.**

While each of the teacher participants felt that accountability measures for teachers in educational reform were a positive catalyst for change in principle, they felt that the use of standardized tests to gauge teacher quality was an ineffective method through which to accomplish these goals. They all also disagreed with testing as a criterion for student promotion and a gauge of student learning through AYP and added that both practices were developmentally inappropriate. They attributed this lack of flexibility to the standardization of implementation of NCLB at the state and district level.

Teacher participants also argued that testing measures only the curriculum taught and not the true student learning since it is only one form of measurement.

It gives you no portrait of a student. Kids who test well usually can’t give you insight, their answers aren’t pungent, there’s no juice in their thinking. (Umberto, interview, 3/26/04)

I am after IOWA a little more…p’od about [testing] than I was initially. After I realized how short the reading passages were. They [the students] had two opportunities and they combined those and then it’s DONE. It’s read, ask a question, they should be able answer to answer it but the other part of me hates the fact that fifty-five minutes of reading is what we worked the ENTIRE year for. And it REALLY ticked me off after I saw that. (Isabel, interview, 5/18/04)

Teacher participants also argued that external social and cultural factors play as much a role in student achievement on tests as teacher practice. Isabel cited the hardships
inherent in poverty as factors that neither she nor the school could control that determine student learning and test performance. Umberto also linked economics and social issues to student learning that should be addressed in the testing policy and the wider context of NCLB. He felt that to address one component created unfair responsibilities for teachers.

All teacher participants, nonetheless, called for additional forms of assessment besides standardized testing to measure student learning and teacher quality. Susan, commented that testing is a conflict between teaching and meeting student learning modalities since testing insures that certain curriculum must be taught by test time regardless of the developmental level of students. All stated that this pressures teachers to push the curriculum, and thus lower the quality of teaching for all kids.

*Sustainability of the Testing Policy: Is It Here to Stay?*

The two most experienced teacher participants, Susan and Daisy, viewed testing as another policy effort to weather and survive while Bianca, the third year teacher, viewed it as a “necessary evil” that teachers should confront and deal with in an effort to enhance learning for all students. All participants believed that increased funding, parent involvement and awareness of testing policy are the key to its success and that the current use of standardized testing does not attend to those issues.

Daisy argued that like children are unique in their needs and learning styles, that assessment should be unique and not standard. Susan added that testing does not take into account student culture and diversity, thus, making students assimilate into the dominant mainstream culture that is addressed in standardized testing in order to gain success in school. The specific challenges of diversity and equity that emerge from testing policy will be further explored in the chapter five.
In conclusion, teachers support the call for accountability measures in teaching as a means to improve practice but do not agree with the current use of standardized tests as the premise for such accountability. Teachers argue for additional forms of student assessment to coincide with developmentally appropriate practice in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers are conflicted on the sustainability of the testing policy while all are concerned with the lack of teacher input in the development and use of the policy. I now explore teacher participant perceptions of the legislation of NCLB.

_Teachers and the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act_

Overall, teacher participants had little awareness of the new legislation and its impact upon their school and teaching. This may be because several components of NCLB such as school accountability and standardized testing policy already existed in Center City therefore, making it difficult for teachers to distinguish differences in policy. For example, test scores were already used for student promotion in select grades and to gauge school success much like the measurement tool of adequate yearly progress in NCLB. Furthermore, Diversity Place School had not yet experienced sanctions from NCLB because of low-test scores or failure to make adequate yearly progress. Isabel shared that teachers do not have the time to learn about new directives since the job of teaching and doing it well is time consuming.

_Parent and Student Accountability._

All of the teacher participants believed that NCLB in principle was a good idea but it that to be successful, NCLB must include parent and student accountability in the legislation. In other words, the current NCLB legislation does not address the role of parents in learning or the socio-economic challenges that face urban students.
It would also call for families to own up to... messes on their fault, because the students are only with the teachers six and half hours a day and then they leave and there’s a huge gap from Friday to Monday...And so many of the problems I see is that you work hard as an educator to create an environment that will blossom a child’s intellectual and academic faculties. Fact and in many instances these children come from domestic situations that are specifically against that whether or not it’s through television, whether it’s from irresponsible parenting, whether it’s through substance abuse in the home, there are so many factors that need to be dealt with that are just never talked about. (Umberto, interview, 5/27/04)

I have a hard time because I think that…a lot of it depends on the kids. I can’t control the fact that [a student’s] dad is in jail and she’s not going to test, she’s going to do terrible. Or that so and so is in between losing his house and coming to school. I can’t control that kind of stuff around the test time. (Isabel, interview, 5/27/04)

Sustainability of the Overall Legislation of NCLB.

Two participants believed that like the testing policy, NCLB will not prevail as a successful reform effort in the long-term because of the discrepancy between its policy objectives and the realities of the implementation at the local or the school level. Three disagreed about its sustainability because they believe that standardized tests produce a tangible measurement that policymakers and others not directly involved with teaching feel comfortable with. Four out of five participants added that regardless of the controversy around the legislation, it would eventually not succeed because they believe it is an under-funded mandate.

I think that teachers, myself included, are quite disillusioned with it at this point. because of the underfunding and just that it’s a really expensive mandate that’s underfunded. (Bianca, interview, 3/15/04)
Teachers and the Process of Educational Reform: The Disconnect Between the Teachers and Policy

The overall attitude toward the policy process from teacher participants can be best summarized by Isabel’s description that policy is constructed of people distant from the classroom. She commented that “it’s overpaid people doing nothing” (field notes, 3/23/04). All of the teacher participants argued that by not including teachers the process of educational policy separates teaching from the reform, thus making teachers typically reactors to instead of active participants in the policy. They added that this also means there is a strong discrepancy between policy objectives and the realities of teaching.

Policy is dry, academic, and misguided. Learning and teaching can’t be standardized…but policy plays differently in each context….like in the four walls of the classroom. (Umberto, interview, 3/26/04)

That the people who are involved in the process are not involved in teaching. (Susan, interview, 3/25/04)

I think the problem is that the people who make policy haven’t been in a classroom in twenty years…I think we need people who are not on the business side of education, people who work 9-5 and take an hour lunch. You need people who work in the leadership part-time and maybe teach the other half. (Isabel, interview, 6/15/04)

Umberto argued that teachers need to get organized and involved politically in reform efforts besides the teachers union. While he supports the latter, he continued that teachers should get mobilized as individuals and as a collective profession to facilitate the necessary changes needed in policy and the policy process. He advocated the use of the Internet as a powerful tool for such daily communication for change. He concluded
Nobody’s going to come to you and ask for your opinion. That’s not how life works…But in the world, nobody asks for your opinion, they wait for you to give it to them and if you don’t give it to them, they blow right by you. (interview, 5/27/04)

In order to eradicate the discrepancies between policy objectives and classroom realities, teachers call for better communication between teachers and policymakers. The discussion now turns to teacher beliefs regarding professional development efforts as a function of policy.

*Teachers and Professional Development: A Hindrance to Teacher Collaboration*

It is crucial to briefly describe the attitudes of teacher participants toward professional development policy since it is a key component of the reform proposed by NCLB to improve teacher quality and practice. All participants viewed external professional development efforts as useless since they are lead by people outside of the local school culture. They each proposed instead that professional development be constructed and led by teachers from the internal school teacher culture in order to respect teacher voice, foster teacher leadership and attend to local needs and meanings. All participants noted that while professional development is in principle an attempt to improve teacher practice, that it adds to the overwhelming task teachers already face and does not enhance already existing structures that support teachers. Participants also suggested that professional development center on collaboration among and between teachers at various grade levels and content areas to be purposeful and relevant.

**Conclusion**

Teacher practice as constituted by teacher agency through the testing policy of NCLB was the focus of this chapter. From the location of participant background, the
discussion unpacked the particular ways that teacher practice was pushed by and also pushed back at the testing policy. First, teachers exercised their agency through creative response to the school environment, particularly the school activities, level of teacher stress and time constraints placed upon teacher practice. Although time constraints and timing of the testing limited teacher practice in some ways, participants incorporated these practices into their daily routines and approached the challenges with an attitude of how to assimilate this into practice rather than change their own practice.

Second, teacher practice as a response to testing itself faced the issue of how to provide developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant practice despite time constraints and test knowledge. Regardless of teacher perspective of testing, policy, or NCLB, participants were both pushed by the testing policy and also found ways to push back at the testing policy through their practice. This exercise of teacher agency was demonstrated through teacher collaboration with colleagues to create interdisciplinary learning, differentiated learning based on student centers, and active learning strategies among other teacher responses. On the other hand, teacher practice was also pushed by testing policy as some teachers limited activities to cover the curriculum in time for testing.

Third, teacher participants were pushed by testing policy in the way that curriculum became selective and the testing privileged certain content over other content. In order for teachers to cover test knowledge in time for testing, teachers struggled with shifting the curriculum around to meet this need. This meant that not only was certain content being emphasized more over other knowledge but this practice also undermined the status of other content to parents, teacher, and students alike.
Fourth, teacher participants utilized their agency through the negotiated and renegotiated relationships with teacher colleagues and students. Even though some participants named that NCLB encourages more competition instead of collaboration among teachers, participants found ways to work with teacher teams, other teachers, and administrators to support their practice despite testing policy. Teacher participants also found ways to push back at the testing policy through their relationships with students outside the classroom. Each teacher described their activities with students outside the classroom as opportunities to get to know students better, better ground their practice and develop rapport with parents in ways that are not possible in the classroom due to testing policy constraints.

Lastly, teacher perceptions of educational issues such as testing policy, NCLB, professional development and policy itself helped contextualize the ways that participants responded to testing policy through practice. The ground is now prepared to explore the issues of diversity and equity that emerged from the practice of policy and teacher pedagogy. This exploration will be the focus of chapter five. It is the hope of teacher participants that such discussion will not only create awareness but also create research that people will listen to. Chapter seven aims to also build upon the description of teacher practice through testing policy to further connect the ways teachers push and are pushed by to the professional development efforts discussed in the implications of this study.

Bianca shared why these discussions and descriptions of testing policy and teacher practice are important to teaching and learning. She said “I see research about NCLB and high-stakes testing as a hope for a way to change…maybe someone will listen
to you cause I don’t have an answer to these issues. I’m not sure what exactly impacts my perception, probably the politics of it all” (interview, 3/15/04). It is the aim of this study that through the lens of teacher experience with testing policy and the particular ways this was unpacked at the local level, that teachers will appreciate the importance of their views and participation in the policy as “a way for change”. Before we can create such change through policy, theory, and practice, we all need to listen to the teachers.
CHAPTER 5

“THERE IS UNFAIRNESS HERE.” TEACHER CONCERNS WITH THE DILEMMAS OF BILINGUAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATION THROUGH THE TESTING POLICY

The overall impact is through the challenge of meeting all students’ needs…NCLB says that the minds that determine the division of our society need to slow society down. It’s a form of slowing down intelligence with the changing purpose of schooling. If we are to survive these changes, society must categorize people and change the school’s purpose to make that happen…I see testing and diversity as a controversial issue. There is unfairness there. The vocabulary and societal references in the test language are different from students’ experiences because their cultures are different from the mainstream. (Susan, interview, 3/23/04)

As indicated by the above perception of testing policy and its impact on student learning and the purpose of schooling, the issues of diversity and equity inherent to testing policy concern teacher participants. Susan described the role of testing in teaching as a “controversial” process predicated on students fitting into ascribed categories of standardized measurement. This chapter will explore these concerns through the particular focus on dilemmas of teaching bilingual and special education students through testing policy. While the school brochure for Diversity Place School lists programs in special education, character education, among others as examples of school efforts to respect diversity, teacher participants were particularly concerned with how special education and bilingual education were constrained by testing policy. The
The previous chapter demonstrated teacher agency in the ways that teacher participants are pushing back and being pushed by school activities, time constraints, curricular constraints and timing of testing policy. This discussion will build upon those issues to explore how testing as a social practice pushes at special education and bilingual students and their teachers.

As Cornel West posited (Chicago speech, 10/30/04) “be highly suspect of what is transmitted to you”. This chapter will explore teacher concerns and suspect questions surrounding the norms transmitted through testing policy regarding dilemmas of teaching special education and bilingual students. The lived experience of teacher participants with these questions may also prove useful to other teachers struggling with the same journey. Furthermore, teacher narratives may also transfer to other teachers troubled with honoring diversity and equity in the classroom through testing policy or encourage discussion based on these experiences.

This chapter will address these concerns emergent from the intersection of the two out of the three circles of policy and teachers/practice. Within the general framework of diversity and equity, consideration will be given more specifically to teaching bilingual and special education students through testing policy. I will explore how teacher participants are concerned with how special education and bilingual education, including these students and their teachers, are located within and positioned by NCLB. To further situate these dilemmas, it is necessary to first give consideration to the context of the DPS and the individual cultural views of each participant. The dilemmas of testing policy and diversity and equity were constructed from the intersection of policy and practice as depicted in figure 5.1 below.
The Context of Diversity Place School

Before exploring the particular questions and challenges that emerged regarding teaching bilingual and special education students through testing policy, it is vital to consider the research site and participants’ perceptions of diversity and equity. The following description of DPS is derived from analysis of school/teacher documents. In the early 1990s, Diversity Place School was selected by the district office to change its former name to reflect the current diversity of the local community. Several organizational programs were then created to accomplish this new focus on local diversity and school/community relationship. This is reflected in the current school mission that reads as follows:

To enrich every student, teacher and parent to feel proud of their ethnic and cultural heritage as they share their particular language, history, customs, holidays and values with their classmates and the school at large. (document analysis, 10/4/04)
Teacher commitment to this mission is best summarized in the following teacher and school vision as created by the teacher leadership committee (document analysis, 3/19/04).

To accomplish our vision, the [DPS] community of school personnel, students and parents commits to the on-going process of improvement for all children. We will construct an environment of excellence and responsibility building upon our many talents and diversity. Within this environment we will strive to develop intellectual, social and emotional growth in our students. This will be accomplished through professional development for school personnel, structured and varied learning experiences for students as well as support programs and involvement opportunities for parents and community members.

The school worked to begin this journey through the establishment of several enrichment academic and co-curricular programs enacted in the regular school schedule and after-school. The academic programs include such examples as history fair, science fair, academic Olympics, and bilingual academic Olympics.

There are two bilingual programs integrated into the traditional curriculum to further address diverse student learning needs. It is important to note that the issue of how to best meet the needs of bilingual students remained a central focus of teacher conversations both among teacher participants and throughout the school staff during the research process as evident in staff, curricular committee, team, and other committee meetings. The school also included the following programs as evidence of the effort to foster community/school rapport and respect of local diversity in the daily school culture - character education, computer laboratory, fine and performing arts, scholars program, a student motivation project, library, special education programs, self-esteem organized activities and a large extended-day program.
To attend to the diversity inherent in the local community, several countries are selected each academic year to serve as themes for classroom instruction. Teachers are expected to implement study of these countries into their content and foster student learning activities or projects around such study. Each country is then celebrated at the community International Dinner and the school-wide International Celebration. During the year of research, the countries of focus in the curriculum were Greece and China. I now explore teacher perceptions of their own cultural identities to situate themselves within the culture of DPS and better foreground their concerns with testing policy and bilingual and special education.

*Teacher Participants’ Perceptions of their Own Cultural Identities*

Teacher views toward their individual culture and meanings were also an important context from which to situate the assumptions about testing policy and issues of teaching bilingual and special education students. During the discussion about testing and culture, teachers were asked how or if at all, the role their own cultural and racial identities played in the process of teaching and learning. It is important to consider that at the beginning of the research process, only the male participant viewed his racial, gender, and cultural identities as an active factor in the classroom. The other participants reiterated that their own cultural identities played no active role in their teaching while they instead, focused on attending to the cultural needs of their students as multicultural practice.

Umberto, on the other hand, demonstrated how teacher awareness served as a standpoint from which to construct a classroom culture. He attributed the fact that he looks very Irish with strawberry-blonde hair and freckles as the reason students, teachers,
and parents alike positioned him immediately as a conservative white man - one not understanding or respectful of their diverse culture. When he communicated with native Spanish speakers in their own language, he commented that at first, it “freaks my students out!” In other words, they were not expecting someone fair-skinned and freckled to be fluent in their language or to make the effort to bridge the typical language and cultural differences between teachers and students. He described how his students then started to position him in a different way because in his words:

they’re so taken aback it takes them a week to recover…but then we reach an understanding and they trust me IMPLICITLY because they’re like, this guy, he speaks to me, he can speak to my parents when they come here. He speaks to them in Spanish, you know. (interview, 3/26/04)

I argue that Umberto’s awareness of his own cultural identity as a white, Anglo man and his desire to bridge this gap between himself and his students created a positive atmosphere of respect and dignity in his classroom through which to better ground his practice in students’ cultures.

Umberto added, however, that his male gender identity also directly positioned him in a locus of power with his students and parents. Since he is one of three male educators at Diversity Place, he believed that his gender automatically placed him in a leadership role among the Hispanic students that respected the male as a natural leader in cultural power dynamics. He explained that this was a challenge and not an asset in teaching at first because:

It makes people immediately suspicious of me. When I first walk in, I’m a white man. I’m the enemy…Because they assume I’m George Bush. After they talk to me for five minutes, then everything changes. Then it’s an avalanche the other way. The support is overwhelming…[and] as the
boys get older, they REALLY, REALLY respond to male authority figures. (interview, 3/26/04)

Umberto stated that since he respects their language in the classroom, his students then do not challenge his authority and thereby, trust him to lead their learning the classroom.

At the beginning of the research process, the four female participants stated that their individual culture and racial identities did not play a role in the teaching or learning process in their classrooms. They believed that along with the international emphasis in the school-wide culture and curriculum, that if they respected the whole child and their individual needs, that their individual cultural identities did not factor into the teaching process. Isabel commented that “I don’t ever notice my whiteness except for the fact that sometimes I am the only white body in here” (interview, 3/23/04). The disconnect between teacher cultural identity and the social and cultural process of teaching was evident in each teacher participant across all racial locations - Hispanic, African-American and Anglo-European.

Towards the middle of the research process, however, the Hispanic participant commented after a taped interview, that she had never really thought about the role of her culture and how that mediated learning or access to power but that she would think about it. At the end of the research process, the two Anglo-European participants named their cultural and racial identities as a key link to enacting multicultural teaching. In fact by the end of data gathering, all participants argued that teachers need time and opportunities to reflect and develop their own cultural awareness despite testing policy to better further their cultural awareness of students.
If is from the particular reflections of teacher participants as predicated on individual and local meanings through testing policy, that the following assertions or themes and concerns emerged regarding issues of diversity and equity with special education and bilingual education. They are centered on the dilemmas of teaching bilingual and special education students resulting from testing policy and the teacher response to these dilemmas.

1. The categories of NCLB and the changes in funding undermine the quality of educational experience for special education students.

2. The importance of testing as a measurement of student achievement qualifies special education students to strive for a standard that is irrelevant to their individual development, and this creates a sense of failure.

3. The language of testing creates dilemmas in respecting student culture and language needs for bilingual students, thus encouraging low academic expectations for bilingual students.

4. Teachers feel that the pressure to cover content material in time for testing periods make it difficult to adequately connect the curriculum to the students’ multiple cultural backgrounds. In other words, teaching for test success limits student culture in the process of learning.

To explore the enactment of testing policy through these assertions according to teachers, consideration will first turn toward teaching special education students amidst testing policy within NCLB. As stated earlier, the text will include both emic and etic perspectives - the emic to provide local meanings and honor participant representation and the etic to offer a different layer of perspective to what these local meanings are.
Testing Policy and the Resultant Dilemmas of Special Education

The discussion will now explore the challenges of teaching special education students through the cultural norms and particular school practices through testing policy. First, participants described funding as a major piece of the development of special education. Then the text turns to the social practice of testing in special education and how this socially embeds the label of special education upon students. From there, a participant shares concerns over the political limitations that testing policy places upon special education and in conclusion, participants examined the ways that testing policy constricts practice for special education students. I begin with a look at the issue of funding through testing policy and special education.

Reorganization of Funding through NCLB limits Quality of Special Education

When asked about the dilemmas that emerged from teaching to the needs of special education students amidst standardized testing, each participant qualified the data assertion that changes in funding for special education as a result of NCLB are undermining the quality of education for those students and the support for special education teachers. Teacher participants felt that while they agreed that teachers and the school were doing a decent job, that services could be better provided for special education students. However, they explained that a decrease in funding means that teachers are being asked to accomplish increasing task with less support. Susan described that “we don’t have enough staff to help them or help with teaching” (interview, 3/25/04).

Teachers believed, much like the discussion in the NCLB literature indicated in chapter two, that since districts already face fiscal crises, the changes in NCLB funding
appropriations makes it more difficult for schools to interpret services and receive appropriate funding. Participants cite this as an example of the discrepancy between policy aims and school realities. Isabel shared that:

Well, in theory, [with NCLB] we would get more positions, but in reality, they cut a position. So in theory, you would get more support but in reality, it’s not going to happen. It’s not going to change anything here…They cut 300 positions in [Center City] so where’s the support going to come from and we’re losing 2 aide positions, maybe 3 so where there was even some support, it’s going to be gone. (interview, 10/4/04)

For example, during the year after data collection, the caseload of special education students increased for the special education teachers while the measurement of adequate yearly progress determined that Diversity Place did not make appropriate gains in this student subgroup. Isabel cited that NCLB manifests in her classroom “with the abundance of special education students in my classroom because there are not enough services available” (fieldnotes, 10/4/04). This may be due to the logistical challenges that the school and teachers face in providing these services with limited resources, thereby another example of how testing policy pushed at teachers, teacher practice, and subsequently, special education. Umberto added that as the special education teacher, he experienced the direct impact of NCLB and testing through “the lack of money for special education or the negative vibe there is toward special education. Tests are the big thing” (interview, 5/27/04). In other words, if students do not score well enough in the subgroup of special education, then the school faces sanctions which puts an added pressure on the collective teacher culture and encourages negative perceptions toward the program.

Teacher participants, however (including one special education teacher and two with dual certification in regular and special education) all believed that more support is
needed for special education teachers and regular education teachers to provide
developmentally appropriate practice. As more funding crises challenge schools across
the district and state, teachers believed that the special education students will fall
through the cracks of the system that is supposed to ensure their quality education. As
the special education students’ scores decline and they are afforded the opportunity to
move to other schools, the students may lose valuable time in development as they must
readjust and gain membership in a new and different school and student culture.
Teachers perceived adjusting to different schools as a possibly social and emotional
challenge for students who are already labeled as “special” and separated as such from
their classmates.

“It’s not spoken but…” Social Labels Further Embedded upon Special Education
Students through Testing Policy

Moreover, Isabel commented that she believed that NCLB will further embed
these labels on kids who will not be in one school context long enough to foster their
skills (fieldnotes, 5/6/04). She added that while at one school, the mere social practice of
special education through testing policy also further labels students in the power
dynamics of peer culture. For example, when students do take the standardized tests, the
special education students leave their homerooms to take the exams in another classroom.
This created a distinctive social practice that affected special education students. Isabel
described the special education students as:

those are the…ones who don’t want to leave…Because they’re different. And everybody knows it’s the special ed kids going out…And they all know that. They’ve even made comments about it…So although it’s not spoken, although no one says anything, you start calling names and it’s all the special ed kids who go away. (interview, 6/15/04)
From this social practice in the classroom, the discussion now turns to explore how testing policy undermines the quality of education for special education students.

*Testing Policy as a Way to Undermine the Developmental Needs of Special Education Students through Sanctions to Schools*

Umberto described the social practice of special education through testing policy as a broader cultural practice. He argued that since the use of tests socially categorizes students, that the testing policy is a process to eradicate the special education system by creating a bureaucracy that limits their education. First, he explained that the time constraints place upon teachers to compress the curriculum do not meet student developmental needs and thereby, do not support their measurement on the tests. Second, he argued like teacher practice, that special education students will be pushed, more specifically, pushed out of schools rather than given time to develop their skills and knowledge. This means that as time progresses and students begin to move around the district system that special education numbers will decline in schools and the district and state will cite this as another reason for less funding, thus eventually eradicating the entire system.

He also argued that the push for the total inclusion program in special education as encouraged through NCLB is another attempt to eliminate special education. He stated that “it’s going to wipe it out. ..that’s the goal” because as more students are included in the regular education classroom, policymakers will view this as a reason to eliminate special education, thus ignoring the needs of students who may require individual support not plausible to deliver in the mainstream classroom. He felt that
policymakers will in turn, eventually require regular education teachers to also do the job of special education teachers.

“It detracts [from] teaching because it will cause people to speed up”  Testing Policy as a Constraint on Practice for Special Education Students

Teacher participants also agreed that like regular education teachers, special education teachers are challenged with the task to cover a certain amount of curriculum by testing time. The first round of standardized testing occurred in March and the second in June. This meant that special education teachers also struggled with how to meet the developmental and cultural needs of their students through their work with regular education teachers’ in inclusion classes and with students during their resource support time.

This addressed the second theme or dilemma that emerged from testing policy and special education - how to foster student achievement despite a measurement that teachers perceived developmentally inappropriate for students, particularly special education students. For example, special education teachers must not only collaborate with the regular education teachers and find ways to modify those activities for the special education students but also find ways to adhere to the established individual learning goals from the student Individual Educational Plans or I.E.Ps.

Umberto shared that it was a struggle to break down the curriculum for the developmental needs of his students when testing requires a faster pace in the regular education classroom. Since his students participated in the inclusion program, meaning that they spent some content with the mainstream students, he adapted their learning to a faster pace. This process not only sometimes frustrated his students but also further
separated them from their regular education peers who were moving at a much higher pace through the curriculum. He argued that the testing policy dictated this process of teaching and learning, making it difficult to specialize instruction for individual student learning needs. Umberto commented that the testing policy undermines student learning because:

it...detract[s] from [teaching] because it will cause people to speed up because they feel that they’re not doing a good job unless they’ve covered all this material that’s going to be covered on the tests. It takes our kids longer to make the connections, when they do, they’re just as strong as anybody else’s connection in fact, moreso because they tend to think a little bit better. (interview, 5/27/04)

Teacher participants also built upon the latter argument by describing that the testing policy requires, although with modifications, that the special education students are tested on their grade level. In other words, students whose abilities are at varying levels due to documented learning challenges are held to a standard that teacher participants have described as “impossible” and “not realistic.” For example, a sixth-grade student who reads on a first grade level and is making learning gains in his classes will be judged according to the sixth grade reading test along with his classmates that do not have learning challenges. This educational discrimination is a byproduct of the discrepancies between testing policy, NCLB and local needs as described by Meier et al (2004). This also means that special education students are assessed according to a measurement that is developmentally inappropriate. As argued earlier in the text, Daisy explained the futility of such a practice- “I don’t think that they should have standardized testing because I don’t think that it is a true assessment of a child or of a person” (interview, 3/17/04).
In summary, the three major themes or assumptions regarding dilemmas of teaching special education students through testing policy focused on the compressed curriculum, the impact of this on student learning and developmentally appropriate practice and what supports exist for special education teachers amidst local and state funding crises. Teacher response to these concerns can be summarized with the following comment shared by a non-participant teacher during a teacher committee meeting: “With testing and with what’s expected with testing and all. I’m behind. I can’t do it all” (field notes, 3/19/04). From this lens of exploring learning difference with special education and teacher response, I now explore the challenges of respecting language and cultural difference amidst testing policy and teaching.

“I need to know. I need to talk.” Testing Policy and Dilemmas of Teaching Bilingual Students

“The words of the test are not sensitive to the kids and their cultures. They are not sensitive to diversity” (Daisy, interview, 5/28/04).

The largest dilemma of teaching bilingual students amidst the accountability component/testing policy within NCLB was how to foster development and learning within two distinctive languages and cultures when the testing assessment is based in the English language. It is important to note when discussing the issue of language and testing, that Daisy, the Hispanic teacher participant, rightfully questioned researcher use of the word dominant when referring to the English language of the test, thus demonstrating how language discourse positions and gets positioned by individuals. Therefore, when discussing the role of language in testing, the word mainstream will be used instead of dominant to refer to the position of the assessment language as negotiated between Daisy and the researcher. Also at the request of teacher participants when
discussing these issues, some participants will be named and others described in a more
general sense.

Teacher participants described several challenges within the overall dilemma of how to foster learning within two languages and cultures for bilingual students amidst the testing policy. Before exploring these in depth, it is necessary to remember the context of the school in regards to bilingual education. Since Diversity Place employed a bilingual and dual language program in the regular curriculum, the emphasis on educating bilingual students was already existent prior to the enactment of NCLB. Furthermore, since the student population at DPS was predominately Hispanic, teachers were already experienced with the issues of educating bilingual students. According to teacher participants, testing policy within NCLB simply shifted the power dynamics within this practice because of the accountability measurements associated with testing policy (field notes, 6/10/04).

Language Instruction: Can Teachers Attend to Both Native Language and Test Language?

The first challenge surrounding bilingual education and testing was the role of language in the assessment and accountability measurements of NCLB and teacher response to dual language development. While teacher participants agreed that standardized testing, as an assessment tool is not a true measurement of student cognition, they also agreed that the testing policy sets up bilingual students for failure. Daisy described it in the following manner “there is a conflict between the language of the kids and the language and culture of the tests…they [the students] can’t relate to the language of the tests” (interview, 5/28/04). Bianca commented that the testing policy
demonstrated a “possibility for bilingual students to be short-changed and rushed through the system. One size does not fit all for bilingual students or special ed” (interview, 3/17/04). This meant that the tests are developmentally inappropriate since they are conducted in English and not culturally relevant to bilingual students, thus, a clear example of how testing policy positioned bilingual students and challenged teacher practice.

Bilingual students in Center City are given three years of language immersion before they participate in the standardized testing included in AYP and student promotion. However, during this time, these students do take a standardized test that assesses their learning and language development in English. This entire test is conducted in English. After the three-year point, bilingual students are then included in the standardized tests used for AYP and student promotion. The bilingual students of the teacher participants in this study varied between less than and more than three years of language immersion.

The fact that English is used as the language to assess student learning was a point of passionate discussion for all participants. Although participants felt that it is unfair and developmentally inappropriate to test bilingual students in English before they are proficient in the language, they all felt (including the bilingual teacher) that bilingual students would be more successful in school once they learned English. Umberto described the struggle between honoring the two languages and fostering learning in both. He explained that even though he emphasizes communication in his room in both the mainstream English and the native language of Spanish, he recognizes the need for his students to be proficient in English. He argued the reality that English mastery
enables bilingual students to be better assessed through standardized testing and thus more successful in the power dynamics of school. Umberto cited the dominance of the one language in this country as a reason for our national development. He argued that:

Whatever language, chose one…but what makes this country a power is that you go from Maine to Southern California, you only need one language. You go from London to Cairo to Turkey, you need twelve. That’s why the European Union is a big battle…but that’s what my friends in Italy would say, that’s why you are so powerful. (interview, 5/27/04)

But as a teacher, Umberto was torn between the process of respecting dual languages and cultures and quickly assimilating students into the mainstream language because he felt that the system did not equally support the native language. He described the controversy of the language acquisition much like when he learned how to swim as a young boy and prefaced this with “it breaks my heart to say this.” He would not get into the water but his parents signed him up for the swim team. He said that “they were like, you’re swimming breast stroke in the 100 and I was SHOCKED. And that’s how they [the students] learn. I need to know, I need to talk” (interview, 5/27/04). Umberto explained the need for bilingual students to quickly acquire English skills as a method of “survival” in society. It is important to note that Umberto also argued that testing language not only assessed English skills but also class membership since the cultural references in the tests were not relevant to student culture.

“Why should I, just because they don’t speak English, start them off in a first grade book?” Testing Policy Timeline and Expectations for Bilingual Students

Isabel, on the other hand, felt that the current testing policy timeline for bilingual students did not properly meet their learning needs. She argued that the testing policy and the school system was pushing bilingual students to conform to learning criteria
before it was developmentally possible. She commented that testing “expectations...for bilingual kids are too high, it’s unrealistic. Research shows that language acquisition takes at least seven years and we only give out kids three before they’re held accountable” (interview, 6/10/04).

Daisy added to the argument for more time for language development through an explanation of the discrepancy between the native language of bilingual students and the assessment of the tests. She described that since many words are not literally translated into English from Spanish, that student learning could not be adequately assessed through standardized tests or adequately developed during the short time period before testing. For example, she commented that:

we were reading a very simple third grade text, okay. And there was one sentence there that said, in the fall, the apples are ready to be picked. So I asked the children what does that mean? One of the little boys raised his hand and said that the apples were going to fall down and we’re going to pick them. In Spanish fall means to fall down. Autumn is the English word to use there. So if they would have said in the book, in autumn and if that child takes that test. (interview, 5/28/04)

She also argued that such testing does not assess the creativity of bilingual students and fosters lower academic expectations for these students. She argued that “because my kids are the lower economic kids, the poor ones and they’re Hispanic, there are low expectations for them on the test and for learning because of the language issue” (field notes, 3/17/04). Since teachers expected bilingual students to achieve low-test scores, Daisy believed that teachers lower the quality of the content for bilingual students, thus perpetuating lower expectations and lower performance. She explained that:

I think that we should push the kids to their limits educationally. I mean, why should, because they don’t know English, why should I start them off in a first grade book? If they’re in third grade, then they should read the
third grade book like other children. Even if they don’t have the English, they still need to…learn those words. (field notes, 5/28/04)

She added that bilingual students should be given support in their native language when needed but also be pushed to learn in the English language. Daisy concluded that bilingual students should learn to mediate both cultures and languages equally in order to foster positive learning experiences and student development. She advocated that students learn about and grow in both cultural identities as explained in the following:

What is an American? If people ask me, okay [Daisy] what nationality are you? What do I say? Do I say that I’m American? I AM but what do I say? No, I say that I’m [Hispanic] but I’M AMERICAN. Like when you ask some of the children here okay, if you’re born here then they’re American so I say what nationality are you? What do they say? American. And I say, where are your parents from? Mexico. Then you’re Mexican-AMERICAN. (interview, 5/27/04)

Daisy advocated that teachers be given time to develop an awareness of their own cultures so that they can become more sensitive to the cultural and learning needs of bilingual students.

Susan added to this perspective of the need for teacher sensitivity. She explained that the quick timeline of testing policy is difficult for bilingual students because it forces them to assimilate both their language and culture into the western culture since the tests and curriculum do not reflect multiple perspectives or cultures. This assimilation must happen in the timeline dictated by testing and not individual student needs. She added that although her practice is mediated by the testing policy, she tried to provide multiple perspectives and voices in her teaching since the students will not see that in the textbooks or test language. Susan did name that her sensitivity toward diversity and issues of equity emerged from her standpoint as an African-American and as a woman.
Parental Inexperience with Testing Policy Hinders Parental Support of Bilingual Students with Testing

Teacher participants did name, however, the lack of parental awareness, and thus parental involvement in the testing policy and student achievement as another support missing for bilingual education. Teachers attributed the lack of awareness to cultural differences between the policy text and the local community. Many of the bilingual students at Diversity Place School were from predominately Hispanic homes in which parents or caregivers were not personally familiar with the process of standardized testing. Bianca described the additional dilemma this creates for bilingual students and teachers:

first and foremost, these kids’ parents may not, and largely, do not understand this experience and what their kids are going through because they do not have personal experience with standardized testing…so how can they help the school and their kids? (interview, 3/15/04)

Consequently, these individuals were unable to fully understand the power dynamics inherent to the testing policy or the impact it has upon their students’ educational future. While the school and teachers have attempted to bridge this gap of understanding about testing through parent workshops and newsletters (document analysis), Daisy added that many Hispanic parents position the school and its teachers as experts, meaning that Hispanic parents hesitate to question the practices of schooling (field notes, 3/15/04). She also explained that the lack of collective public awareness of the testing policy in NCLB also contributes to the understanding in the diverse Hispanic communities. This meant that because of particular cultural norms, the parents of bilingual students were not usually actively engaged in the dialogue about the testing policy or able to properly support their students’ experiences.
“We’re not meeting the needs of our bilingual students.” School Response to the Challenges of Testing Policy and Bilingual Education

Like teacher participants, the school also explored how to address the aforementioned challenges of bilingual education through testing policy. During staff meetings, teacher committee meetings and social events (field notes, 3/12/04), the collective teacher discussion along with administration centered on how to best support language development and testing performance for bilingual students. One way that the school addressed bilingual students and their efforts in testing whether before or after the three-year mark, was to sometimes pull these students out of their regular education classes for extra instructional and language support. This meant that the bilingual students were given additional classroom support in smaller classes with other bilingual students to practice language acquisition and prepare for the tests.

Teacher participants, however, argued that the logistics of accomplishing their objectives of content standards and supporting the language development of bilingual students proved sometimes difficult to achieve well. Some teacher participants felt that pulling students out of instruction made it difficult for bilingual students to value their learning in the classroom or feel a part of the classroom culture. Bianca simply stated that “it’s difficult to include them when they’re not here” (field notes, 5/14/04). In a sense, the pullout process also encouraged labeling similar to the special education students as they were removed from their regular education classes for support with individual learning. While it was not the intent of teachers or school to foster this difference, the logistics of helping bilingual students, complying with district guidelines regarding bilingual education and supporting their dual language development in the
regular education classroom created a consistent discrepancy between testing policy, bilingual education, and classroom realities. These dilemmas are another example of how testing policy impacts practice and curriculum through its positioning of bilingual students.

Teacher Response to the Challenges of Testing Policy and Bilingual Education

Teacher response to the dilemma of fostering learning of bilingual students despite the language discrepancies in assessment and the challenges this creates in the classroom varied among participants. While each shared concern for the quality of education for bilingual students, they approached these dilemmas according to their local meanings. For example, Umberto and Isabel’s practice relied on differentiated instruction. Daisy raised the level of content materials in her practice to establish high expectations for her students. Susan gave bilingual students Spanish-English dictionaries and spent time discussing social issues across difference. Bianca utilized creative projects to facilitate learning that might otherwise be constricted through language difference and relied on some alternative assessment to meet student needs. Bianca also added that these dilemmas of teaching bilingual students amidst testing required that teachers take careful time to better prepare their lessons and rely on patience to find ways to be creative in instruction (field notes, 5/20/04).

Participants also felt that acknowledging the challenges and openly discussing difference and culture with students was a positive way to work within the established system of accountability and continue with the content and testing requirements of the policy. This positioning of the testing policy through school structures is one way that teachers exercised their agency. Regardless of cultural location or classroom practice,
teacher participants and their students were again impacted by the testing policy of NCLB as evident in the discussions on concerns with bilingual and special education. I now refer to the initial research question on cultural norms and testing policy, more specifically what cultural norms were transmitted to students and teachers through the social practice of testing as manifested through teacher response to testing policy. It is also vital to understand the conversation surrounding testing and cultural norms to better locate the ways that administrators, scholars, and policymakers can address these needs as considered in chapter seven.

“We are losing good potential teachers.” Testing Policy and Cultural Norms

Through an exploration of the dilemmas of teaching as named above, teacher participants thoroughly reflected upon the challenges of meeting diverse student needs amidst a move for standardized curriculum and student learning. When asked what cultural norms the testing policy transmitted to them as teachers and subsequently to their students, they acknowledged their assertion that the testing policy drives educational reform. In other words, as the sole measurement of student learning and teacher quality according to policy, testing demonstrates that all learning centers on tests and student performance on tests. Teachers felt that this cultural norm was unrealistic to good teaching and the natural process of learning. In fact, Isabel commented that teachers would not have problems implementing reform if it was realistic to the act of teaching (field notes, 6/17/04). She posited that if policy included teacher voice more in the creation phase that there would not be as many discrepancies between objectives and teacher realities. She also argued that teachers would not question a policy if it were grounded in the best interests of students.
Moreover, as an established practice, teachers felt that testing policy impacts numerous facets of education ranging from the issues of practice and diversity and equity described above to the recruitment of new teachers coming into the practice. Susan explained that “NCLB was a quick fix scheme. The kids will suffer. It has discouraged people from entering the field of teaching. We are losing good potential teachers” (field notes, 3/23/04).

Teacher participants felt that the cultural norms transmitted through the policy centered on intolerance for individual student learning difference and non-standardized practice. Participants explained that teachers are being conditioned through the testing policy to reduce creativity in teaching practice. This is turn, built upon the previous assertion that testing drives all learning efforts in schools and that it is the dominant measurement of intelligence. In addition, teachers and students were also positioned to think that certain content areas are of less importance since they are not included in the measurement of testing policy. This meant that not only do students and teachers get position by and also position the testing policy but also through this action certain norms become enacted and socialized. Bianca described her perceptions of the cultural lesson emerging from testing policy as the following:

that it doesn’t matter about creativity, that a person has to be able to perform under immense pressure, that if you can’t test well, that you’re not considered successful…because there are a lot of students who have straight As but test poorly and vice versa. The creativity issue is big and I try to block out the policy message that social studies doesn’t count, that it is isn’t important. (interview, 3/15/04)

Bianca’s content area, social studies was a content area not included in either student promotion or the measurement of AYP for NCLB.
Teacher participants also named the power that testing policy plays in the change process in schools. Several teacher participants felt that high-test scores were the validation needed to garner support for culturally relevant and creative teaching. Umberto summarized this by describing that testing is the only way to create change in schools. He felt that since testing is the only measurement of student learning used in schools and in educational reform, that a school or teacher must rely on test scores to gain support for change in the classroom (field notes, 3/17/04). Daisy concluded that the cultural norms of the testing policy are “that testing drives everything in schools. That scores matter but they really can’t truly measure learning. That testing is more important than the home culture of these kids, where they are coming from. It disrespects an awareness of different cultures” (interview, 3/17/04).

Conclusion

Teacher concerns and conversations regarding diversity and equity issues for bilingual and special education students demonstrated the constraints placed upon teachers and practice to honor diversity and equity through testing policy. It also portrayed the real discrepancies between testing policy objectives and the realities of the classroom for teachers and students. As a non-participant teacher remarked “maybe the powers to be [in policy] need to listen to what we need to do our jobs right” (field notes, 3/19/04). In other words, teacher practice is once again being impacted in particular ways by the testing policy. These particular dilemmas of special education and bilingual education are summarized in table 5.1.

Particular dilemmas facing the quality of special education and the ways that the policy positions these students and their teachers centered on the following: limited
funding of these programs, the political emphasis on standardization of teaching and learning as a means to eradicate special education as a social practice, and the time constraints of the curriculum that hinder student developmental needs and further embed the social label of special education.

Like the concerns of time and curriculum, teachers agreed that these issues also limited the quality of bilingual education and teacher efforts to honor the diversity of language. Furthermore, teachers struggled with the discrepancies between the mainstream language of English/instruction and the need/desire to honor and develop the students’ native language. It appeared that these social practices also encouraged lower academic expectations for bilingual students as the school attempted to provide support for bilingual students. Altogether though, teachers explained that the cultural norms transmitted to students and teachers through the social practice of testing is that cultural diversity, creative teacher practice along with student individuality are not emphasized in the measure of achievement and thus, not considered worthwhile. It apparently seems that if it isn’t on the test, than it must not be worth learning. Limiting the natural curiosity of human learning was not the cultural tenet of democratic education.
### Dilemmas of Teaching Special Education and Bilingual Education Students with Testing Policy

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<tr>
<th><strong>Special Education</strong></th>
<th><strong>Bilingual Education</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>• Reorganization of funding limits quality of education</td>
<td>• Teacher challenge to attend to language of instruction and native language</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Label of special Education is socially embedded through testing policy</td>
<td>• Testing policy timeline and low academic expectations for bilingual students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Testing as a way to undermine developmental needs of special education students</td>
<td>• Parental inexperience with testing policy hinders parental support for bilingual students with testing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Testing as a political practice to eradicate special education</td>
<td>• School response to challenges of testing policy and bilingual students</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Testing policy as a constraint on teacher practice</td>
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**Table 5.1 Dilemmas of Teaching Special Education and Bilingual Education Students with Testing Policy**

It was apparent though throughout all discussions, questioning, and reflection of teacher participants that all were seeking ways to find openings in the testing policy to ground practice in student needs, allow for teacher creativity and encourage school as a social and cultural place of hope. It is the aim of the next chapter on collaborative research and change to build upon the discussion of the ways that teacher practice is pushed by testing policy and the dilemmas of bilingual and special education. Through collaborative research, the next chapter argues that teachers can address their concerns, struggles, and awareness of testing policy, practice, and diversity and equity to create teacher empowerment, impact practice, and thus, create real change based on hope, dialogue, respect, love, and action. If these aspects of teaching and learning can become
integral aspects of policy and change in classrooms, then policymakers may finally create reform that truly leaves no child left behind.
It is from the context of discrepancies between testing policy and teacher practice and through the lens of culture and local understanding that the collaborative methods of this study aimed to achieve two goals - 1) to describe the lived experiences of teachers with testing policy within NCLB and 2) to provide teacher participants with the opportunity to reflect upon their local meanings and consequent practice. Teachers enact testing policy, as a social and cultural practice, in different ways across many different contexts and through various structures as described in chapter four. In other words, testing policy as enacted in the classrooms of teacher participants is socially enacted based on teacher meanings, local cultural truths, and teacher agency as constituted through this process. As indicated in the discussion on testing policy and practice, teachers are creating ways to exercise their agency, through their positioning of the policy and interaction with school culture.

This chapter will explore the interaction of the final two conceptual circles, teachers/practice and research as shown in figure 6.1. From this interaction of scholarship and teachers/practice, the focus will turn to how teacher agency was impacted
through teacher participation in the collaborative research process. The discussion will examine the final research question that addresses how research can create and support a political space for teacher growth, empowerment and development and how through this, teachers might construct a purpose for the scholarship itself. More specifically, the chapter will build upon the collaborative nature of the research to describe how such an approach to inquiry blurred the role of researcher and participants and how in turn, teachers constructed a blurred researcher role for me as a form of teacher agency.

![Figure 6.1 Recursive Interaction of Teachers/Practice with Research](image)

**Figure 6.1 Recursive Interaction of Teachers/Practice with Research**

It is through the exploration of teacher agency and how a space for teacher development and empowerment was created through the research process that one will be able to gauge the implications of this study as addressed in chapter seven. This question of teacher development and empowerment through research participation is not only a relevant issue to policymakers and administrators but also useful to academics who strive
to bridge the gap between theory and practice in education. Now during such broad political change in education, the work and understanding of these two ways of knowing remains evermore important to teachers and educational reform.

Collaborative Research and Teachers: A Political Space for Change and Empowerment

In order to understand the purposefulness of this study as described in chapters 1-3, it is necessary to investigate how the aforementioned findings about teacher practice and policy and dilemmas of special education and bilingual education within testing policy affected the participants themselves. Chapter four included detailed explanation regarding teacher participant views toward policy and the context and enactment of testing policy through teacher practice. Chapter five explored the dilemmas of diversity and equity regarding special education and bilingual students through the testing policy. However, this chapter will extend these understandings to illuminate how collaborative methods of the research process created a safe political space for teacher participants to be empowered and from which to further develop practice.

This study utilized collaborative methods from the theoretical lens of sociocultural/critical paradigms relying on feminist principles of research to create such an experience for teacher participants and researcher. More specifically, the study was premised on the socialcultural ways of knowing that construct policy as a social and cultural practice enacted in many contexts during which participants are viewed as actors and not subjects of the inquiry. Critical ways of knowing built upon the belief that all knowledge is socially constructed and as such, constituted by asymmetrical power dynamics over time. Feminist principles of research added the collaborative methods of
research as a way to narrow the lens of inquiry and support participant reflection, questioning, dialogue and praxis as a key piece of the inquiry process.

This study aimed to use the participant observation practice of sociocultural approach to policy and the emphasis on dialogue and reflection from critical theory along with the collaborative principles of feminist research to help teachers, policymakers and scholars see the social process of testing policy in the classroom. The following discussion will now explore how these methods impacted researcher/teacher participant rapport, researcher positionality in participants’ classrooms and the blurred roles that emerged during this process as a form of teacher agency along with teacher understandings. The discussion results from the intersection of the last two circles—teacher practice and research as displayed in the above figure 6.1. I begin with an exploration of the blurred role of researcher and how teacher agency was apparent through participant construction of this role, which in turn, enabled deeper access to local truths.

“She’s from this world. She’s a teacher.” Blurred Role of Researcher as a Form of Access and Teacher Agency

This description of teacher lived experience was predominately based on the process of intersubjectivity or the interactions between researcher and participant subjectivities (Glesne, 1999) as located in the theoretical standpoints of the study. These interactions also demonstrated the extent of teacher agency with testing policy as evident in the ways that teachers created a role for me as the researcher in their classrooms. Yes, each participant had agreed to participate in the exploration of the topic of testing policy from teachers’ perspectives. However, what I failed to realize at the beginning of the
research process was the extent to which teacher agency would impact my role as a researcher in the classroom throughout the research process and thereby, influence data gathering and findings. This was particularly evident in the ways that teachers blurred my role as a researcher in their classrooms. I also argue that the blurred role of researcher that was constructed in some participants’ rooms and throughout the research process influenced researcher access to teachers, teacher culture, and school culture. Furthermore, it appeared that when teachers positioned the researcher in a blurred role as a teacher first, researcher second, that rapport was strengthened, the collaborative methods of the study qualified, and the findings better located in local truths. However useful to the grounding of the data and the ethical practices of the research, the construction of a blurred researcher role was also a messy process.

For example, when I first entered the research site, it was through the introduction of a teacher who had been a student teacher in my own classroom in a public school in Ohio in 2000. In other words, the staff and faculty of the school came to know me and my research interests through this connection with the initial contact. When asked who I was or how I knew this teacher, the individual often explained that I was new to Center City and then described my former role as her mentor teacher. This astonished her students who could not picture their teacher as once a student and typically garnered immediate politeness from her colleagues who obviously respected her. When office staff made the mistake at the beginning of the research process and confused me as an actual student teacher rather than a researcher, the initial contact/teacher participant teased that they don’t make student teachers that old anymore (field notes, 9/11/04).
friendly and relaxed positioning of me by the contact/teacher participant in turn positioned me in a friendly manner with school staff and other teachers.

These social experiences also unintentionally fostered the success of the collaborative methods of this study since staff, teachers, administrators, parents, and eventual teacher participants all came to know me as a teacher first, researcher second. This dual identity positioned as a teacher first was the reason that as one participant described, teacher participants trusted me more (field notes, 5/18/04). This also helped facilitate deeper researcher access into the teacher culture and teacher meanings throughout the study as demonstrated in the following vignette describing researcher interaction with non-participant teachers during lunch in the teachers’ lounge at the beginning of the research process. I argue that the blurred role of teacher/researcher facilitated incredible access for the researcher to local truths.

When lunchtime arrived during the time of observation, I often accompanied the teacher participant to eat lunch - sometimes in the teachers’ lounge, with students or in the office as copies were made. During these times, I tried to sit somewhat back from the table to not impose my presence on teacher conversation. Most of the teacher participants introduced me to their colleagues and others did not. When eating lunch with Isabel and her teammates in the teachers’ lounge, a teacher whom I had not had a conversation with prior to this, turned to me with a stern tone and loudly asked, “Now WHAT exactly do you do here?” I politely explained that I was a doctoral student working with Isabel on my dissertation study. For a moment or two, the other teachers were quiet and nodded their heads at me in an indifferent manner.
Then the teacher asked more specifically, “But what are you studying?” I then explained more in-depth how Isabel and I were looking at the impact of standardized testing on teachers and before I could explain another detail, the entire table exploded in conversation. “TESTING! Ohhhh, let me tell you what it does to the kids!” “Do you think someone will finally listen?” And the comments continued as teachers passionately discussed and debated the testing issue and its interaction with teachers (field notes, 12/4/04). From that day forward, the teachers were more relaxed around me and engaged in conversation. In fact, during the data collection some approached me to offer examples of union documents on negotiations regarding testing policy in the district or made jokes to me during staff meetings about NCLB (field notes, 3/19/04). It was as if since I had positioned myself as an ally, I had been given a key to their social and cultural world as evident in the ways other non-participant teachers positioned me socially. The understandings I gleamed from these interactions not only gave me further access to the local meanings of teacher culture and school environment but in turn, better grounded the questions asked during dialogue with participants.

An example of how teacher participants clearly positioned the blurred role of teacher/researcher within their own culture is expressed in the following interaction between Bianca and the principal of Diversity Place School (field notes, 7/8/04). As Bianca was discussing issues that emerged from a teacher/parent governance meeting with her administrator after-school, the administrator referred to a question I had asked during the proceedings. The administrator then explained that since I was an outsider to the school that I didn’t realistically know the answer to a question I had asked about class size and union responsibilities. The teacher participant relayed to me that she had replied
that no, “She’s from this world. She’s a teacher.” This demonstrated teacher participant construction of my role as an insider to teacher culture through the blurred positioning of me as a teacher/collaborator/researcher.

It is from this blurred identity that I will explain how collaborative methods fostered this relationship with participants in conjunction with teacher reflection and dialogue that empowered and developed teachers. These blurred roles are best summarized in table 6.1. I will also explore how this construction of my role as researcher in their classrooms through the research process was a form of participant teacher agency through research and testing policy. I first give consideration to the particular ways that teachers constructed my role as researcher in their classrooms. I start with the blurred role of complete member. From there I will look at the researcher role as a mixture of blurred and complete observer in classroom culture and turn to the positioning of the researcher as a complete observer and non-participant in the classroom culture. I conclude with a discussion of the ways that the collaborative nature of the research empowered teachers, impacted practice, and created change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daisy and Isabel</th>
<th>Teacher/Collaborator/Researcher Complete Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bianca</td>
<td>Teacher/Collaborator/Researcher – Researcher/Teacher/Collaborator Complete Member to Complete Observer - Complete Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umberto</td>
<td>Researcher/Collaborator/Teacher - Teacher/Collaborator/Researcher Complete Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Researcher – Researcher/Collaborator Complete Observer</td>
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“Did you have your own room in the olden days, Mrs. P?” The Blurred Role of Teacher/Researcher as a Complete Member of the Classroom Culture.

As indicated by a student’s question of the researcher, the blurred role of the researcher was sometimes positioned as a complete member of a classroom culture. This was one way that teacher participants exercised their agency through the purpose of the research. How participants used me in their classrooms illuminated their construction of the research process and their efforts to make it useful for them and their practice. For example, when this third grader in Daisy’s classroom asked me if I had had my own room once (field notes, 5/11/04), it demonstrated that the students perceived me as a teacher and that the participant had facilitated that role for me in her room. Through the construction of the blurred researcher role in the classroom, teacher participants were able to position the research in different ways that afforded them participation.

This section will explore how the blurred role of complete member of a classroom culture was constituted for the researcher and how this positioning enabled deeper researcher access and better grounded the data in local truths. The discussion will begin with in the classroom of the third grade Hispanic teacher, Daisy. When I approached Daisy to participate in the research study, she was tentative but welcoming and open to the purpose of the study. She later admitted that at the beginning, she was also somewhat intimidated by me saying “at first, I was kinda like intimidated by this girl who’s going to do her doctorate and… come into my room” (interview, 5/28/04). Regardless of these feelings, Daisy said that she would participate since she wanted to learn more to become
a better teacher. From this explanation, it appeared that Daisy immediately positioned the research process as a learning opportunity for her and her practice.

After explaining the purpose of the research study and my initial intent to learn about the local context of the school, Daisy shared that she was unsure of how this process would unfold in the classroom. She was curious about what was expected from her or as she phrased it, how she could help me (field notes, 11/7/04). I assured her that through observations and reflective conversations with her that we would frame the particular questions of the study together. I also emphasized the issue of reciprocity of the study, meaning that I hoped that her participation would also serve her teaching and personal self. Shortly after the initial data gathering, Daisy became more comfortable with me and began to position the research purpose and my role as a researcher in an active manner in her classroom. I could no longer sit quietly and take fieldnotes in the back of the room (field notes, 3/9/04).

Daisy quickly constructed this active role for me as a complete classroom member through participation with her students and classroom culture. She was not comfortable with me professing the principles of collaboration without seeing it in action. She began to position me as a resource for her teaching instead of lens from which to explore her teaching (field notes, 3/25/04). During informal interviews, she would ask me to give feedback on how good or useful her lessons had been that day. I quickly responded that I was not there to evaluate her teaching but to assist her in using me to construct another lens from which to look at her teaching. I assured her that as collaborators and partners, I could help her think about her practice but would not evaluate it. I was also uncomfortable with her positioning me as an expert and shared this with her. As
someone who thinks of herself first as a teacher and second as a scholar, this was a new dynamic for me to shift through. I wanted to be careful to respect how Daisy needed to construct my role and position in her classroom but also remain conscious of the purpose of the research. I relied on open discussions with Daisy to explore the emergent issues of the research and the dynamics of our developing rapport. These conversations were either held in informal settings such as the lunchroom as we ate with her students or during after-school coffee or in her classroom during formal interviews or more structured dialogue.

Daisy then began to use me as both a researcher and a teacher resource as she solicited my involvement in her teaching. Collaborative methods of the research helped foster this newly constructed relationship since the inquiry was based on open dialogue between researcher and participant. I name this newly constructed role as teacher/collaborator/researcher. It is also an example of how collaborative methods enabled this teacher participant to exercise her agency through the research process and in turn, push back at the testing policy. While she did not name these conversations or the blurred researcher role as ways of pushing back, it is evident that she found a way to make research work for her and her practice amidst testing policy.

For example, she asked questions about my teaching experiences in Ohio and subsequent academic readings and invited me to demonstrate strategies of teaching to her during class time. While I was at first hesitant about this blurred role; I felt that to refuse her invitation to collaborate occasionally in teaching would hinder our rapport and consequently, the exploration of the research topic. I reflected upon this tension and my concerns in the researcher reflexive journal. However, I remembered that with the
feminist principles of research that named the inherent power dynamics that I could be conscious of my subjectivity and also honor the role that Daisy needed to construct for me in order to participate in the research process. I also felt that these experiences would better ground me in the local meanings of Daisy’s classroom and lived teacher experiences. And to be honest, I welcomed the opportunity to share my joy as a teacher with Daisy and her students.

“You could spend time with us even when [the teacher] is not here.” Blurred Researcher Role and Student Relationships in Collaborative Research.

It is also important to examine how students positioned me in the classroom as a result of the collaborative nature of the research and my relationship with Daisy that emerged from the study. Since Daisy constructed a nurturing sense of community in her classroom, her students were comfortable and also curious about my role and contribution to the classroom. Her students were between the ages of seven or eight. This meant that developmentally, they were curious beings and less aware of social differences than the adolescent students I encountered in the classrooms of other teacher participants. At the beginning of data collection, the students were polite, respectful, and eager participants in the random lessons I presented to them (field notes, 3/12/04). They jumped out of their seats to engage in drama strategies during a reading of The True Story of the Three Little Pigs (Scieszka & Smith, 1992) and proudly demonstrated their classwork when I entered the room for fieldwork. By the middle of data gathering, it was evident that my blurred role as constructed by Daisy was a complete participant member of the classroom community.
Since Daisy had constructed a role for me as a teacher/collaborator/researcher in order to push back at the testing policy and make research useful to her, her students then treated me as another teacher as evident by the student comment above. For example, when Daisy was absent from school and I stopped in to check on the students, one student stopped me and said pensively “You can spend time with us even when [the teacher] is not here” (field notes, 5/18/04). This demonstrated that the students also positioned me as a teacher in their room with the comment that I served a purpose separate from their teacher.

The blurred role with students also better grounded observations and researcher perceptions in the realities of the classroom. For example, when Daisy was called to the office for a personal emergency once, she left the students in my charge during a bathroom break. The power dynamics immediately began to shift as the students then tested my new position as sole teacher. The boys began to play in the bathroom - washing in the sink and throwing water at each other, thus, testing my role. It was an uncomfortable experience for me since I was unsure of how to respond to this new positioning of me and reflective on how my actions might impact researcher/participant rapport. I quickly handled the disruptive behavior, spoke with a few boys regarding their “choices” and returned the class to their room, hoping that Daisy would return soon (field notes, 4/23/04). When she returned, she thanked me for my help and our rapport remained the same. Through that short time period and the challenge to my role from the students, I learned that after being out of the public school classroom for two years as a graduate student and researcher, that I lacked my usual innate confidence and connection to teaching. It was an added perspective to the layered understandings as constructed
through the blurred researcher role and provided me with a new respect for the teaching practice I was observing and trying to understand in the context of testing policy.

Toward the end of the data gathering, her students solidified my blurred role as an active complete member of the classroom culture and a teacher/collaborator/researcher with a social gesture. The students invited me to an end-of-the-year party that included two bags of chips and one half-opened bag of pretzels. While these students had little economically, what they did have, they shared with an open heart that touched me both personally and professionally. During the party, they presented me with a terrarium that they had all donated money toward and a slew of cards and hand-written notes thanking me, telling me that they loved me and wished me luck with my “book”. Daisy, in turn, told me that I had become a part of her classroom and the school and gave me an embroidered denim shirt with the words, Diversity Place School. This was similar to the staff shirts that teachers sometimes wore indicating her positioning of me as a member of the school culture.

Like her students, Daisy had constructed a space for me as the teacher/collaborator/researcher that aligned with her needs as a teacher and personal beliefs as a human being. It was also indicative of how collaboration in research can open and facilitate new space for dialogue, reflection, and learning between researcher and teacher that benefits the practice of both. It is an example of how intersubjectivities intertwine and how teacher participants relied on their teacher agency to position research. I now turn to the classroom of Isabel to explore how the blurred role of researcher further grounds the data in local truths by checking researcher subjectivity.

*Blurred Role of the Researcher as a Tool for Checking Researcher Subjectivity.*
The researcher role and rapport that developed with Isabel is an example of how collaborative research methods better informed the research, and checked researcher subjectivity to create a more useful role for the research in the classroom. When I first entered Isabel’s classroom, she had already discussed and approved the purpose of the research since she was my initial contact. Although I had predicated that the research would be situated on local meanings, it seemed that Isabel openly trusted me since I had been her former mentor teacher. And through this role, I was also given complete access to her classroom culture and teacher meanings. Isabel was also confident in her abilities as a teacher and as such, openly welcomed others into her room. I was no exception.

At first, I found that my observations of Isabel’s practice and classroom culture was a comparison between what I knew of her as a teacher in Ohio and the teacher she had become on her own (document analysis, 9/11/04). It was amazing to see her growth and talent and my observations were predicated on this subjectivity. After reflection on the local meanings of policy, I realized that I needed to better clarify my purpose through writing and open discussion with Isabel so that findings were not what I saw but also grounded in what was important to her. I needed to use the access that the collaborative nature and personal knowledge gave me as a researcher to gain clearer understandings of practice and teacher meanings.

Since I had personal access to the participant before the data gathering, I had deeper access to local truths during the research but that access was also mediated by shifting power dynamics that the collaborative nature of the research helped clarify. I had not seen Isabel in the four years since she left my room as a student teacher. Therefore, although the researcher/participant rapport was established, it was still an on-
going process (Glesne, 1999). I used the informal interviews, quick conversations on the way to lunch or walking students to bathroom breaks to check researcher subjectivity and clarify meanings gleaned from observations and further ground the findings in emic and not etic perspectives. We had intense reflective conversations and eventual formal interviews about her practice and testing policy. Because of the collaborative nature of the research, meaning that participant interests guided questions and etic perspective framed the questions within the research purpose, the researcher/participant rapport was productive and helped check researcher subjectivity. The collaborative nature of the research had also fostered a friendship between researcher and participant that often emerges from critical/feminist research. Therefore, not only were the questions more personal but the responses were more reflective of local meanings and the discussions more layered and openly political to better guide researcher subjectivity.

When asked how researcher subjectivity impacted the research process, Daisy added that the collaborative nature of the research, more specifically the reflective dialogue, contributed to a check of researcher subjectivity and supported honest teacher participation (field notes, 5/27/04). As we discussed emergent themes and connected them to observations and teacher questioning, Daisy and I explored how my subjectivity as an Anglo-European and then as a teacher and a researcher clouded the process. She argued that there will always be subjectivity and that unless a researcher gets to know the people of a study, there will be extensive bias. She explained the challenge this presents in the following:

I took a class last year and the teacher, Anglo, okay? He’s like a psychiatrist or something okay. So he has his own clinic or whatever and his friend, another Anglo was going to do a research, a study about Puerto Ricans…And I said to myself, how could you do a research about Puerto
Ricans if you really don’t know?…What’s true for us in our culture is strange to you. (interview, 5/28/04)

Daisy explained that through a strong rapport between participant and researcher, that the process can be named and checked to not fully hinder the local truths.

Bianca acknowledged that there will always be researcher bias in the research process but advocated that it be explored through reflection and feedback to not portray teachers in a negative manner. Bianca added that researcher subjectivity honor teacher voice with the construction of relevant research that respects teachers. For example, she explained that through checked researcher subjectivity, a researcher could better locate the data and write a more useful piece. She explained that:

If I’m going through research and I find it unrealistic, I don’t use it. If it’s unrealistic or it’s a college professor writing about middle school and you can tell that he’s never been in the school and the information doesn’t have any application for me, it’s all technical, then that’s not for me. It’s not useful. (interview, 5/17/04)

The aim of this collaborative study was to use the blurred researcher role to check researcher subjectivity and create useful research. As the researcher, I now explore my perceptions of the blurred role, how I in turn, exercised my agency through this social construction and the subsequent impact upon the research process and data.

“Mrs. P knows what 2 do and not what 2 do.” Researcher Perceptions of the Blurred Role as Complete Member of the Classroom Culture.

It is important to also describe how I responded as the researcher to the role of complete member constructed for me by Daisy and her students and how this also added to the collaborative practices of the research. Throughout these interactions, I openly interacted with the students but constantly discussed my thoughts and reflections on what I observed and emergent themes regarding testing policy with Daisy. I also reflected and
wrote down these issues each day in a researcher reflexive journal. I ate lunch with her and the students as much as possible in order to be respectful and have the opportunity for dialogue. It was often difficult to find time to talk with teachers who have such little time to think during each day as evident in the practice of eating lunch only lasting twenty minutes.

I also exercised my own agency as a researcher and openly contributed to the blurred role as teacher/collaborator/researcher because I felt that it honored teacher needs, research objectives and better grounded dialogue in local meanings, thus making data findings more relevant to classroom practice. For example, I brought Daisy’s students yogurt and sports watches donated from race directors after I completed my first half-marathon in April. I shared pictures after a short vacation with my family and discussed relevant geography with the students. I played soccer with the class on the last day of school as a reward for positive behavior in the classroom that Daisy monitored. I watched her students during a Latin dance performance in which Daisy needed to supervise her dancers.

I read Charlotte's Web after lunch for two weeks and recognized that two students went to the library to get their own copies of the novel. I helped the class practice their play for the third-grade Olympics and discussed gender rules after a listening to a short story about a boy who played with dolls. I convinced the local video store near where I lived to donate appropriate children artifacts from movies as behavior incentives and writing prompts for students. As noted in the following text, these were efforts not always limited to Daisy’s class. When I brought yogurt and watches, I brought enough for the students of each teacher participant. And the film artifacts from the video store
were not exclusive to Daisy’s students depending on the age level of the film. The extent of these efforts, however, was dependent on the role constructed for me in the specific context of the teacher participant’s classroom.

As a researcher attending to feminist principles of research located in sociocultural/critical ways of knowing, I completely embraced the blurred role as constructed by the participant while working to also honor the purpose of the research. I believe that this role as constructed through teacher agency and researcher subjectivities not only empowered the rapport with Daisy and her students but also helped bridge the gap between theory and practice. Since my role was blurred and closely attentive to research principles and local meanings, I argue that the findings are both robust and more clearly transferable to teachers in other school contexts because they are based on the realities of teachers and the enactment of testing policy.

In fact, this teacher/collaborator/researcher role with Daisy continued into summer school in an effort to observe testing policy at various times of the year. Some of these students knew me since I had also observed in a sixth grade classroom but consequently, knew me positioned in a different role. Other students, however, were from neighboring schools and did not know me at all. I found that although Daisy strongly adhered to the teacher-scripted summer school curriculum, that she again asked for me to participate in random lessons to help make connections with the kids. She expressed that both she and the students were bored by the curriculum. And since these students might not move onto seventh grade, Daisy asked if I could help with individual support more often than during the regular academic year. She pushed back at the testing
policy by positioning me again as a support of her practice and another perspective to her teaching.

For example, I bought the fourteen students Lance Armstrong’s yellow wristbands as part of a lesson on personal goals and creative writing combined with reading facts and opinions about his sixth Tour de France win. And when a student helped me with a drama strategy presentation, I shared my candy bar for lunch with him. At the end of summer school, these students, on their own accord gave me a signed soccer ball and hand-made cards and poems. The words of one such poem are as follows:

Mrs.P knows what 2 do and not what 2 do. She can give you something and she can leave your heart broken. And trust me you seen the real side of her cause inside she’s a real nice person. She can show you love, courage and fellings. She don’t need her fists to fight. She has words that can brighten a criminal day. If you take the time and get to know her you will think she’s cool and neat. Even though she might act like a child when she goes to Disney world she still need to be respected in many different ways! (document, 7/26/04)

As indicated by this description, my researcher role was again blurred and students viewed me a teacher first, researcher second. To further demonstrate the extent, to which my teacher/collaborator/researcher role had become blurred, Daisy asked if I, along with the students could help clean up the room at the end of summer school. This initial effort developed into a creative redesign of her entire classroom with coloring, cutting, moving furniture and creating interactive bulletin boards that still remain in her room today.

As findings were co-constructed at the end of the study, I returned to the school several times and also continued to talk on the phone with Daisy to get feedback and clarify perceptions. When I encountered her former third grade students, they embraced me with hugs and warm wishes. And when I encountered the now seventh graders, they
say hello and ask how my “book” is coming. In fact, during several conversations with Daisy to discuss the writing and findings of the study, she continually asked when I was coming back to the classroom since she missed me. I felt guilt as I had to reiterate my then new role of researcher first, and teacher collaborator second. Since then through conversations about the writing and findings, I have been able to cross the repositioned borders of researcher/collaborator/teacher through the collaborative nature of the dialogue. I realized through data analysis that as Daisy positioned me in a distinctive blurred role in her room, that each aspect of this teacher/collaborator/researcher role informed and constituted the other throughout the entire research process and afterward.

In conclusion, there was strong evidence that the blurred role certain teacher participants constructed for the researcher in their classrooms attended to teacher agency and research purpose. The blurred role of teacher/collaborator/researcher demonstrated that teachers pushed back at the testing policy and the traditional role of research as a distant function of the classroom. Through the variance of researcher role, the collaborative methods were able to better ground interview questions, clarify observations in local meanings, affect change in teacher practice, respect teacher positioning of the use of research and also check researcher subjectivity. I now turn to the classrooms in which the collaborative methods were used but the researcher participation as constructed by the teacher participants was more conservative and not blurred in the classroom culture. Each experience, however, will contribute to understandings of collaborative research as a political space for teacher empowerment and development and explore how teacher participants used this space for teacher agency through testing policy.
Back and Forth: Variance in Teacher Construction of the Blurred Researcher Role

Since teacher agency is a social and cultural practice dependent on teacher and local meanings, how teacher participants constructed the researcher role and consequently, the purpose of the research also varied. Besides the blurred role described above, other teacher participants either constructed the researcher role as a complete observer in the classroom culture or crossed back and forth between the latter and the blurred role.

Timing of Testing Policy as a Construction of Researcher Role.

I argue that these constructions are evidence that teachers constructed my role as researcher depending on what they wanted from the research, thus pushing back at testing policy through research participation. These particular needs shifted throughout the year as heavily influenced by testing policy and the timing of testing. However, the shifts in researcher role are also examples of how testing policy through research participation also pushed at teachers. For example, at the beginning of data gathering Bianca was eager and open during reflections, conversations and interviews. She introduced me to her students and frequently involved me in classroom discussions, much like her interaction with the special education teacher who supported her instruction. In fact, Bianca asked me to read a novel to her students several times and thanked me for extra support supervising students during project times. I brought yogurt and sports watches to her class after the race. I gave her students stickers from a professional soccer team after the Women’s World Cup. In addition, I arranged for a Greek guest speaker to visit her room during their country study on Greece and continued to bring occasional film artifacts from the video store. Bianca appreciated these efforts.
As the research progressed, Bianca’s construction of my role in the classroom began to shift from complete observer and teacher/collaborator/researcher to less of a member and more of an expert as the researcher first, teacher and collaborator second. I argue that the since the interviews aligned with the timing of testing, the reflection and discussion of testing policy pushed at these participants through the research. This was evident in the way that Bianca positioned me more as an expert after the first interview (field notes, 3/23/04).

For example, after Bianca reviewed the first formal interview transcript, she shifted her positioning of the research and its usefulness to her practice in a more formal manner. She distanced herself from the collaborative nature of the research because she constructed me as an expert instead of an equal. She studied for the subsequent interviews and brought research to these interactions so that she could “sound smarter” and “get it right for me” (field notes, 5/18/04). This was an interesting shift in the power dynamics of the research because at the same time, Bianca and I were also developing a friendship. In other words, as we got to know each other more in social situations, Bianca became more formal during our interactions in the research process. When asked about this change or positioning me as an expert in the research process, Bianca argued that it was an appropriate role since I had more classroom experience than she did (field notes, 6/15/04).

When I reiterated that I was not an expert in either research or practice and was continually impressed with her abilities, Bianca thanked me for my presence but continued to act in a more formal manner. I believe that this shift in positioning may also have been due to the push at practice that Bianca experienced around testing rounds as
teammates became more stressed, students more anxious and she practiced math skills occasionally to support her teammate. Research then became something to learn from as a subject instead of source for learning as an equal actor. This was apparent when she shared “Michelle thinks we’re helping her but no, she’s helping us…we should be giving her something” (field notes, 6/12/04).

However, after testing was over, the role of expert shifted again back to the blurred role of collaborator to reiterate the assertion that the construction of researcher role by teachers was dependent on the needs of the teacher and her views toward the research process itself. For example, toward the end of data gathering and after testing, I was invited to supervise the sixth grade field trip to downtown Center City and once again, became an active participant in the classroom culture. During discussions about the issue of representation, Bianca again asserted her role as a collaborator in the research through honest and messy conversations with the researcher, thus reestablishing her agency through testing policy and research.

It is important to also given consideration to how a first year teacher also constructed the researcher role as an expert but transformed this role apart from the timing of testing and constructed a blurred role through the collaborative nature of the research.

*Researcher Role as Expert Transformed through Collaborative Research.*

Umberto, the first year teacher participant, openly welcomed the research process into his classroom and eagerly approached each conversation, reflection and dialogue about testing policy and practice. He cited his participation in the research process as a learning experience. I argue that his participation was also a form of teacher agency in
that as a first year teacher in an urban school during testing policy, he was not afforded much guidance from the school structures. Participation in the research could address this and thereby serve as a way for Umberto to dialogue about his practice while also constructing relevant and useful research.

At the beginning of the research process, Umberto positioned the researcher as an expert and often commented that since he was a first year teacher, he was unsure if what he thought and said would have real use for the study (interview, 3/26/04). I assured him that as a first year teacher and a new graduate student working on certification at the same time, that he would bring a unique perspective to the lived experience of teachers with testing policy. I assured him that the collaborative nature of the research would afford each of us the opportunity to observe, reflect and dialogue on issues as the emerged from the actual classroom. I believe that the collaborative nature of the research demonstrated to Umberto that the since the research questions grew out of real practice that the ensuing conversations would also be purposeful to his growth as a teacher.

Through his positioning of me as the expert, Umberto often deferred to me when discussing issues of practice and policy. After much conversation about the purpose of the research and his relevance to the study, Umberto became more comfortable with the dialogue and asked deeper questions than before. He also then began to blur the various researcher roles as a teacher/collaborator/researcher in the classroom and stopped prefacing his words with “I’m not sure this is what you need” or “I don’t know if I answered you correctly” and started simply stating what he thought. It is through the initial reflection and discussion grounded in his actual practice afforded through collaborative research that Umberto stopped apologizing for his opinions and thoughts.
In the middle of the research process, Umberto began to challenge my opinions during reflective dialogue. It was evident that he was then positioning himself as an equal collaborator in the research process. This was also demonstrated through the connections Umberto made from our conversations and interviews to his actual practice and worldview. For example, at the beginning of data gathering, he admitted that due to his own personal traumas with standardized testing and his resultant views of the testing policy in regards to special education, that he had ignored the tests in his practice and interaction with students (interview, 3/26/04). Throughout the development of the research, he began to deeply reflect on this decision and question how to incorporate the policy in a manner that supported student performance and also respected their diverse needs.

Umberto eventually blurred my role in his classroom as teacher/collaborator/researcher. Since his classes were roughly eight or nine students at a time, it was also more obvious that I was in the room. He introduced me to the students, explained our purpose, and often included me in classroom activities or discussions. Like the other classrooms, I shared yogurts and sports watches from the half-marathon and pictures from the Womens’ World Cup. Umberto had asked if I could share this experience with his students since soccer is a respected cultural practice for his Hispanic students.

In addition to this, he also sometimes asked me to cover a class for a short time when certain emergencies with student behavior called him from the room. As a result, his students were familiar with me. During the middle of data gathering, I inquired as to how the collaborative research methods could better serve his practice. I asked if the
issues or themes emerging from our discussions were relevant in order to facilitate
reciprocity and better ground the findings in local meanings. Umberto stated that he was
comfortable with the process. With a joking tone, he added that the only thing I could
change was to start wearing a burka because his seventh and eighth grade boys thought I
was attractive (field notes, 4/7/04). I now expand the discussion of teacher construction
of researcher role to include how the positioning of me as a complete observer was also a
form of teacher agency through testing policy and the tensions this created in the
collaborative research process.

“Thanks for listening. I really think what YOU’RE doing will make a difference.”

Tensions in Researcher Role and Participant Rapport.

While the collaborative nature of the research encouraged an active and blurred
role for the researcher in other participants’ classrooms, Susan constructed a complete
observer role for me in her classroom. As evident in the above comment, she constructed
a binary dynamic between researcher and participant that worked against the
collaborative nature of the research. Initially, she saw the research as my work and not
an equal effort. I argue that this was evidence of her views of research as distant from the
classroom purpose and not useful to her practice. However, when Susan initially agreed
to participate in the research, she asked for me to pay attention to the enacted gender
roles of her Hispanic female students thus constructing a role as collaborator for the
researcher. I was to be an extra set of eyes to help her see her students better. She said
that she would also introduce me to her classes.

Not once did she explain who I was to her students at any time during the research
or ask for observations relevant to her request. Each time that I observed in her
classroom, I was a complete observer and a non-participant in the classroom culture. The only time I interacted with her students was to ask if I could sit in seat or offer a pen to a student who did not have one. While they sometimes asked who I was and my purpose, I kept the introductions simple and concise so not to interfere with Susan’s teaching or needs for the research as constructed through my role as researcher in her classroom. I do want to note that during the above experiences, Susan was consistently kind to me.

The collaborative nature of the research did not serve to elucidate local meanings in a straightforward manner as done in the other classrooms. This meant that during discussions or formal interviews, it was necessary that I not only clarify meanings gleamed from observations but also qualify emergent questions of the research. Since the researcher/participant rapport was often distant and formal without the benefit of friendship as with Bianca to explore dynamics, it was confusing on how to progress in the research purpose and employ feminist methods of collaboration. I often felt more of a positivist than a critical/feminist researcher since the reflective dialogue was infrequent. However, it appeared that this distant positioning of me as the researcher was contingent on the timing of the testing policy, this indicating that testing policy also pushed through the researcher.

For example, on the last day of school, I brought a small gift to Susan to thank her for her time and for allowing me to continue observations during summer school. She immediately became teary-eyed and emotional as she shared her feelings toward me as the researcher and the research itself. She shared that she was impressed with me because I was trying to get the teachers heard in the policy world, that I was an advocate, that unlike most people who wait till they have the advantage of age and experience when
they’re older, I was giving back at a young age. She said that the work and I had inspired her and got her thinking about her own self. Similar to her comment at the beginning of the research as shown above, she stated that my work was going to really make a difference. I told her, again that I believed that “our” work was going to make a difference (field notes, 6/17/04). It was a humbling experience for me as a researcher who had positioned the participant in certain manner based on assumptions that were not grounded in real collaboration. I came to the conclusion that the collaborative nature of the research was defined and positioned differently by participants relevant to their needs and not according to my controls as the researcher. It was an intense learning experience.

During the summer school observations, Susan was again formal with interaction in the classroom but then more relaxed and forthcoming during conversations. I believe that this was not only due to the relaxed nature of the summer schedule and less teaching pressures but also because of the aforementioned sharing between researcher and participant that created a new understanding. For example, the formal interview held during the summer lasted over two hours.

Teacher participants as indicated in this chapter constructed various roles for me as the researcher in their classrooms. The range of these roles demonstrated the breadth of teacher agency through testing policy and research. The collaborative nature of this research created a space of empowerment and development for all teacher participants regardless of their pushing back or being pushed by the research practice. I now explore the specific impact of the research on teacher participants and thus, the usefulness of the collaborative nature of the research.
Contributions of the Blurred Role for Practice and Research

The discussion on the blurred role of researcher included the perceptions of teacher participants, students and researcher to explore how this collaborative nature of research might honor reciprocity and teacher agency as expressed in the text above.

This section will examine how the blurred role benefited participants and research. I start with revisiting the classroom of Daisy. As a teacher, I was able to gain access to Daisy’s classroom and she was comfortable with me. She positioned me as an equal and not as an expert researcher. As a teacher/collaborator, I could frame reflections in a manner that answered Daisy’s request to better her practice and also honor the purpose of the research. As a researcher, I framed each of the former roles through honest reflection in my own writing and honest dialogue with Daisy. And in this role, she was not uncomfortable in challenging my observations or answering my questions. And as I struggled throughout the research to ensure that one identity did not silence the other, I realized the purposefulness of each and let go of the socialized notion inherent to positivist research that argues distance from an object of study in order to gain real knowledge. Yes, this study was not framed in the latter paradigm but as a human being, it is the perspective that I had encountered throughout schooling until the doctoral level at which I was finally able to consider other epistemologies. I do admit, that the nature of knowing is still a struggle in all my identities as indicated through my first resistance to the blurred roles that Daisy constructed for me as the researcher.

The usefulness of this collaborative role and blurred position in Daisy’s classroom not only grounded findings in local meanings to an extent but also benefited teacher practice. At the beginning of the research, Daisy shared that her purpose for participation
centered on her desire to learn more so that she could become a better teacher for her students. However, like other teacher participants, she was sensitive to the possible ramifications of her participation in the research. During the first interview, she was concerned that her comments might offend the administrator (interview, 3/17/04). I assured her that through member-checks, she could validate the interview transcripts. In addition, the principal reiterated to me to share with participants, to go ahead and discuss whatever issues or thoughts were necessary, that if she was hurt, she would get over it because the purpose was to help teachers learn (field notes, 3/23/04). It also appeared that Daisy was at first uncomfortable with tape-recorded dialogue and often hesitated before speaking during tape-recorded interviews. When the tape recorder was off, then she became more engaged in the discussion.

As the research progressed and researcher/participant rapport further developed, Daisy became more reflective and detailed with her reflections and questioning of herself and the topic of inquiry. This indicated the space of empowerment that the collaborative methods encouraged. She then began to ask for my random participation in her teaching and used this to frame additional questions. In the middle of the process, Daisy commented that the research had encouraged her reflection and added to her feelings of connection with colleagues. She stated that:

> it makes me more aware, cause sometimes I just think these things in my head and I keep them but then when you’re talking and you’re asking these questions then it makes it more real. These things can be addressed. (interview, 5/28/04)

She concluded that to have a conversation about her teaching and issues of education through a supportive communication was important to her.

*Impact on Cultural Identities*
The collaborative nature of the research along with the blurred role of researcher not only empowered teachers but also impacted their cultural identities in some cases. For example, at the beginning of the research process, Daisy stated that her culture and race played no role in her teaching because she worked to meet the needs of all her students (field notes, 3/9/04). I argue that through the reflection and dialogue afforded during the collaborative research, that Daisy began to develop an awareness of her own cultural assumptions and how these impacted her role in the classroom an evident when she shared that as a Hispanic teacher, she could:

Understand them [the students] better because most of them are, they’re ALL Hispanic children. I can understand the culture, the language, even though our [individual] cultures are different, they’re very similar…[I can] reach them and understand them better…[and be] more sensitive to their needs and understanding their families when their parents come. (interview, 10/4/04)

She added that as a woman and also a mother, this identity positioned her in a nurturing and caring manner toward her students.

The following comments also demonstrated how her developing cultural awareness influenced her evolving role as a teacher when Daisy described what cultural norms she wanted to transmit to her students as a Hispanic female teacher. I believe that this awareness also served as a form of teacher agency because she saw her identity as a model for students that are faced with constraining practices at school. Therefore, her efforts to transmit certain cultural norms that work against low academic expectations for bilingual students is a form of teacher agency through testing policy. She shared that:

I would like to be a positive role model to the students, being Hispanic…to the gentlemen and the girls because a lot of us think that we need to have somebody because we can’t take care of ourselves and that’s not true…Just because we’re women doesn’t mean that we have to hang on to somebody…I try to push that…they can do anything. You don’t
Another example of how the blurred researcher role and the usefulness of reflection and dialogue impacted participants’ cultural identities was evident with Isabel. While Isabel had consistently attended to the whole needs of her students, she did not name her racial identity as an active factor in her practice. Through the reflection, dialogue and questioning that collaborative research encouraged, her cultural standpoint evolved through the research process. She summarized these changes and benefits of participation in collaborative research with the following description shared at the end of the research process:

As a Caucasian, I think in the beginning I said it probably didn’t affect me because I’m white but it probably does in ways that I’m not always thinking of…when I draw on my background knowledge I definitely have to keep in mind that I’m not drawing on their background knowledge because we don’t have the same stories and we don’t have the same experiences…I guess I had never thought about it before. The more we talked and the more I read definitely makes sense that it impacts all parts of us and what we do…I think about being more culturally relevant. That’s probably the biggest thing I’ve taken from this. (interview, 10/4/04)

When asked if there was anything about the writing of the study that might better serve her practice, Isabel named the realities of hard-working teachers by asking, “Can you get me more supplies?” This indicated that even as collaborative research created a space for teacher empowerment and development, the structures of schools such as limited funding for supplies served as limitations to teacher efforts.

Influence on Individual Change/Praxis

Another example of the impact of collaborative methods on teachers and practice was the extent to which these reflections impacted individual change. For example, at the beginning of the research process, Daisy was unable to make time to collaborate with her
teammates. After talking about the need and importance of collaboration to teacher practice and development throughout the research process, Daisy is now collaborating weekly with her teammates (field notes, 10/4/04). Daisy also added that her participation in the research affected her confidence. She explained that she overcame her initial nervousness toward research and me and said, “no, I want to learn. I want to keep that learning. And Mrs. P has taught [me]…and that’s very good. And I use that with my kids” (interview, 10/4/04). This is an example of personal change that was mediated by teacher agency through participant reflection, construction of the blurred researcher role, and

Bianca’s participation in the research demonstrated how even though the researcher/participant rapport was positive but messy, the collaborative principles of the research created a space for teacher reflection and development. For example, at the beginning of the research, Bianca did not name that her racial identity impacted her practice in terms of issues of diversity and equity in her classroom (interview, 3/15/04). She felt that the multicultural school curriculum and her efforts of classroom community attended to culturally relevant pedagogy. In the middle of research, she commented that she wanted to see how the research process was useful to teachers in case she decided to conduct her own in the eventual future, therefore exploring an additional aspect of her teacher leadership (interview, 5/17/04). At the end of the research process, Bianca stated that she appreciated the opportunity for reflection because it had proven to be a useful tool for practice during her graduate studies and that she needed to be reminded of that (interview, 10/4/04). Furthermore, she added that reflective practice could also help teachers consider their cultural assumptions that in turn impact their practice.
In addition to developing rapport, the collaborative nature of the research did afford teacher reflection and change. Another example of such transformative change was seen in that Susan decided that she needed to take a more active role in school and teacher leadership by becoming the new union representative (field notes, 1/10/05). She stated that she decided that if she was going to talk and complain, then she needed to get involved in the action. Furthermore, at the end of the research process Umberto described how the collaborative nature of the research and researcher role helped guide his first year as a teacher. He explained that his participation had:

been great. It’s offered me a lot of guidance and helped me think about stuff that I normally wouldn’t even thought of [regarding] testing, and how it impacts the children, because we’ve just been dealing with stuff all along rather than thinking how it is really affecting them. (interview, 10/4/04)

This is an example of how the reflection and dialogue that collaborative methods encouraged can inform researcher views toward the process of inquiry but also empower teacher development and practice.

It is because of the collaborative nature of the research that a first year teacher was comfortable enough to engage in reflective research and as a result, address policy issues in classroom practice. It is because of the collaborative nature that a first year teacher better clarified cultural awareness and issues of diversity and equity that impacted classroom practice. It is because of the collaborative nature of research that a young researcher gained immediate access and developed a positive rapport with teacher participants that respected local meanings and attended to the research purpose. It was through these practices and blurred roles that a safe political space was created for teachers to question, reflect, challenge and dialogue in a manner that empowered their
sense of self and developed their practice. Furthermore, it was through these practices that myself as a young researcher was also encouraged to learn, question, become vulnerable and grow. That is the story of collaborative research and teacher agency as told in these narratives.

Conclusion

As discussed in the text, three intersecting circles of policy, teachers/teacher practice and research constitute the social enactment of testing policy within NCLB. As each circle intersected with the other, the issues and practices within impacted and acted upon the other practices. As demonstrated in the discussion regarding testing and practice, the views of teacher participants toward policy were situated by their personal views and experiences. This in turn influenced their meaning making and positioning of the testing policy both personally and in the classroom. The intersection of practice and policy, nevertheless, also created dilemmas of teaching bilingual and special education students that further challenged teacher practice to attend to issues of diversity and equity.

Research served as the last circle of the pattern to provide a clearer understanding of how these practices were enacted. The collaborative methods of this research as demonstrated in this chapter afforded teachers the opportunity to reflect, dialogue and question testing policy in order to situate the research in a purposeful manner to teachers. This chapter explored the particular ways that teacher participants pushed back at the testing policy through their construction of the researcher role and the research and concurrently how some participants were pushed. Regardless of the enactment of teacher
agency, the data findings were relevant to teachers and thus, grounded in local meanings. This created a study purposeful to scholars, teachers, and policymakers alike.

Collaborative methods of research attended to not only teacher development and understanding of the testing policy but also constructed a clearer picture of the policy objectives within the realities of the classroom. It is the implications of this story as told from the perspectives of five urban schoolteachers that will be furthered explored in chapter seven. It is the hope of this researcher that the narratives of teacher participants will be honored by future research that explores and extends their experiences with testing policy and teacher agency. It is important to continue the dialogue on testing policy and teachers through the interaction of the three circles of policy, teachers/practice and research. Through participation in this conversation, teachers may then be able to answer the call for action from Fried (2005) by responding to the “politicians who want to bully schools into submission. [Teachers can say] I am not just a test-prep function. I know these kids and what they need. Our kids [and teachers] are smarter than what the politicians [and the tests] think” (2005, April). As indicated, collaborative methods of research based on listening, questioning, reflecting and action can serve to create such dialogue and a political space from which teachers can impact research, practice, and policy.
CHAPTER 7

REFLECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS: REALISTIC POLICY, REALISTIC RESEARCH, AND REALISTIC PRACTICE

“Those who seek to understand the meaning and import of educational policy seek at the same time to inform it, as citizens and as professionals...Being mindful of the dangers of speaking for others, policy researchers are nonetheless in a position to raise awareness in the policy formation process of the multiple sites in which policy manifests, as well as the multiple meanings that governing policy may acquire in daily practice” (Sutton, M. & B. Levinson, 2001, p. 15).

Teacher lived experiences with the testing policy of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act and the implications of the latter address the multiple meanings and multiple sites of educational policy enacted on a daily basis as described above. As West and Peterson (2003) argue, like the earlier laws that NCLB builds upon, the current legislation “will undoubtedly reshape the focus of public schools in ways unforeseen” (p. 2) but despite the wide purview of the policy objectives and “though NCLB is undoubtedly the most important piece of educational legislation in thirty-five years, it does more to initiate a political process than to decide it” (p. 19). This study and its findings aim to examine this political process and the emergent questions regarding the social enactment of policy from the perspective of the direct facilitators of the policy - teachers.
The narratives of teacher participants and the findings of this study serve a wide range of fields- academia, policymaking, teacher education, public school administration and most importantly, other teachers. It is the consideration of teacher perspectives of the testing policy that was the focus of teacher narratives and their collective voice as shared in this dissertation. The aim of the study was to explore not only the social practice of testing policy in the lives of teachers and what this means for teachers and practice but also to “raise awareness” of the realities of teacher classrooms and public schools as described by Sutton and Levinson (2001). Thereby, the narratives that were shared and discussed in chapters four, five and six regarding the issues of testing/practice, testing/practice/diversity and equity, and collaborative methods/teacher development are recursive in that they illuminate local meanings and the testing policy itself.

In conjunction with teacher participant voices, the etic perspective of the researcher aimed to honor the local meanings provided by participants and also the meanings gleamed from researcher observations, interactions, and interviews with the cultural site and its members. Furthermore, the relationships that developed through such interaction between researcher/participants and researcher/site were also an ethical consideration. It was necessary as the researcher to explore in both isolation and with participants how this access informed the data and emergent findings as explained in chapter three.

I now turn to a summary of the findings as framed by sociocultural/critical theory with feminist principles of research. From this discussion, the text will turn to the exploration of the implications of findings for teacher education, policy and scholarship. I will then build upon these implications through researcher reflection. Reflections will
address the following issues- limitations of the study, potential connections for further studies and professional development efforts in order to better clarify teacher enactment of policy and what supports are needed to foster teacher development and empowerment as named in chapter four.

Summary of Data Findings

“When we pay close attention to the frameworks of cultural meaning people use to interpret their experience and generate social behavior, we see not only the recipients of educational policy but also its authorized formulators and purveyors as fully cultural animals as well. By highlighting the place and role of values, beliefs, and identities in the policy process, we provide analytic tools to range across the spectrum of sociocultural activity” (Sutton, M. & B. Levinson, 2001, p. 3).

The findings of this study include the “place and role of values, beliefs, and identities” of teacher participants to construct an exploration of the enactment of testing policy in the local context of an urban school during the second year of NCLB implementation. As discussed in chapter two, the issues of implementation at the state level were determined to be relevant to the long-term sustainability of the legislation throughout the literature on NCLB. This study places itself in the context of addressing the call for exploration of implementation but situates itself at the local level to facilitate a closer look at the realities and effects of the testing policy of the law on the classroom and teachers. It is an effort as Elmore (2004) advocates, to demonstrate the “backwards mapping” of policy to create “school reform from the inside out”. In other words, this dissertation aims to locate the testing policy of NCLB from the local perspective of the teacher in order to inform the broader discussion at the state and federal level.
The following questions framed the inquiry process as constituted by sociocultural/critical ways of thinking and feminist principles of research:

1. How do teachers experience standardized testing within NCLB?
2. How does this process impact teacher ability to respect issues of diversity and equity in the classroom?
3. What cultural norms are transmitted around standardized testing policy?
4. How can research create and support a political space for teacher growth and development?

The themes or patterns of meaning that emerged from the inquiry have been conceptualized in three intersecting circles that represent policy, practice, and research. As each circle can work in isolation or stand alone, it also works across and in conjunction with the others. For example, as the policy intersects directly with teachers/practice through the testing policy of NCLB, it also stands alone but also impacts the research process through its effects upon teachers/practice. As teachers make meaning of policy through local meanings and individual worldviews, they concurrently position the policy through practice that in turn, positions their experiences in a standpoint from which to respond to or participate in research and its own process and purpose. Each circle serves a purpose of its own but also intersects with the other aspects of education to mediate the classroom culture and teacher practice that facilitates such culture.

*The Circle of Policy: Practice Pushed and Practice Pushed Back*

Teacher participants maintained the following regarding the first circle, policy as they described their practice and personal views toward policy itself, the legislation of
NCLB and the specific testing policy. First, teachers agreed that a system of accountability was a good thing for teaching as an effort to raise expectations for practice but as implemented through NCLB, it was not an effective tool. Teachers also believed that the use of testing as the sole measurement of student achievement and teacher quality was developmentally inappropriate to students and counterproductive to good and creative teaching. Second, teachers asserted that the pressures of standardized testing policy encourages teachers to compress the curriculum to meet test requirements and timelines, thus, creating obstacles to culturally relevant teaching and developmentally appropriate practice. More specifically, most teachers in this study changed their practice to different extremes in order to meet test demands but also found ways to push back at the testing policy through practice choices or curricular design. Lastly regarding policy, teachers argued that in order for policy to be relevant it must be realistic. Teachers added that more teachers at the classroom level need to get involved in school governance and policy efforts to help foster such collaboration between teachers and policy. Teachers did, however, name the time constraints of their daily jobs as a major obstacle to becoming more politically engaged in educational reform at any level.

*The Circle of Practice: Issues of Diversity and Equity*

The second or main circle of the conceptual three circle design is the teacher/practice. This circle intersects on both sides with policy and research to consider cultural norms enacted by each that situate teacher self and practices. Through this study, teacher/practice intersectionality produced the focus of teacher collaboration in research to include action and subsequent teacher worldview. On the other hand, the intersectonality of teacher/practice with policy embedded the issues of self/local
meanings, practice pushed/practice pushed back by policy, and issues of diversity and equity created by testing policy. It is the exploration of the latter that will be considered next in the text.

*Dilemmas of Teaching Special Education Students.*

Teachers named several major themes regarding testing policy and dilemmas of diversity and equity in the classroom, more specifically, dilemmas of teaching special and bilingual education in an urban school. First, like teacher practice being pushed by testing policy, teachers argued that the compressed curricular timeline that testing requires encourages teacher-directed practice that alienates special education students who develop better under more non-traditional teaching methods. Moreover, the rushed curriculum further embeds the social label of special education upon those students since they become further behind in the curriculum than their classmates. Special education students need more time to make the cognitive connections between curriculum and personal experience that is difficult in the rushed classroom. Second, the testing policy also further embeds the social label by blatantly distinguishing learning abilities by removing special education students from regular testing practice. Lastly, some teachers felt that the testing policy within NCLB was a political effort to eradicate special education by pushing these students out of schools as they are afforded opportunities to move to higher-performing test schools. As these students move, they will have to continually adjust socially and intellectually to a new learning environment which, in turn, may hinder their learning. Teachers added that these students will continue to test low and consequently move from school to school. This will thereby create fluctuating
numbers of special education enrollment at schools and give policymakers less reasons to fund the program and eventually concrete justification for ending it.

*Dilemmas Teaching Bilingual Students.*

Regarding dilemmas teaching bilingual education students, teachers asserted that the developmentally inappropriateness of the teaching methods and curriculum encouraged by testing policy and its timelines also limited language development for bilingual students. First, teachers argued that the language of the standardized tests forces bilingual students to quickly assimilate both their language and culture in order to be successful according to testing policy criteria. This means that bilingual students are tested both during their language immersion, considered the 0-3 years initially in the states, and after this time period. During language immersion, the students are tested in English but not counted for AYP. After language immersion, the students are counted for AYP and student promotion in Center City. One participant commented that research states that it takes up to seven years for language acquisition and therefore, the current testing policy is developmentally inappropriate for bilingual students. Second, the dilemmas of testing bilingual students also impact the level of educational support from parents. In other words, it seemed that the parents of bilingual students are typically unfamiliar with testing policy in their own experiences and thus, unaware and not fully equipped to understand or support their children’s experiences with testing. Therefore, parents of bilingual students as a collective are not usually able to offer the home support needed to facilitate language immersion in a manner that encourages enculturation rather than assimilation of student language and culture.
Third, teachers asserted that in addition to the language of the tests, the quick timeline of the testing policy encourages student assimilation into the mainstream language and culture instead of offering multiple perspectives in the curriculum that would model encultration of culture and language. Teachers again, argued that this is developmentally inappropriate to student learning, limiting to culturally relevant practice, and propagating limited cultural norms. Finally, some teacher participants posited that testing policy encourages the cultural norm of lower academic expectations for bilingual students. Since bilingual students are often limited in their developing English language abilities, their test scores both during and after language immersion are lower than English speaking students. Teachers explained that some teachers expect this and thus, lower the curriculum for bilingual students instead of pushing them to cross borders between dual languages and cultures.

The Circle of Research: Collaboration and Teacher Empowerment

The third circle, research can also stand on its own but in the case of teacher lived experiences with testing policy, serves as the vehicle from which teachers were able to reflect, question, and act upon their views and practice while concurrently, co-producing a collective case study that also informs scholarly research and policy studies. The focus of the circle of research is the collaborative nature of the study that specifically entails the following - teacher reflection, dialogue, questioning, and reflection as a recursive practice. The intersection of the research circle with teacher/practice created action, emergent researcher/teacher participant worldviews and informed collaborative methods of the research. I now explore the purposefulness of the collaborative nature of the
inquiry as a tool for creating a safe political space for teacher empowerment and development.

Teacher participants’ assertions regarding the collaborative nature of research inform its usefulness for both practice and inquiry. First, teachers and researcher argue that the collaborative methods of the research afforded that the questions asked and the construct of the topic of inquiry were situated in local meanings that respected teachers and the local cultural site. This means that when research is collaborative in nature that the participants can help the researcher locate the topic in a useful manner to teachers and scholarship since it is grounded in local meanings and classroom needs. Second, collaborative methods or the collaborative nature of research influenced a positive, sometimes messy but ethical rapport between teacher participants and researcher. Collaborative methods encourage a respectful, honest, and openly political relationship between participants and researcher as each develop trust, gain deeper access to each other and negotiate and renegotiate relationships based on developing meanings.

Thirdly, collaborative methods guided and checked researcher subjectivity, thus, further grounding the data in emic meanings enhanced by etic perspective. Since the researcher was constantly reflecting on interactions, observations, and local meanings, the researcher developed a critical awareness of her place and power in the research process. In other words, through such examination of researcher subjectivity, the researcher was able to explore the developing themes and researcher positionality during honest discussion with participants as collaboration developed. Finally, the collaborative methods of research in conjunction with the specific components just discussed, afforded teacher participants the opportunity to reflect, dialogue, question, and reflect again upon
personal views and practice throughout the research. Through such recursive practice, the teacher participants were able to develop a personal and professional awareness, better clarify new meanings, extend new understanding with questioning and dialogue, and create action that was relevant to practice and personal context. These methods in combination created a safe space for teachers to develop and take action in ways that inform scholarship and extended their practice since action was based on the combination of personal meanings, theoretical discussion, and teacher choice.

It is through the interaction of each circle that the lived experience of teachers with testing policy was explored and examined in the context of teacher classrooms and the urban school district. What implications do these teacher narratives and assertions regarding policy and practice, dilemmas of diversity and equity, and collaborative research methods have for teachers, administrators, scholars, and policymakers? What purpose can their stories serve for the understanding of policy as a social practice? How can administrators respond with effective professional development that adheres to policy needs and new teacher understandings? How can this study inform future research that will extend its implications to effective policy development? Most importantly, how can teachers be supported in their efforts to respect issues of diversity and equity amid testing policy? These questions, issues, and collective challenges will be further explored in the succeeding section on the implications of this study on teacher lived experience with testing policy of NCLB. From this discussion, the researcher will reflect on the role of the researcher in the process, and the need for additional research to further illuminate the policy process and teachers. The focus of the discussion is to foreground teacher
perspectives in policy and research in order to avoid the blanket acceptance of external views toward reform as described by Meier (1999). She writes the following:

We know that the so-called hard stuff—test scores, attendance data, dropout statistics—is not ‘hard’ at all; it is soft…accessible to our not-disinterested manipulations. Yet whenever I ask my colleagues why they continue to trust judgements based on such flimsy evidence, they chorus back: ‘It’s the only stuff we have. Anyway,’ they add more softly, ‘our voices and accounts are not considered credible’”. (1999, p. 63)

Meier (1999) advocates that educational researchers, along with teachers and local actors, get involved in the debate on reform and the use of data to create change. It is the credibility and usefulness of teacher views that the discussion aims to develop and this dissertation build upon regarding such change through practice, policy, and research. I begin with the implications of the study for teacher educators and administrators.

Implications of the Study

Meaning for Teacher Educators: Training and Professional Development Efforts

The implications of the study for teacher educators will be discussed first and then followed with the professional development supports teachers recommended relevant to the work of administrators and providers of professional development. The focus of this study was the lived experiences of teachers with the testing policy within NCLB. Using this framework, the study explored how teachers enacted the policy through their practice, meaning making of the policy and the resultant cultural norms of such practice. The collaborative methods of the study also examined how teacher participation in the research process can afford teacher development and empowerment, thus impacting teacher practice and views. The experiences of the teacher participants in the study constructed a solid understanding of the enactment of this fairly new policy and what dilemmas and understandings result from policy and practice. The findings hold
implications for teacher educators as they are charged with training pre-service teachers to enter similar experiences as the participants and address similar issues in their practice.

Teacher Educators and the Call for Community.

The first implication for teacher educators that this study argues for is the need for a teacher community from which to develop a collective professional voice and through which to foster professional growth. In order to facilitate a sense of community among teachers and collectively develop the characteristics needed to establish a profession, teachers need to recognize and develop their political voice and teacher leadership both in and out of the classroom (Lynch, 2002). This can be done through time created for teacher participation in reform efforts, relevant professional development, and time for collaboration that creates teacher community in and across schools.

Freire (1998), hooks (2003), Kohl (2003), and Palmer (1998) all advocate a sense of community among teachers as a necessary key to teacher sustainability, growth, action and quality. It is through the personal connection and the reflection and dialogue that a teacher community affords that a teacher can feel supported, safe and able to develop awareness and questioning that leads to praxis in pedagogy and personal leadership. These skills, as argued by teacher participants, are as necessary to teacher development as content knowledge and standards. I also argue that to better facilitate one of the major objectives of NCLB, teacher quality, that supporting and developing teacher community in schools would serve teachers, administration, teacher educators and policy. Teacher educators can play a major role in this development and sustainability of such community and skills through their preparation of pre-service teachers.
“Make Sure You Tell Them What it’s Really Like in the Classroom. Make it Useful.” Teacher Educators and Reflective Practice.

Teacher participants explained that pre-service teachers need to learn about the political nature of teaching and the need for leadership skills as a component of teaching along with theories of learning and content methods. When entering my first classroom of higher education as an adjunct professor, teacher participants said to me “Make sure you tell them what it’s really like in the classroom. Make it useful.” They added that I should help make theory and scholarship real in ways that are realistic to the classrooms in today’s schools. I believe that teacher education can accomplish this through reflective pedagogy and an emphasis on teacher leadership, teacher community and action research.

Bianca described the major benefit of her participation in the research process as a reminder of the power and usefulness of reflective teaching that she learned in graduate school but had difficulty maintaining in the classroom (field notes, 5/28/04; interview 10/4/04). She explained that while her graduate program emphasized this skill, as she got further along in the daily life of teaching, it was easy to forget. As argued earlier in chapter one, school structures and teaching itself are isolating social practices that create obstacles to teacher political awareness, reflective practice and involvement in reform efforts. Bianca felt that through the reflection and dialogue afforded in the research process that she was able to name certain practices and values that she in turn, aimed to incorporate daily into her teaching. Bianca also added that her goal for the coming academic year was to also get more politically involved in the school governance and continue to develop her overall awareness as an effort to improve her teaching for her students. I warrant that teacher educators can help foster this practice in practicing
teachers through structured collaboration with public schools as a key piece of their own practice and development as professional educators themselves.

I add that while reflective pedagogy may be a major focus of some teacher education programs that how to sustain this practice through community despite the realities and politics of teaching is not fully embedded in pre-service teachers. This means that teacher educators have additional responsibilities placed upon them in conjunction with the implementation of NCLB. More specifically, the legislative component of teacher quality in NCLB currently places teacher educators in a state of flux due to the changing requirements placed upon higher education as a result of state compliance. Teacher educators can respond to this challenge by fostering teacher development and leadership through a strong development of action research skills in pre-service teachers. Since policy relies heavily on research-proven theories and practices, then pre-service teachers would benefit from reflecting on, questioning, and analyzing their practice through action research. As practicing teachers then, these individuals would claim a more active role in school culture through reflection on practice and be able to express views more clearly on policy enactment through their own analysis. It is important that teachers understand the system that mediates their practice and their role within this in order to facilitate teacher development and empowerment that concurrently affects student achievement and policy objectives. As Audre Lorde (1984) explains “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change” (p. 112). Teacher educators can help practicing teachers create genuine change through collaboration, action research and support of teacher community.
Teacher educators can enable such change with pre-service teacher by teaching growth through sustainable community once they are in their own schools and classrooms.

*Teacher Educators as Grounded in Public School Classrooms.*

The challenges to teacher educators as named above can be supported through the second implication of this study as constructed by teacher participants. Teacher participants expressed the need for teacher educators to remain connected to classroom teachers in an effort to better ground their practice in the realities of classrooms. Teacher participants posited that teacher educators, along with other educational leaders, accomplish this through direct interaction with teachers and students. Isabel suggested that reform efforts and teacher training be lead by people who are in the schools daily and who view change based on local meanings and not a business model. She added that this would afford leadership a perspective of schools and teaching that was realistic and respectful of teachers. The grounded practice of teacher educators can also inform efforts to better prepare pre-service teachers with the skills for teacher leadership, political participation, and development of teacher community as described above.

As stated in chapter six, teacher participants responded more fully to the researcher because I was positioned first as a teacher and then as a researcher. The collaborative nature of the research allowed me to not only gain better access to local meanings but also use my own teaching experiences to better relate to participants. However, it is important to note that during the research process, I was also given the opportunity to collaborate on teaching lessons with participants in various forms that better grounded my perspectives of local truths in the classroom realities. It was a humbling and powerful learning experience that informed not only my professional
development and the research process but also my personal views that I believe are recursive upon the former two.

While teacher educators do remain in some ways connected to the classroom through extensive time in the field during research or through professional development efforts, it is not the same as actually teaching a class or supervising students. Along with teacher participants, I argue that teacher educators be given the opportunity to spend real time, not connected to research or an external agenda with teachers and students actually teaching. Staying true to the act of teaching is the most effective way to stay grounded in schools, policy, professional development or any type of educational leadership. It keeps you real. It adds to the humanity of theory and applied knowledge. For example, when Isabel was asked at the end of the research process if there was anything else that either the researcher or the research could do for her, she responded “Can you get me supplies?” Testing your teaching talent grounds all additional work to improve practice and schools in ways that respect teacher needs and human realities. It reminds you of the realities and struggles of teaching. It reminds you that most classrooms struggle with a lack of supplies. It keeps you real. I now address the implications of the study around professional development for providers of these efforts and public school administrators.  

 Administrators and Providers of Professional Development Efforts 

Like teacher participants advocated that teacher educators be better grounded in the realities of teaching, the implications of this study for the development and administration of professional development argue similar challenges. What do the realities of teaching as described in this study in the context of testing policy say to the professional development administered along with such legislation? NCLB premises the
development of teacher quality upon concrete professional development in conjunction with raised certification standards and changes in teacher education programs. This means that policymakers charge administrators and providers of professional development with the task of improving teacher practice and thus, raising student achievement as measured by standardized testing. As stated earlier in the text, teacher participants argued against standardized testing as the sole measurement of student learning and teacher quality. Teacher participants recognized the need for measurement that policymakers can understand and use across standard contexts but argued that measurement needs to be grounded in student needs and present multiple perspectives of student lives and achievements. This is the same argument used in the consideration given to professional development and its impact upon teachers and practice. Teachers asked for professional development grounded in their realities and flexible to allow and support multiple perspectives.

The first implication of this study for administrators and professional development providers is to better ground these efforts in local needs and teacher realities. In other words, teachers need and will more fully respect professional development that reflects their meanings and challenges in the classroom. To facilitate the community argued for in the literature as a means of teacher development and quality, professional development must understand the local context of teaching in order to gain access and create learning that is relevant. Teacher participants asserted that testing policy creates more competition than collaboration among teachers and between teachers of various grades. Therefore, teachers suggested that professional development efforts be lead by teacher leaders in the individual school rather than by an external person to
develop teacher community. By using teacher leaders in their own school, teacher participants argued that activities and discussion would connect the objectives of the professional development with the real lives of teachers and the school culture. This would also empower teachers through the validation of their views and professional opinions since the professional development was based on collaboration and dialogue. If district policies or NCLB requirements required an external person, teachers asked that the individual be close to the act of teaching to make learning meaningful.

Second, teachers added to the need for grounded professional development with a call for time during such efforts to reflect, name issues, develop awareness, question and connect learning to own ideas and to foster community with other teachers. Teacher participants asserted that such reflection and connection would improve individual practice as evident through collaborative research. Teacher participants named the need for time to develop and foster a teacher community as a key component to their practice and sustainability.

It is also argued that through such reflection, teachers would be able to further name their own personal assumptions and values in order to develop individual cultural awareness. From this, it seems that teachers would be able to better address the curricular dilemmas that testing policy creates around developmentally appropriate instruction and culturally relevant practice. This would allow teachers the opportunity to create and discuss implementation of positive response to the dilemmas of teaching special education and bilingual students as presented by the testing policy. Teachers assert that such time could also be used to develop teacher accountability systems based on teacher meanings, thereby, creating a system that more teachers buy into and respect.
Time to develop political awareness and activities would also allow teachers the opportunity to develop teacher leadership, another key component to teacher development as named by participants.

If teachers are given the time to know themselves and apply their theories with practice through personal reflection and collective dialogue, concurrently student achievement and practice can be more effectively improved. Teachers argued that with an emphasis on time and collaboration, professional development efforts could improve and better sustain classroom practice. Teachers, like students, must own their own learning and practice before enacting external policies that aim to change and improve practice (Elmore, 2004). If teachers are supported in these efforts, then policy objectives will also be more clearly enacted and achieved as professional development becomes a connection between policy and teacher needs. The implications of this study for policy will be addressed in the following section.

Policy Implications of Teacher Lived Experiences with Testing Policy Within NCLB

If you could say one thing to policymakers involved in the policies of standardized testing, what would you say to them? ¹

Well, of course, the first thing I would say is just let’s not have them. But assuming that they’re going to be there and there’s one thing I can say and they would laugh at me but I would tell them to make the test non-binding. – Umberto, formal interview, 5/28/04

Involvte teachers from the frontlines and be aware that student achievement is not always accurately reflected by one test or set of tests- use other

¹ Participant quotes will be noted regarding date and context of comments such as field notes, informal interviews, or formal interviews. Comments are shared on the side to indicate the dialectic nature of the inquiry.
As indicated by the above comments, teacher participants have definite views regarding testing policy within NCLB and its impact upon their teaching and students. These views are predicated on both personal meanings and experiences as well as teacher professional knowledge based on classroom experience. Through this social and cultural process, policy is interpreted by teachers and enacted in various contexts. This study of the local enactment of the policy in an urban school context holds several timely implications for policy and policymakers.

*Policy Sustainability and Teacher Supports.*

First, the sustainability of the testing policy and the overall legislation of NCLB largely depends on teachers and their ability to raise student achievement despite pressures of standardization and possible school sanctions. Understanding teachers and their needs is the key. Teachers are the main facilitators of this policy. They are the direct link between policy and students through their social enactment of the policy. It would prove useful then to better support teachers in their efforts. However, as indicated in chapter four with regards to the dilemmas emerging from testing policy, raising student achievement with a compressed curriculum and less staffing support creates an hindrance to not only teaching practice and student achievement but also the long-term success of testing policy and NCLB.

This means that as already argued, teachers need more supports for development and opportunities for empowerment in order to meet the needs of their students, foster effective and culturally relevant practice and achieve policy objectives. Teacher participants maintain that lower class size, increased staffing and direct financial support
for the latter are important steps that need to be incorporated into the support component of NCLB. Furthermore, teacher participants call for less test preparation materials and instead, increased funding for the staffing required to accomplish the objectives set before teachers by the policy and the ever-changing context of urban schools. Isabel explains that:

we have testing materials out the wazoo. There is tons of money for that…[and external professional development] is a waste of time…for example, the in-service on [the state test] gave useless information like 1,000 tests were misplaced in North Carolina when graded. What supports could exist would be lower class size…have a special ed teacher for each grade level…it makes me angry that we put our money into the other stuff and not staffing. (formal interview, 3/23/04)

Since professional development is a key in the legislation to improving teacher quality, then adding the above proposed changes could address local needs and help decrease the discrepancies between policy objectives and local meanings of the policy. In addition, these changes along with constructive professional development efforts would address the effects of testing policy sanctions upon teachers and schools. This is an area not supported by the legislation. In other words, when sanctions begin to affect a school culture and teachers/practice, these efforts could support the school and create a space for communication on how to address school needs rather than simply punishing their actions. This would address the criticism of the policy that argues that sanctions create a form of discrimination against schools and teachers who are working in urban settings trying to already do the work that the legislation charges since there are no supports incorporated into the policy itself.

Moreover, to make supports that are relevant to teacher realities and needs, teacher participants assert that not only should professional development efforts reflect
local meanings but that teacher voice needs to be an active part of the implementation of the policy at all levels. Bianca suggested that the policy afford further research collecting teacher input to testing effects and relevant changes needed for legislative sustainability. She explains:

I also feel that it’s a huge undertaking but important for the government to survey the teachers to get more input, [from] the people actually in the field teaching. Just seems like we should have more input than just having representatives of the profession telling you input but actually getting input FROM the teachers. I think that would help positively. (formal interview, 3/15/04)

She does add that along with this effort, teachers as individuals and as a collective force must find ways to be more politically involved in the legislative process that creates educational policy. She does not place the entire responsibility for change and better communication on the policymakers.

*Policy and Economic Effects of the Local Community.*

Second, teacher participants assert that the effectiveness of the policy will continue to be undermined until the economic context of the local community, more specifically, the poverty that students and parents encounter is addressed in comparative policy. Throughout the research process, teachers cited parental support and economic status as major influences on student achievement that exist outside the purview of school and teachers. However, neither social services nor economic growth are components of the testing policy or the wider context of NCLB. Each teacher indicated that parental support is key to student development but that the economic challenges of poverty often impede such support. Isabel compared the reality between the urban and suburban settings - “Obviously there’s a problem when 30 percent of the school can’t [score]. And in the suburbs 100 percent of the kids can…[It’s] parent support at home (formal
interview, June 12, 2004).” She attributed the challenges of poverty and low job rates as contributing factors to low parental support.

Nonetheless, I argue that for the legislation to effectively address the necessary changes of implementation as indicated by the literature, the economic component must be included in the accountability measure of NCLB. To address one aspect of children’s’ lives without considering the economic context only creates another discrepancy between policy objectives and local meanings. This will also create additional problems that the government will need to counter eventually if not addressed now. Ladson-Billings (2005, February) calls for such a comprehensive and respectful policy to create and encourage citizenship instead of piecemeal actions. Developing citizenship with comprehensive policy will address the needs of the community and in turn, support the school and teachers. In addition, teacher participants also posited that testing policy should include student and parental accountability to better support the school/teacher/community relationship.

Thirdly, the literature on the status of NCLB and testing policy calls for additional exploration of the implementation process of the policy at the state level to determine what supports are needed to better develop the policy. This study places itself in the gap in the literature on local context and addresses issues of the local implementation process and the supports needed for teachers. Bianca recommended the following specific changes in the policy itself and the process of policy.

In order to achieve success, clarification on the implementation, procedures, communication with teachers, full funding of the mandates, and inclusion of teachers from the frontline in the process need to happen. Otherwise, this NCLB creation and implementation occurs in a vacuum and is ineffective and unsuccessful. (formal interview, 11/11/05)
Other teacher participants argued that in order for the policy to achieve its goals of increased student achievement in the four subaggregated groups, that testing should not be the only form of assessment used in the overall policy. The impact of testing as a sole measurement is discussed at length in chapter four. Umberto, like other teacher participants, called for alternative assessment or additional assessments to standardized testing. He explained that “I think student achievement should be assessed through oral examination, portfolios, and interviews without a written component [for special education students] when necessary (formal interview, October 4, 2005).”

*Policy and the Purpose of Schools.*

The final implication that teachers assert for policy centers on the role of the school within the cultural practices of the local community. Teacher participants argued that to better reconcile the discrepant actions of local schools and teachers with policy objectives, that the latter must afford and financially support actions that reposition the role of the school in the local community. These are efforts not always explicitly connected to testing policy. In other words, teachers explained that schools and teachers alike must reflect on and support the needs and culture of the local community but that the current legislation does not support or allow time for such development. Umberto posited that in order for the school to be successful in student achievement, whether through testing or other tools of measurement, that it needs to be the center of the community. He continued that the idea of a school as the center of a community as in Center City is what makes the urban city unique. He described the power of the newly developed co-curricular programs at DPS that bridge community and school as examples of the potential for school/community relationships.
[School] is not a place where you go, get smarter and leave. It's, it's a part of your community and what's really taught me that is the sports program we’ve got here and the dance program and because that's when you see the community. Everybody rallies behind the soccer team. Everybody rallies behind the Latin dance and coming to see acting performances. People, a school is an important part of a neighborhood in [Center City] it's the ultimate though. It should be looked at that way…That to me, when you come to school, it's basically the neighborhood clubhouse…If you come at it from that point, then you really understand the impact of a school, and you’re working to improve it and it’s not a place, it’s not a business. It’s not a commercial atmosphere in any way, shape, or form. (formal interview, 10/4/04)

Other teacher participants extended the benefits of school/community relationships to include the impact upon teacher relationships with students and cultural awareness. It is important to note at this juncture that in chapter four several participants argued that the testing policy encouraged teachers to regard students in terms of test scores while not affording time or opportunity to get to know the whole child and individual culture. It is just as important to note, however, that each participant in this study took time to spend with students outside the classroom either during sports or co-curricular programs.

Isabel explained that affording teachers such opportunities to be involved with the community impacts their practice as well. She added:

I think that being with kids in the after-school stuff I do out of school [is a way that I develop awareness of student needs and culture]. I think that’s where I really see these kids. And to come to understand a lot of them better…When we are out doing girls on the run and when you’re seeing their parents, when you’re meeting their families…and it’s not like you’re in your classroom, all of sudden you see a whole different side of that kid and you definitely see them as a kid and not just as a student in front of you. (formal interview, 5/18/04)

Umberto further explained the benefits of such programs and school positioning for teaching practice and bridging cultural understanding.

Because I’m not only a [teacher in the classroom] but I’m also the basketball coach, I’m also the soccer coach, so I see them in a different
way and they go WOW- you’re with me during this time that I love and I trusted you…and you guided me…and I see how that kinda turns over to [the classroom]...It changes everything. And they were going to fight me no matter what and I coach some of their cousins in soccer. And in this [Hispanic] neighborhood, that’s important. And they hear their cousins say…he really helped me with this and suddenly they start to HEAR me differently. Because they know me not as somebody trying to get them to [only] do algebra but also they know me as somebody who’s guided them. (formal interview, 5/27/04)

Like the importance of policy addressing the economic context of students and schools, the role of schools in the community concurrently impacts school/teacher/community relationships and teacher practice. Similar to the implications for professional development around collaboration, teacher participants asserted that the sustainability and effectiveness of the testing policy and the collective legislation of NCLB depends on affording opportunities for school/teacher/community collaboration. Consideration will now be given to the implications of this study that inform scholarly knowledge.

**Implications of the Study for Scholarly Understandings of Policy and Practice**

The implications of this study for scholarly knowledge proceed from the sociocultural and critical ways of knowing and viewing knowledge construction and the feminist stance toward the research process. More specifically, this study is located in the sociocultural theoretical lens that views policy as a social practice and the critical theoretical framework that describes how asymmetrical power relations constitute social and cultural production. While this study examines the experiences of teachers through these optics, their narratives demonstrate particular principles of the theory and how the recursive power dynamics and local meanings of an individual situate knowledge. Not only does this study add to sociocultural understandings of policy in the particular exploration of a new federal legislation but it also describes how the power of the policy
and local power dynamics impact teachers and their practice. Furthermore, the collaborative nature of the research as based on the feminist principles of research adds to the scholarly knowledge that addresses such ethical issues as the purposefulness of research, reciprocity, and resultant power dynamics inherent to the process that inform findings. This study also evokes the powerful potential that such methods and approach to research can create for teacher practice, school understandings, and policy contexts. This is theory applied in context of schools and teacher lives.

*Sociocultural Approach to Policy and the Role of the Researcher.*

First, the study contributes to the sociocultural understandings of policy as a social dynamic that constitutes local meanings through social and cultural production of knowledge. The experiences of these teacher participants depict how the testing policy is enacted and what effects this process has upon teacher practice and issues of diversity and equity. This was the focus of the study. It is important to note that this study extends the sociocultural literature on NCLB and contributes a local understanding of the policy in an urban context with a solid history of school reform efforts. However, what this study contributes most to theoretical knowledge is the understanding of the researcher role in the construction of sociocultural inquiry. While this study was premised on the descriptive framework of sociocultural approach to policy in conjunction with critical theory and its focus on praxis, it became apparent how important the positioning of the researcher is to the access given and subsequent grounding of data in local meanings. Sociocultural theory explains that policy is culturally recursive as individual actors reinterpret and negotiate new meanings of the policy through daily interactions and practice (Cade and Levinson, 2001).
Nevertheless, while this study demonstrates how teachers did this, it argues that to truly understand the social and cultural process of knowledge construction that the role of the researcher is just as important to consider in the grounding of findings. This means that while sociocultural theory examines social practices and meaning making of the actors within, it does not place a large emphasis on the power dynamics of the researcher role in this process. It does argue for ethical consideration of the researcher role but does not whole-heartedly embrace it as a key and necessary link to data understandings. I argue that this study and its findings - the narratives of the teachers within the framework of this policy - would not have been as grounded in local meanings without clear exploration and reflection on researcher role, rapport, and interaction with the cultural site of the teachers and school. In other words, the role of the researcher in this sociocultural located study extended beyond ethical issues to become an active component of understanding. This study presents an approach to sociocultural theory that embraces researcher role, rapport, and access as main components of the data and not simply ethical considerations that impact the trustworthiness or validity of findings. I believe that the fusion of sociocultural theory and its approach to cultural practices with critical theory and its positioning of power in knowing creates more salient and rich data and reflective findings.

_Collaboration as a Space for Critique._

Second, the implication of the study for critical theory center on the use of collaborative methods and the collaborative essence of research as key tools for ethical and transformative research. It is through the use of this collaborative and messy theoretical approach to research that the nature of critical theory was applied as
participants constructed new meanings, reflected on this knowledge, asked connecting questions, and developed new understandings and created relevant action. While critical theory embraces the political nature of research and that all truth is subjective, I believe that the collaborative methods and approach not only influenced participant action and deeper findings but also better critiqued the research itself. Critical theory is often criticized because of its claim to illuminate oppressive power dynamics and encourage action without a clear critique of its own role in the power dynamics of research and resultant oppression. This study answers this critique to an extent by providing an example of how collaborative methods create a political, messy, and vulnerable space for the researcher as well to be challenged, questioned and reflective of her role and power during data collection, data analysis and beyond. It has been an incredible learning experience to honor the principles of open, reflective dialogue that position me as a topic of discussion along with interpretations of teacher experience with testing policy.

*The Realism Bridge: Approach that Crosses Policy, Practice, and Theory.*

Thirdly, to answer participants’ calls for realistic policy based on realistic research, this study aimed to locate findings in local meanings, interpret themes and experience along with participants and create reciprocity between research purpose and lives of teachers. The study aimed to construct research that could serve teacher knowledge and empower teacher practice. Condliffe-Lagemann (2000) writes that educational research has been used historically to focus on issues of change not perceived as relevant to teachers. This has perpetuated the difference between policy, research, and schools. Condliffe-Lagemann (2000) explains that:

it would not be inaccurate to say that the most powerful forces to have shaped educational scholarship over the last century have tended to push
The focus of this dissertation was to redirect the practices of research to incorporate interaction with practice and policy at the same time. The aim was to not only create a useful dissertation but to answer teacher calls for realistic research or more specifically, research that bridged the gap between theory, practice and policy. It is important to note that my teacher identity located in the newly developing researcher self felt compelled to do the same. The collaborative methods and approach to research combined with the teacher/researcher role I created and also had created for me in the research process made these goals possible. I now describe how these practices created a “bridge” for teachers, policy, and scholarship.

The research practices based on the principles employed in this study and the theoretical standpoints combined will be forthcoming described in this section as the “realism bridge” that answered teacher challenges for realistic research/policy. Elmore (2003) calls for the “backwards mapping” of policy or “reform from the inside out”, meaning research that speaks to the meanings of teachers first in order to perpetuate useful and effective research that will work in schools. Temes (2002) adds to this argument for purposeful research that addresses teacher realities when he argues that the needs of the teachers must be first addressed before reform can impact the needs of students. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) call this an “awakening the sleeping giant” when teacher development is directly supported and integrated into policy construction instead of an extra component of policy. They argue that reform efforts would be more effective if teacher leadership was incorporated as an equal part of the policy process.
I build upon these concepts of useful policy to include the creation of useful research that crosses borders beyond policy and schools to include academia and the research process itself. The combination of collaborative practices and concepts in this study create such a “realism bridge” or a study that bridges policy, practice, and theory through a focus on the following: respectful observations, openness regarding the political nature of research, flexible participation in the research site based on local needs, blurred role as researcher and data source, open-ended dialogue, reflection for participants and researcher, honest and messy conversation that incorporated new meanings, and the development of personal awareness and honesty to enable praxis that is recursive to more questioning and dialogue.

Using the framework of the realism bridge encourages realistic research that can explore political, messy topics and facilitate relevant research for scholarship and policy. Since the dialogue throughout the research grounds questions in local meanings, the findings of the research are also further grounded in local meanings. Furthermore, the reflection and negotiated and renegotiated meanings of the dialogue and subsequent analysis also help to create findings that are relevant and realistic to the realities of teachers and schools. The research then creates clear exploration of teacher lived experience from which policymakers can better inform their decisions. In turn, the resultant policy can be more clearly relevant to practice and thus useful to teachers. In addition, educational research can use this approach to further develop its knowledge base and usefulness to policy and practice, thus creating a realism bridge. After consideration of the implications for scholarly knowledge, I now address the limitations of the study and implications for future research that extend upon these findings.
Reflections on the Study

Limitations of the Study and Implications for Future Studies

“How long do you think you’ll be able to sustain a democracy without a dialogue?” (West, 2004, October)

As Cornel West (2004) points out, the importance of sustaining and expanding a democracy is predicated on the centrality of dialogue to create useful and effective social and cultural change. I borrow this argument and apply it to the discussion on testing policy and teachers. It is the consideration of the limitations of this study and how to expand the dialogue and reflection begun to inform exploration of teachers and policy through future studies that will now be addressed.

The participants in this study represented a variety of grade levels from grades 3-8 and content areas to compare and contrast the experiences of teachers with testing policy. These teacher participants were from grades that were included in the measurement of adequate yearly progress in NCLB. Some of the teachers were from grades in which standardized test scores were also included for student promotion in Center City. Two participants did, however, represent content areas that are not measured for NCLB. One of the latter however, was impacted by the testing policy for student promotion. It is important to consider how teacher experiences might vary or remain constant if exploration included a wider sample across grade levels and content areas. Would the experiences of 3-8 grade teachers in the content areas solely measured for NCLB position the testing policy differently than those in the non-recorded content areas as explored in this study? Would the experiences vary or remain the same if teachers were considered from only the grade levels that are included for NCLB and student promotion? It would be prudent to explore how teacher participants view and experience the testing policy and
the overall legislation of NCLB across varied samples of grade levels and content areas to extend the grounded findings illuminated in this study. In doing this, the findings of this study would be more transferable across the realism bridge for policy, academia, and teacher educators/teachers and also more generalizable.

Another consideration that holds importance for the generalizability of this study is the issue of teacher experience. The participants in this study ranged from a first year teacher to a twenty-seven year veteran. While their comments and positioning of the testing policy varied based on knowledge and experience with testing policy, other factors such as gender and race also played a role in their meaning making and use of the testing policy. How would first year teachers with no experience with testing policy in any form position and respond to the testing policy of NCLB? Veteran teachers or even two or three year experienced teachers in Center City were already familiar with testing policy in the form of student promotion. Would first year teachers as a collective express their views more or less than experienced seasoned reform-minded teachers? Would first year teachers close their doors and ground their practice in the theories from their teacher education programs or to the pressures of standardization from the test? Studies that explored this sample in comparison to the sample of this study would greatly inform teacher education and its efforts to adhere to policy and research agendas.

The issue of geographical location is also necessary to consider before generalizing the findings of this study to further explore the role of cultural and economic practices upon teachers and testing policy. This study explored teacher experiences with testing policy within NCLB in a large, urban school district. The local community and student population of this study was culturally diverse and low-income. The participants,
except for the first year teacher, were experienced with widespread educational reform efforts in Center City and the challenges of teaching in an urban school district. This means that the participants had already experienced various curricular debates, external policy directives and accountability measures created by the district leadership. While this extended the findings of this study since teachers were not just beginning to experience testing policy, it is necessary to consider other geographical locations for research. How would teachers in either a rural or suburban district experience testing policy? How would the economic differences in these areas as compared to the urban experience impact teacher practice and testing policy? Would schools in rural and suburban areas afford more or less freedom to teacher practice despite testing policy? What dilemmas of diversity and equity would emerge from the testing policy in non-urban areas that might have a more homogenous student population? How would teachers in these areas that have not experienced widespread educational reform respond to and participate in collaborative research? Consideration of these questions in other sites would build upon the data of this study and add to the call for “reform from the inside out” as well as the call to explore the implementation process of NCLB in the literature.

I must also consider the issue of how the data would have been grounded differently if I had conducted the research in a district in which I was a classroom teacher. Moreover, it is significant to explore how the study would have developed in terms of methods, local meanings, and contextual access if I had actually been one of the teacher participants myself. If I had explored teacher experience in a district in which I was familiar with the history of teachers and testing policy, would researcher access have
been grounded in local meanings or hindered by administration? If I had included myself and my teaching practice in the exploration of testing policy and teacher experience, how would collaboration with other participants have been affected? Would collaborative methods have encouraged deeper access to participant experiences and in turn, also created a political space for teacher development? If I had been a participant as well, the power dynamics of professional relationships between teachers/self and administration/self might have played a larger role in contextualizing findings. Or if I had been a teacher participant, I may have had greater contextual information to local meanings and data. I cannot help but remember the power that the tape recorder wielded during interviews or how the possibility of ramifications for participation in the research affected participants. If I had been a teacher participant/researcher, I may have been more sensitive to these power dynamics since I would have already been an experienced member of the school culture. These are issues that need to be examined before the findings of this study could be replicated or widely applicable to other teachers and districts.

I also contemplate the idea as Cornel West (2004, October) asserts that “no particular lens has a monopoly on truth”. In other words, what would this study look like if located in a different theoretical approach? How would this inform the data and more importantly, advocate for teachers? As critical and feminist ways of thinking explain, there are many truths in the world that mediate social and cultural knowledge. These truths are also constituted by asymmetrical power dynamics inherent to the social production of knowledge. With respect to this belief, what other theoretical camps would have served the narratives and experiences of the teacher participants? I wonder how a
study using discourse analysis to explore the power of the actual text of the testing policy and the local meanings of participants might look like. I also consider how the postmodern approach to knowing and its views of social categories might deepen participant reflections and knowledge. Would a researcher located in these ways of knowing have been able to see different themes? And considering the political emphasis on quantitative research and its methods in the Bush administration, I also consider how a study located in the latter might further extend teacher realities or experiences to policymakers.

Regardless of my own personal beliefs and views toward schools, policy, and teachers, it is important to the data analysis and also my own professional development to consider other perspectives and how they might also inform the topic of inquiry. Alexander Russo (2005, February) challenges all those involved or concerned with schools, teaching and children to respond to NCLB in one of three ways. He explains that you can 1) fight the legislation, 2) ignore the legislation and do your own thing while ignoring the effects this choice has on yourself and practice or 3) find a way to make the policy work for your teaching and your students. I apply this explanation to the exploration of theoretical camps regarding this topic. It is important to find how to make the policy work for teachers and students and considering other theoretical perspectives can only enhance the dialogue, not limit research findings.

These issues and questions explored in the text require additional reflection and exploration across disciplines in education, more specifically teacher education and policy in education. Through extensive discussion of the named topics and how they may afford deeper understanding of teachers and policy itself, further studies may build
upon these findings and deepen the generalizability of data. Consideration of the aforementioned issues may also increase the understandings of teachers’ experience with testing policy and the overall legislation of NCLB and thus, create relevant praxis. I now reflect on my self and developing selves as a researcher, student, teacher, and teacher educator within this study and its findings.

Crossing the Borders: Reflections of the Study from the Perspective of the Researcher

Who am I and how have I grown through the research process? What borders do I now inhabit and cross over daily through the learned praxis created by this study? These are questions that permeated my reflections, dialogue with participants and analysis as I aimed to gain access to the research site and school/teacher culture, develop researcher/participant/student rapport, and ground the data corpus in local meanings. These are questions that constituted my understandings before, throughout the research and continue today. I am a public school teacher. I am a teacher educator. I am a policy analyst. I am a newly developing educational researcher and scholar. And my humanity engulfs and informs all these layered selves and identities. At times, these selves are in isolation or sometimes in conjunction with each other and blurred. I cross the borders of these selves effortlessly at times without realizing I have even done it or at times have to concentrate more on one self over another. I am a work in progress but confidant in the lessons learned so far from this process of knowing and becoming. I am constantly learning from it all. It is the blurredness of these selves that interacted with participants and shaped the rapport, knowing, and data corpus. While I believe that I worked hard to also honor the selves of the participants, I openly accept and name the active border
crossing of my own selves in the research process and how this affected the data and participants.

To align with the premise of qualitative research as suggested by Glesne (1999), I followed the ethical practices of member checks and grounded emerging thoughts and themes in the data observations and analysis. Questions were grounded in the local meanings and explored to validate their usefulness to participants and the research. The human element of qualitative research was the focus of the study. To align with the sociocultural tenets of this research, I aimed to understand local social and cultural practices through recursive and constant observations, dialogue, and reflection in order to ground the data and emergent questions in local truths. To honor the critical ways of knowing in the research, I openly discussed and embraced the political power dynamics of the topic and school/teacher culture to foster naming and learning from such conversation that would create action. It is through the interaction of all three approaches that concurrently, such praxis was encouraged - for the participants and myself - and the implications of the study became known and heard, loudly.

How did this process of knowing and learning about ways of knowing in the context of testing policy impact my role as a researcher as well as the other identities that combine to make myself the blurred individual that I am? How did this inform the study itself? At the beginning of the research process, I was a participant observer in all five classrooms and in the context of the school itself. I got to know the teachers and their students by attending social events after-school, eating lunch in the teachers’ lounge, and helping occasionally in their classrooms. It was during this time that the teachers expressed their concerns and initial opinions regarding testing policy within NCLB.
Standardized testing as a component of the student promotion policy and in NCLB permeated most conversations regardless of context. Teachers were talking about and responding to this policy and practice. Teachers were concerned about their own practice and the impact the interaction of policy and practice would have upon their students. They cared about doing the best for their students and they reflected on how to continue to accomplish this in the developing context of NCLB. They seemed frustrated, somewhat despaired, energetic, passionate, and angry all at the same time. Most of all, they were focused on their students. That is what lead them to the participation in the research I proposed that would help clarify the policy in practice from their perspectives.

During this time, teachers began to trust me as a teacher and later as a researcher. I struggled with how to qualify the objectives of the research with the needs of the teachers and the policy. I found myself constantly observing and questioning local meanings and interaction in every context. And I questioned the truth of reciprocity throughout the process but moreso during the initial phase. It seemed that all the benefits of the research were for my gain as a researcher despite my efforts and goal of creating equity and reciprocity. As the teachers positioned me as another teacher and began to trust me, they continually shared that they were doing fine, no need to change the research, just do what I needed to do for the project. I felt guilty and questioned how the blurred positioning of me as a teacher first, researcher second might cloud the process and resultant findings. While I was confident in the theoretical positions that located the study, I was also aware of the trustworthiness of the process and how my role influenced the process and eventual findings. I continued to reflect and write on these issues and occasionally discuss my concerns with participants. They were always supportive and
remained true to the position that the research was for me despite my explicit expressions about mutuality. I attribute this response to the teacher participant view that research was usually irrelevant to their realities in classroom as explained earlier in the text. I believe that since the teachers trusted me and positioned me as resource for their teaching to various extents dependent on the individual, they were not able to focus on the research process itself until later in the research process. I call this positioning and the role it created as teacher/researcher/academic blurred. During this time, I expected the research process to have a clear beginning, middle and end and had not learned yet that the control over the process was not mine. I did not, however, recognize how reciprocity was developing at this time until toward the end of the process and during the analysis stage. I now know that the research process was on-going from the moment I entered the school and was welcomed into the classrooms.

I can remember though how teachers began to become more aware and vocal about the research once formal interviews began and the tape recorder loomed over these interactions. Participants were concerned about possible ramifications of their participation in the research in terms of the rapport with teammates, colleagues and administration. We revisited the trustworthiness criteria of the research and I reiterated how collaborative methods could afford participants much control. The research process then predominately defined teacher/researcher/academic rapport and teacher meaning making. I adhered to the collaborative nature of the approach and the collaborative methods of the study - co-constructing questions, gaining feedback throughout the discussions and reflecting on connections together when possible. I eventually found that as teachers became more comfortable with my active role as a researcher, they then
continued with their positioning of me as a teacher first, researcher second. They challenged previous assumptions, had open, political and passionate conversations with me and engaged in reflection about these issues. They began to own the process as evident through their responses. And as a researcher, I became more aware of the grounded theory developing about teachers and testing policy that I could share with various fields and advocate for these teachers who worked so hard to honor diversity and student culture.

Again, this growth provided a messy vulnerable time as I struggled with remaining true to the tenets of qualitative and sociocultural/critical research and honoring the rapport between the participants and myself. I now realize through much deliberation and analysis that the researcher and participants were both growing and learning throughout the entire process. It was not until I was able to step back from the research site and discuss findings of the study with participants that I was able to name that growth as evident through rich and salient discussions and praxis. The content and context of the reflective discussions were powerful and informative throughout the research process because of the messiness of the theoretical locations and methods.

For example, teacher participants took their developing knowledge and renegotiated meanings and practice. Bianca remembers the usefulness of reflective practice and has attended more school governance meetings to become more politically involved. Isabel acknowledges her cultural identity in her practice. Umberto stopped ignoring the testing policy and is now exploring how to reconcile his practice and policy in a developmentally and culturally relevant manner for his students. He is also more aware of the practices of school governance after research discussions. Susan decided
that she needed to become more active herself and “if I’m going to talk and complain and get passionate, I need to be involved.” She is now the new school union representative. Daisy is now collaborating weekly with her teammates on curriculum and other practice issues. She is working toward the issue of teacher community as discussed in her reflections.

As a public school teacher, I understand the experiences and challenges of the participants with testing policy and issues of diversity and equity. As a young policy analyst, I can now see how the social enactment of policy is categorized by a discrepancy between policy text and its discourse and local context. As a teacher educator, I appreciate the call for training that better prepares teachers for the political arena they now enter in today’s schools and the focus on skills needed to sustain and further develop teacher community and teacher leadership. As a newly developing researcher, I am excited about the findings of this study, the potential of collaborative methods through the realism bridge, and how future studies may build upon the themes of this study and these teachers’ lives.

I cannot express how this process and the study itself changed who I am as a human being. I cannot thank the teacher participants of this study enough for their time and honesty. I respect the vulnerability that this research placed upon them and their practice. It is this gift of learning from these human beings that has transformed not only the data but also my knowing and worldview. I have grown in all aspects of my selves because of what I have learned from these teachers and their experiences with testing policy. I have asked new questions of myself and of research that would not have been possible without their example of leadership, love and caring in the classroom. These
teachers taught me how to create and sustain real research and I developed my skills because of them. My experiences in their classrooms and lives reminded me of the power dynamics in schools and teaching and how this can illuminate knowing. Finally, these experiences have foregrounded the importance of listening to and supporting teachers as a necessary tool for positive reform and positive education. Listening to and learning from the teachers is necessary to the future and success of schools and our democratic ideologies. It is because of these lessons that I now desire to use my blurred selves in a public school classroom and conduct research on the questions of this study in my own classroom context. I could not have grown or come to this place in my life without these human beings, their reflections, and challenging questions. I will continue to learn and be guided by these experiences in my personal and professional endeavors. The teachers in this study have truly transformed me. It is my hope that their experience can now transform research and policy.

Conclusion

The lessons learned as a researcher from this process will continue to be tested and developed throughout my professional work. I expect the power of this study to touch all of my developing selves through my work with public schools, scholarship, teachers, and policy. I realize the importance of a realism bridge for research and an open dialogue regarding the worlds of policy, practice, and theory. I understand the power and necessity of theory to the development of democratic ideals in teaching and schools. I now appreciate the way of viewing the world and truths that theories provide. It is the applied use of this emergent knowledge based on the experiences of teachers with policy that is the challenge for my professional life. The worlds of policy and
scholarship have much to learn, as demonstrated by the data and teachers of this study, from teachers. It is my responsibility to continue to honor the lessons of the teachers in this work and to incorporate this knowledge through constant reflection, dialogue, questioning and recursive action. I now must attend to how to continue to advocate such ways of knowing and the teacher experience after the research is over. I must make the data and teacher issues real to my own work and life and heard by others. This is the call for true democratic education, to listen to the teachers. In the current changing political times of public education, we can no longer afford not to.


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