ABSTRACT

HAMM, LINDSAY MAXWELL. “The Art of Education is Dead:” A Mixed-Methods Study of Public-School Teachers’ Dignity at Work during North Carolina’s Neoliberal Shift (Under the direction of Steve McDonald)

Debate about the purpose of public schools in the U.S is omnipresent. Reformers, academics, and politicians debate which values schools should instill, who is best suited to teach students, ideal learning outcomes, and the most effective way to measure successful teaching and learning. The tensions have resulted in several eras of education reform, each critical of the current set of public-school teachers. The current reform paradigm argues for a neoliberal shift of education in the United States, contending that free market forces are the best way to fix what reformers view as a “broken” education system. Federal programs, including No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RttT), opened the education “market,” first to accreditation, examination, and curriculum companies and then to private companies running charter schools in direct competition with their public predecessors. North Carolina (NC) became a frontrunner state in the current, neoliberal education shift after the 2013 legislative session, during which the state removed teacher tenure and moved millions in funding away from public to charter schools through an enlarged voucher program.

Most research into how this neoliberalist shift shapes schools focuses on student outcomes. Sociologists recently called on the field to study how neoliberal changes to education also change teachers’ jobs (see Connell 2013; Renzulli 2014). While education reformers often point to the possibility for higher salaries, new chances for promotion, and even more enthusiastic students and colleagues, sociologists fear that neoliberal changes to public schools will undermine teachers’ ability to achieve dignity at work, and in turn, the long-term health of the education field. Neoliberal reforms heavily focus on the actual labor of teaching as
legislation and new education programs embrace the neotayloristic assumptions and tactics deeply embedded in many of the free market business tactics they are adopting. This focus on labor has major implications for the 3.1 million people who work in U.S. public schools.

In this project, I use mixed-methods data collected from two-hundred and twenty-three public-school faculty in one NC Learning Education Agency (LEA) between 2012 and 2015 to assess how this neoliberal shift to North Carolina’s public education shaped teachers’ ability to attain dignity in their jobs. Analysis using grounded theory methods reveals that NC’s neoliberal shift undermines the structure of public schools as workplaces that allow teachers to attain dignity at work. Public-school teachers and administrators consistently reported that the way they used to teach and want to teach – the “art of teaching” – was not possible, if not entirely “dead,” in the current underfunded and chaotic education climate.

As teachers worked to safeguard their dignity some formed in-groups to effectively hoard resources from other groups of teachers in the school. This relational protection practice produced inequality within their schools. However, these effects were more pronounced among schools with limited resources and high levels of organizational chaos. Two organizational factors influenced whether or not teachers engaged in hoarding practices: (1) additional resources, and (2) effective management. But, neither of these conditions was sufficient. Teachers needed to work in schools led by a principal who had access to additional funding and used these resources to achieve their vision for success. Undermining public-school teachers’ conditions for attaining dignity at work has negative consequences for the health of the teacher labor force and student outcomes, suggesting the need for alternatives to the neoliberal reforms currently taking place in North Carolina and around the United States.
“The Art of Education is Dead:” A Mixed-Methods Study of Public-School Teachers’ Dignity at Work during North Carolina’s Neoliberal Shift

by
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all who work in North Carolina’s public school system. Most especially, this project is especially dedicated to those who allowed me to speak with and observe them in Pierce County\(^1\). Your strength, good humor, patience, struggles, and heart will stick with me always.

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\(^1\) All names are pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of study participants.
BIOGRAPHY

Lindsay Hamm grew up in Montpelier, Virginia. She graduated from Virginia Tech in 2009, with a Bachelor’s of Science in sociology and a minor in history. In 2011, she earned her Master’s in Science in Sociology from North Carolina State University, and her PhD in 2018. She is now a continuing lecturer in Purdue University’s Sociology Department.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Critics across the political spectrum call for reform of the United States' education system. Many point to minimizing the long-standing achievement gap between historically marginalized groups and the white, middle-class students the education system was designed to serve as the call to reform. Others argue that the nation’s students lag their Chinese, Japanese, and Scandinavian peers, which puts the U.S. at future economic disadvantage. No matter their reasoning, national and state programs overwhelmingly choose neoliberal reform policies. They believe that shifting education to function more like a free market - with schools competing like companies for students and their funding - will better serve students from all backgrounds. Over the past few years, North Carolina (NC) has taken the lead in neoliberal education reform. The state has increasingly allocated funds for vouchers to private schools, charters, and online academies while adopting more flexible working terms for public-school faculty and empirically based assessments for teachers and students.

Interviews with teachers (see Ravitch 2016) and classroom observation studies about neoliberalist changes to schools (i.e. Plank and Condliffe 2013) shed some light on how these reforms shape teachers’ work lives. But, they do not give a complete picture of how the 3.1 million people² working in U.S. public schools experience these fast-paced changes on the ground. Most current teachers entered a sector of loosely connected schools designed around a public service ethos which is now being reshaped by people largely outside of the field³ to one of individual units competing for a share of this newly-broadened education market. Sociological analysis rooted in labor process theories can help us better understand how public-school

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² US public primary and secondary schools (not including colleges and universities) employ more people than even Walmart, the country’s largest private employer.
³ This is common critique of education reforms across the country (see Ravitch 2016) and one that came up repeatedly in interviews.
teachers adapt to their quickly shifting employment field. More importantly, we can analyze whether the neoliberalist mandates undermine the conditions for public-school teachers to achieve a sense of dignity in their work. This latter assessment has implications for the wellbeing of teachers and students, as well as the longevity of the education system.

This study uses sociological theories about workplace dignity and relational inequality to analyze mixed-methods data collected from two-hundred-and-twenty-three public school teachers and faculty in North Carolina between 2012 and 2015 to answer these questions. In this first chapter, I describe the United States’ economic and political market-centered shift. A description of the shift in education follows. From there, I outline North Carolina’s recent neoliberal educational shift and explain how it provides an excellent case study for understanding how broader changes in the U.S. are shaping public teachers’ working conditions. This first chapter concludes with a roadmap for the following chapters.

THE NEOLIBERAL SHIFT

In the mid 1970’s, employers in the United States began turning to more flexible modes of production to remain competitive in the global economy (Krippner 2012). The large, bureaucratic organizations that got employees to “buy-in” to company goals during the age of the social contract were not responsive enough to remain competitive in quickly changing and increasingly risky international markets. Free-market supporters turned to a more neoclassical understanding – neoliberalism - of markets after 1970s stagflation to remain competitive in the new economy (Dumenil and Levy 2004; Jones 2012). Neoliberalism is a market ideology that stresses the power of free market forces – the “invisible hand” - to fairly regulate supply and demand of all goods and services (Connell 2010; Smith 1776). Neoliberal advocates, most notably President Ronald Reagan, push to remove regulations on market practices, including
fixed exchange rates, subsidies, taxes, and worker and consumer protections that may limit economic growth and trade. Then, in the absence of this regulation, consumers will only buy from producers doing a good job. Competition between producers will rein in misbehaviors like price-gouging and mismanagement (Connell 2010; Harvey 2005).

The U.S.’ current deregulation began in the early 1970s, as President Jimmy Carter’s administration worked to deregulate trucking, banking, and the airline industry (Castells 2001; Dumenil and Levy 2004; Jones 2012). President Ronald Reagan’s firing of more than eleven-thousand air traffic controllers striking for higher wages in 1981 serves as the U.S.’ symbolic turning point away from Keynesian structured markets. By branding the strike “illegal,” the federal government committed to backing the free-market forces of supply-and-demand to set wages over rates set through negotiation (McCartin 2011). Presidents Reagan and Clinton also cut support to social services by lowering federal taxes and replacing welfare with the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (Castells 2001; Jones 2012). Each of these actions stressed the responsibility of the individual and the power of the market over the government as the best regulator of economic and social life.

THE “EDUCATION CRISIS”

Education in the United States began shifting towards marketization in 1983 with the Reagan Administration’s publication of the A Nation at Risk report (Berliner and Biddle 1996; Bullough 2014; Slater 2015). This report emphasized that America’s public education was mediocre in comparison to other countries. This “education crisis” resonated with the country’s new global economic worries with its prediction that Japan and Russia’s superior education

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4 Education in the U.S. technically began this shift towards a market-based, new governance structure in 1978, as education funding in the state of California was massively undercut by steep property tax caps under Proposition 13 (Connell 2013).
systems would result in economies that would surpass the United States’ shortly. The narrative that the U.S.’s public schools are failing has dominated public opinion since (Fabricant and Fine 2015; Guggenheim 2010; Johnston 2014; Kumashiro 2012; Ravitch 2010).

However, many researchers feel that the “education crisis” was manufactured by those who did not fully understand how the tests compare across national education systems. U.S. schools are not failing in terms of education outcomes when compared to other countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Ravitch 2013, 2016; Berliner and Glass 2014). The tests are not directly comparable. First, test parameters are inconsistent across countries, leading to comparison problems that include translation issues, age of students, poverty rates of the students, and math system used (Berliner and Glass 2014).

Second, the generalized, “common,” nature of schooling in the U.S. makes direct comparisons of its education system to countries without generalized enrollment inequitable. Other Western education public school systems track students into different occupational or vocational schools instead of enrolling most students in academic programs kindergarten through the end of secondary education. Thus, the students taking the international standardized exams for mathematics only represent a homogenous group of the highest-achieving students in that subject (Trines 2016). In the United-States, all school-aged children are federally mandated to take all of the exams (Carnoy, Garcia, and Khavenson 2015; Ravitch 2013, 2016; Berliner and Glass 2014). Furthermore, the US educates a more diverse population than other countries. Although education spending has increased exponentially since the 1970s, much of this funding went into building special education programs as public education became more inclusive, as mandated by Congress in 1975 (Loveless 2011).
The U.S. also has a higher child poverty rate (over 20%) than the other industrialized nations it is frequently compared to on standardized scores (UNICEF 2012). In 2013, fifty-one percent of U.S. public school students came from low-income families (Southern Education Foundation 2015). Many of these low-income students in the U.S. are tracked from an early age but kept within the same schools as other students under the common school model (Darling-Hammond 2010; Oakes 2005). Moreover, we know that standardized-tests results are more highly correlated with parental socio-economic status (SES) than with student ability. This makes comparisons across countries one of the demographic make-up of the students rather than one of academic achievement (Reardon 2012; Rothstein 2004). Students from middle and high-SES backgrounds in the U.S. perform as well as students from other industrialized countries (Carnoy, Garcia, and Khavenson 2015; Carnoy and Rothstein 2013).

Thus, critics argue that the “education crisis” is focused on the wrong problems. Rather than focusing solely on teachers and classrooms, they point to rising inequality and childhood poverty within the U.S. as the primary driving force behind the international testing discrepancies. Critics also point to discrimination within education that reproduces class and ethnoracial inequalities both across and within schools (Darling-Hammond 2010; Ravitch 2016; Renzulli 2014).

**U.S. Education’s Neoliberal Shift**

Echoing the sentiments of private company CEOs in the 1970s, advocates of market-based reform for schools argued that public schools needed to be freed from the “bureaucratic shackles” the “common school” form held them under. Opening the schools to market forces would create competitive pressures and a feedback mechanism whereby parents and students would choose the best schools, leaving those with ineffective practices to reform or close. In the
long-run, the free market would instill this as a perpetual loop that would provide continual, evolving quality control to meet the changing needs of all students (Chubb and Moe 1990; Davies and Quirke 2005; Davies, Quirke and Aurini 2006; Hoxby 2003). Corporate-style reform embraces neoliberal philosophies that emphasize the free market, choice, accountability, and data-driven decision making.

In education, emphasizing these neoliberal goals translates to greater privatization, punishments and incentives for individual performance, centralizing power and curriculum, and using empirical assessments to evaluate employees, schools, learning education agencies (LEAs), and states (Ravitch 2016; Tirozzi 2013). Individual states began this shift in response to Reagans’ initial call in the early 1980s by implementing broad curriculum overhauls (Bullough 2014; Tirozzi 2013). Later, in the early 2000s, the federal government took greater control over education reform with President Bush’s No Child Left Behind (NCLB). President Obama has continued this legacy with the Race to the Top (RttT) program under the 2009 “American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), renewing adherence to many of the market-driven, top-down, neoliberal philosophies that formed the foundation of NCLB.

Neoliberal reformers favor data-driven decisions as an objective way to identify low-performing teachers, and settled on the standardized tests students now took as the best empirical measure available (Goldstein 2014; Ravitch 2016). NCLB included a provision that, in addition to setting state learning standards and creating standard exams, states should also hold their teachers accountable for making sure their students met the standards (Hinchcliffe 2015, 2016). RttT reasserted this emphasis, particularly in the four “Turnaround” models for low-performing

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5 The latest iteration of NCLB, “Every Student Succeeds” Act (ESSA), no longer includes this mandate, but highly recommends that states still hold teachers accountable to measurable scores. After the Act was signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015, states debated whether they should keep or reduce this part of teachers’ assessments. NC debated, but ultimately kept Standard 6 for the following year (Hinchcliffe 2015, 2016).
schools. Although few public-school teachers across the nation have been terminated for low test scores, reformers like Michelle Rhee of Washington D.C. have fired hundreds of teachers from their LEA’s under this philosophy (Dee and Wycoff 2015; Rhee 2013).

*North Carolina as a Microcosm of the U.S. Neoliberal Education Shift*

Education reformers and analysts point to North Carolina (NC) as the fore-runner of neoliberal education change after the 2012 elections (Ravitch 2016). The state participated in NCLB alongside the rest of the U.S. starting in 2000, but the neoliberal shift into market-based education policies ramped up in 2010 when NC successfully competed against 35 other states for one of the twelve second-round grants. The General Assembly was in the second year of budget cuts, keeping teacher salaries frozen and cutting textbook funding from $116 million down to $2.5 million (Wagner 2014). Winning the federal grant brought nearly $400 million in federal funding and meant agreeing to overhaul NC’s lowest performing schools under the READY initiative. All schools also had to adopt the Common Core Curriculum and revamped their assessment and accountability models (NC DPI 2015). In its application for the grant, NC identified 5% of the State’s schools, 118 in total, as “low performing” and thus eligible for implementing one of four “Turnaround Models” designed by the U.S. Department of Public Education (USED) to revamp the schools. Each of the 118 schools underwent transformations including closure, replacement of existing leadership and falling under new accountability guidelines and programs (NC DPI 2015).

The 2012 fall elections further solidified the market-based shift in NC public schools as the governorship and both General Assembly houses became majority Republican for the first time in more than a century. The summer 2013 legislative session focused heavily on revamping the state’s education system, jumping to the forefront of the Nation’s privatization movement.
The budget did not include money for teachers’ raises, which had remained stagnant since the 2008 economic downturn. Limits on class sizes were removed, and funding for thousands of teachers’ assistants was cut from the budget. These cuts meant that public-school faculty entered the 2013-2014 academic year for a fifth consecutive year of pay raise freezes and steep budget cuts while the population was continuing to grow (ACLU 2013; DPI 2013).

The pinnacle of North Carolina’s neoliberal shift was the 2013 “Excellent Public Schools Act,” (part of the “Appropriations Act”) Senate Bill 402 (2013 N.C. Session Laws c.360). Teachers lost their tenure status and increased pay for advanced degrees. The act also mandated that all LEAs in North Carolina had to choose and inform the faculty they select as the “top 25%” for longer contracts than those offered to the other 75% of licensed educational professionals employed by the county, alongside compounding pay increases in exchange for early forfeiture of their “career status” (Crumpler 2013).

Furthering the neoliberal shift, “The North Carolina Opportunity Scholarship Act,” allocated $10 million into a voucher system for charter schools. Eligible students would receive up to $4,200 for private school tuition, taken directly from the public-school LEA they would have attended (Quick 2017). The legislature also ended the North Carolina Teaching Fellows program in 2011, making the 2015 class the final cohort. The thirty-year program provided four-year college scholarships to top-ranking high school students in exchange for at least four years in a North Carolina classroom. More than 8,500 students graduated and worked in schools all across the state. The graduates tended to stay in the classroom, with eighty-percent staying in the classroom after their four-year commitment and seventy-five percent still teaching six years later. Many of those who participated in the program remained in state’s education system, moving into leadership positions (Public School Forum of North Carolina 2016). Some of this
money was moved into Teach for America funds. However, Teach for America is a private company, and its participants tend to be less invested in the community and often leave after their initial two-year commitment (Fitzsimmon 2015; Ravitch 2016).

Education agencies around NC fervently contested the bill, with the Wake County School Board (which includes the state capital, Raleigh, NC) voting unanimously in favor of asking the State to repeal the law in March 2014. On April 23, 2014, two LEAs, Guilford and Durham counties, won an injunction against the bill requiring LEAs to identify and offer the top 25% of teachers in the LEA raises by June 30th, 2014 on the grounds that asking teachers to do so in exchange for their “career status” is unconstitutional (Burns and Binker 2014). This meant that teachers who had tenure would keep it, but teachers without it could not earn it in the future.

Over a decade, North Carolina had dropped from ranking nineteenth in teacher’s salaries in 2001 to forty-seventh in 2013, dropping more than thirteen percent between 1999 and 2015 when adjusted for inflation (Hinchcliffe and Mims 2017; NC DPI 2015). This rate was significantly higher than the nearly two percent decrease the average teacher salary in the U.S. decreased over the same time (Hinchcliffe and Mims 2017). Textbook funding dropped seventy-eight percent, from sixty-eight dollars per student to fifteen dollars in 2014. Similarly, spending per pupil for instructional supplies like computers dropped from an average of fifty-nine dollars in 2008 to twenty-eight dollars in 2014 (NC Public Schools 2016). In 2014, North Carolina ranked forty-sixth in the country for per-pupil spending (Doran 2016). Many in the state were concerned about how these cuts would shape the future of North Carolina’s public-school system, especially if they remained permanent (Imig and Smith 2013; NC Public Schools 2013).

In the summer 2014 session, Governor McCrory pushed through a new teacher payment schedule to address the above trend in NC’s education system. Advocates lauded it as a
landmark victory for teachers, asserting that public educators would receive, on average, a seven percent pay raise for the 2014-2015 school year (Binker and Leslie 2014). In reality, the new salary system subsumed longevity pay\(^6\) and resulted in a one-to-eighteen percent pay raise for teachers, favoring those with five or fewer years of teaching experience. To cover the teacher-pay expenditure, the General Assembly pulled money from the budget for teacher’s assistants in the second and third grades and Medicaid assistance, as part of what NC House Speaker Thom Tillis dubbed the “divide and conquer” approach to appeasing constituents while trying to balance the budget (Leslie and Burns 2014; Leslie 2011). The State Senate also voted to repeal the national Common Core curriculum and created a new advisory commission that would make a statewide curriculum to replace it for the 2015-2016 school year (Binker 2014). A virtual charter school program, which further opened the education “market” was also approved. Although legally contested, the online school began enrolling K-12 students in February 2015.

*How do Teachers Experience the Neoliberal Shift “On-the-Ground”?*

The existing research is not entirely clear about how and under what conditions neoliberal changes discomfort, and even anger, teachers. Neoliberal reformers contend that only teachers who put their own needs before the students dislike the free-market changes because they make teachers more accountable for their work (Kopp 2011; Rhee 2013; Goldstein 2016). However, researchers contest these arguments, finding that the neoliberal emphases on individual accountability, empirical measures, and efficiency make the job of teaching more difficult than ever before. Emphasizing results over the process and efficiency over quality gives teachers less autonomy to accomplish the ultimate goal of helping students from diverse backgrounds and build their knowledge and develop the skills they need for their futures.

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\(^6\)“Longevity Pay” refers to the bonuses that state employees receive each year on the anniversary of their hiring date. For teachers, longevity pay began kicking in after ten years of service.
Most of this latter research focuses on charter schools, which are already organized under a neoliberal paradigm. Neoliberal changes to public schools will follow different processes and outcomes, as the teachers and administrators did not initially hire into a marketized environment. Furthermore, most existing research on the work teachers do focuses on curriculum and student outcomes. Research on school management focuses heavily on the role of principals, the diffusion of new initiatives, and school board power. There is little research on discipline and the non-academic parts of teaching that take up so much of a teacher’s day – the actual “labor” of teaching that occurs outside of the days they are administering standardized tests (Ingersoll 2003; Cohen 2011; Connell 2013). Sociologists argue that analyzing how the neoliberal changes public teachers face shape their actual work experiences will yield greater insight into their largely negative reactions to the changes (Connell 2013; Renzulli 2014).

DATA AND ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This dissertation uses mixed-methods data collected from two-hundred and twenty-three public-school faculty in one North Carolina LEA between 2012 and 2015 to sociologically study what the U.S. neoliberal education shift looks like for those implementing it on-the-ground. In the second chapter, I outline what neoliberal workplaces look like and how they incorporate neotayloristic management strategies and assumptions about workers. I then discuss the current literature on how teachers are experiencing the neoliberal shift taking place in education. Chapter 2 concludes by detailing Hodson’s (2001) theory about dignity at work and how researchers have built onto it since. I explain how analyzing teachers’ experiences during a neoliberal shift
through a focus on their dignity helps us understand their reactions and the broader implications of this shift for the public-school workforce moving forward.

To address these questions, I conducted a mixed-methods case study of the teachers and staff in Atwood, Butler, Sattler, and Whedon public middle schools to assess how these fast-paced and top-down neoliberal changes shaped their work experience. I began collecting data in 2012, the year before the new legislature passed the “Excellence in Public Education Act,” and was able to capture teacher and administrator reactions to the mandates and subsequent legal battles over them through 2015. The mixed-methods nature of my data collection allowed me to capture broad sentiments from across the learning education agency (LEA) and more in-depth nuances from observations and semi-structured interviews. Between September 2012 and September 2015, I conducted semi-structured interviews with sixty-one school faculty members who currently worked or had recently worked in the county. I also conducted fifty-two additional hours of observation, sitting in classes, meetings, and trainings when invited by people participating in the study. I iteratively analyzed and collected data, using grounded theory methods in an abductive approach. Essentially, I coded for emerging themes in the data and then adjusted the interview guide and survey instrument to assess the hypotheses I was coming to for these themes (Charmaz 2006).

I fielded two waves of a survey designed to capture the relationships and viewpoints of the school employees. These surveys, as well as the interview questions, were designed in a convergent mixed-methods manner (Creswell 2007). Between the two survey waves, I collected data from two-hundred and eighteen unique respondents. The surveys asked participants about how they found their jobs, their teaching philosophies, connections, and opinions about the recent legislative changes. Chapter 3 goes into greater detail about how I collected and analyzed
the data. I also describe Hodson’s (2001) theory of working with dignity in that chapter and explain how this theory helped to guide my abductive data collection and analysis process.

In Chapter 4, I argue that the recent neoliberal changes, underscored by neotayloristic assumptions about workers motivation and production, are undermining teacher’s conditions for attaining dignity at work. Education reformers argue that emphasizing the neoliberal goals of standardization, efficiency, competition, and choice will empower teachers to make more ambitious curriculum and pedagogical decisions. Instead, I find the teachers in Pierce County are increasingly overworked as their jobs and resources become less secure. Their conditions for dignity at work are directly undermined as they lose job protections, income, and basic teaching resources. Their ability to achieve dignity in work is challenged by the poorly-funded and quickly changing top-down mandates teachers felt unable to keep up with, rendering them less able to feel in command of the material. The teachers and administrators largely felt that the fast-paced, top-down changes are far more about political posturing than they are about bettering education opportunities for students.

Chapter 5 uses observation and interview data to analyze how teachers are working to safeguard their dignity even as the conditions for them to achieve it in the schools are undermined. I find that teachers engage in all four actions Hodson (2001) theorizes workers use to curb denials of their dignity at work: 1) resistance, 2) organizational citizenship, 3) independent meaning systems, and 4) group relationships. The most commonly relied-upon tactic across the schools was reliance on group relationships for daily teaching-related support. However, administrators and teachers worry that continued stress on individual competition will undermine this safeguarding method, leading teachers to resist in ways more destructive to the overall workplace. Furthermore, teachers’ use of intergroup relationships to protect their
conditions for dignity in work results in further relational inequality between groups of teachers in two of the four schools in the study.

*Chapter 6* investigates the organizational differences between the four schools to determine why the opportunity hoarding I find in the previous chapter occurred in two of the schools and not the others. I find that the schools where teachers are not hoarding opportunities were able to avoid “organizational chaos,” a type of mismanagement, by using additional monetary resources and more intense labor control techniques than those used by the principals in the other schools. The principals in these schools stabilized the workplace conditions while the state-environment undermined conditions for dignity at work that their teachers did not feel the need to hoard opportunities to protect their dignity in work.

The final chapter discusses the implications for these findings, both for teachers as workers and for schools as a social institution. Neoliberal education reforms could empower teachers and public schools by strengthening the core of the profession and allowing students and teachers to find or create classroom environments that better suit them than the current community-school model. However, the neoliberal changes, guided as they are by neotaylorist management principles and consistent underfunding under the guise of “efficiency,” are undermining the conditions for public-school teachers to attain dignity both in and at work. Ultimately, this also undermines the learning environment for students, as their teachers combat time constraints and affronts to their dignity.
CHAPTER 2: THEORY & CONCEPTS

I discussed the neoliberal shifts in the private and public sectors in the first chapter to establish how these broader institutions are changing. In this second chapter, I focus on how the actual organizations – the workplaces – within those broader institutions change under neoliberalism. Neoliberal ideology emphasizes the freedom of market forces, without the interference of regulation. Worker protections, including the minimum wage, tenure, benefits, and working hours routinely come up in neoliberal restructuring.

The goal is allowing managers to set the supply of labor by the demand of the businesses market. For example, if a business needs employees more at one time of day or year, the manager should be able to call in and send home workers at-will. Alternatively, jobs only need to offer the wages and benefits needed to attract the best staff for the position. This model is increasingly used throughout the private sector. Low-wage service businesses like fast-food restaurants send workers home after the peak shift, while high-paying services in the tech industry contract out workers for a limited span of time (Kalleberg 2009; Jencks, Perman, and Rainwater 1988). Education has traditionally been a public-sector service; public-school teachers were shielded from these neoliberal practices under the “career system.”

This chapter examines the literature on neoliberal workplaces to determine what these changes may look like in schools. I also lay-out neotaylorism to explain some assumptions about workers neoliberal management tactics bring with them. This is followed by a review of what we know so far about how neoliberal changes to education are shaping public-school work-lives, which suggests that teachers are frustrated with the top-down changes. I conclude with a discussion Hodson’s (2001) theory of dignity at work and the additions he and others have made

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7 See discussion of the “career system” in chapter one.
to this framework for understanding how people view their work. As I will later explain in chapter 3, this broader framework of worker dignity allowed me to better make sense of the patterns I found while iteratively analyzing the mixed-methods data I collected from public-school teachers during North Carolina’s neoliberal shift between 2012 and 2015.

NEOLIBERAL WORKPLACES

Crowley and Hodson (2014) define neoliberal workplace policies as those emphasizing the use of flexible employment and monetary incentives among an atomized workforce. These flexible means of production are driven by the neoliberal assumption that the free-market is the best regulator. Inefficient, unnecessary, or poor products and workers will sink to the bottom and either shut-down or be fired by managers who have the power to remove poor performers. Competition is the best incentive to improve and improvements can always be made. Furthermore, there will always be performers on the bottom as those on the top continue to innovate and improve (Collins 2001).

Flexible production is also characterized by offloading risk. Companies only keep on-hand the components they need for this moment’s job. They do not stockpile parts or resources; markets shift quickly, and companies do not want to get stuck with de-valued goods. Similarly, neoliberal workplaces try to keep on as few employees as necessary, as labor costs are some of the highest for manufacturers and service providers. Full-time workers are legally mandated to have expensive benefits and worker protections. Therefore, neoliberal workplaces tend to rely on a mix of over-worked full-time employees, perma-temps, and well-paid - but temporary - contract workers (Axelrod 1987; Tilly 1996; Smith 1997; Smith and Neuwirth 2008; Kalleberg 2000, 2012). Neoliberal workplaces also increase the number and kinds of tasks that full-time
employees must perform to cover a greater amount of work with fewer people, essentially "intensifying" their jobs (Kalleberg, Reskin, Hudson 2000; Crowley and Hodson 2014).

The public sector paralleled this shift away from the “social contract” model of employment by the private sector with the development of the “career system” of “public service.” In exchange for lower salaries and higher intrinsic rewards (the satisfaction of helping people) compared to the private sector, public sector employees got to keep the bureaucratic protections of tenure, more internalized labor markets, and more reliable work benefits, including healthcare and retirement (Bernhardt and Dresser 2002; Bowman and West 2007; Karmack 2007). Recently, however, public sector employment is shifting to look more like the private sector. Following neoliberal, free-market ideology, bi-partisan efforts on the federal and state level are dismantling the “career system” to remake the government into a more efficient and decentralized system that emphasizes performance and measurable results (Hays and Sowa 2006; Karmack 2007; Maranto and Condrey 2001; Wilson, Rosicgno, and Huffman 2013, 2015).

NEOLIBERAL WORKPLACES AND CONDITIONS FOR DIGNITY

Sociologists have extensively studied how the neoliberal policies corporations adopt affect employee productivity and wellbeing. While some applaud the upskilling of jobs and the greater autonomy afforded to employees under these market-driven reforms, job degradation and greater control over workers have increased (Hodson 2000). Jobs are now more precarious as companies offload risk by hiring temporary and part-time employees over full-time workers with benefits (Kalleberg 2000, 2009; Mishel, Bernstein, and Shierholz 2009). Production teams intensify surveillance and encourage conflict among workers (Graham 1993; Smith 1997). Additionally, managerial use of corporate culture to blur lines between employees’ private and
work lives has resulted in greater employee burnout and increased health problems (Kunda 2006; Chamberlain and Hodson, 2001; Crowley, Tope, Chamberlain, and Hodson 2010).

Neotaylorism

Many of the negative effects of neoliberal reform for workers come from the neotayloristic assumptions about employees underlying the neoliberal changes companies adopt to compete in the global marketplace (Crowley and Hodson 2014). Frederick Winslow Taylor (1911) deeply distrusted workers to work as efficiently and productively as they possibly could. Taylor also theorized that people were naturally suited for different kinds of jobs, and urged employers to look for workers with specific traits to create the most productive workforce.

Taylor (1911) also advocated the separation of manual and service labor from intellectual labor. In practice, this creates a central management removed from production who devised and then passed directions and scripts down to their employees to make the production of goods and services as efficient and standard as possible. These tasks are reduced into small bundles that do not require much skill and employees can quickly learn. Management, once relatively unproductive labor, became the main source of ideas in workplaces under Taylor’s (1911) philosophy (Hanley 2013; Tomaskovic-Devey 2014). Critics of neotaylorism argue that this management philosophy leads to workers alienated, or disconnected, from their labor (Braverman 1974) each other (Crowley and Hodson 2014), and their emotions (Hochschild 2002).
NEOLIBERAL MARKET IDEOLOGY & NEOTAYLORISM IN EDUCATION

When a neoliberalist ideology is carried out with neotayloristic managerial assumptions within education, it leads to policies and management strategies that heavily emphasize:

1) Efficiency  
2) Standardization  
3) Accountability & Empirical Measures  
4) Competition & Flexibility

Each of these characteristics do not inherently undermine the conditions for workers to attain dignity at work. In fact, emphasizing each could empower workers by clarifying communication, decreasing nepotism, and encouraging productive innovation (Hodson 1995, 2001). However, the combination of the neoliberal emphasis on cutting costs as much as possible with the neotaylorist focus on complete control over labor more often undermines workers (Crowley et al. 2010; Crowley and Hodson 2014; Crowley 2016). Furthermore, when the changes are passed down from forces outside of the organization (school), and broader institutions (LEA, State), they may undermine the conditions to achieve dignity at an even greater extent than if they were coming from the management within the organization (school), alone. Workers have even less of a voice in their development and implementation than they would working with their management alone (Philpott 2007).

TEACHERS’ EXPERIENCE ON-THE-GROUND

Jamie Vollmer’s experience attempting to reform public education using his award-winning Great Midwestern Ice Cream Company as a model illustrates why the U.S.’ diverse, general education system and an emphasis on standardized outcomes conflict in ways that make the U.S. appear to be “falling behind” other industrialized countries. In the 1980s, Vollmer firmly believed that the current school-system was out-of-touch with the needs of the changing global economy. Following neoliberal and neotayloristic assumptions about workers, Vollmer
believe that teachers set in their ways were the main impediment to progress. If only schools practiced the same cutting-edge total-quality-management and continuous improvement techniques he used, the problems plaguing education would be efficiently solved. Vollmer (2002) was quickly disabused of his neoliberal model for education after presenting his ideas, alongside other business leaders, to a group of 300 public school workers when one teacher asked what his company did when they received a bad batch of blueberries. They sent them back. The teacher jumped to her feet and replied:

“That’s right! And we can never send back our blueberries. We take them big, small, rich, poor, gifted, exceptional, abused, frightened, confident, homeless, rude, and brilliant. We take them with ADHD, junior rheumatoid arthritis, and English as their second language. We take them all! Everyone! And that, Mr. Vollmer, is why it’s not a business. It’s school!”

After this initial interaction, Vollmer (2002) dedicated his life to better understanding how schools work and developing ways to address their problems. He concluded that U.S. public schools will never truly run like a competitive business. They have no control over their raw material or revenue streams. Furthermore, they are subject to the whims and desires of multiple, competing “customer” groups that few CEOs deal with. U.S. public schools must enroll every student residing in their district. Schools in most other countries either do not, or they track their students from an early age into different programs and schools to better meet their needs (Trines 2016). Charter and private schools in the U.S. also do not enroll every child in a geographic radius. These schools can reject students who do not fit their philosophy and eject students who misbehave or perform badly on tests (Carnoy, Garcia, and Khavenson 2015; Carnoy and Rothstein 2013; Renzulli 2014).

In every “human improvement” profession, the client’s commitment is essential for the success of the professional, no matter their qualifications or experience. Research, schools, and
teachers repeatedly point out that there are no immediate, tangible incentives for students to do well on the standardized tests teachers are evaluated under NCLB and RttT. Thus, even when students can pass the test, many are disengaged from school, either out of boredom or a feeling that college is unattainable (Cohen 2011; Ravitch 2016; Zoch 2004). This leaves teachers embedded in this “testing culture” concerned for their jobs as they try to engage their students to do well on multiple tests they do not care about. Furthermore, they are mandated to do so using curriculum and pedagogy largely designed to address the test parameters passed down from the centralized curriculum or testing body. Public school teachers are left struggling to connect with students in the meaningful ways they need to teach. They are further frustrated that their knowledge about how to teach and assess learning is over-run by a standardized curriculum. Each of these factors undermines teacher’s ability and desire to do their job.

*Public-School Teachers as Scapegoats*

Critics argue that education reformers have used public-school teachers as scapegoats for a variety of social ills. This latest iteration is blaming teachers for the failures of the “testing-culture” education has become under neoliberal reforms that stress scores and competition (Berliner and Glass 2014; Cohen 2011). “Teacher-bashing” became popular on social media, news outlets, and community forums as parents, students, and the public tried to assess why the old problems of inequality persisted and new ones around the “testing-culture” emerged (Ingersoll 2003; Berliner and Glass 2014). Public-school teachers have been described as the “welfare queens” of the early 21st century, greedily protecting their own interests over the needs of their students and communities (Goldstein 2014). However, research consistently finds that individual teachers, while important, have a small impact on students’ overall education outcomes. Outside factors, including access to healthcare, the socioeconomic status of the
student’s family and neighborhood, language use in the home, access to resources like books and mentors are twice as important as the whole impact of a school on a student’s achievement (McCaffrey et al. 2009; Darling-Hammond 2010; Berliner 2012; Baker 2012).

Because many reformers see teachers as the fundamental problem and key to fixing the “education crisis,” most programs center on measuring and improving the performance of individual teachers. Under a neoliberal model, teachers are seen as rational actors who are working for money through student growth on standardized tests (the outcome). By this logic, offering teachers more money for higher outcomes will result in their harder work and ultimately accomplish better student performance. However, studies on merit pay and intense accountability programs across many education settings find that the initiatives lack effectiveness (Sass 2008; Goldstein 2014).

If anything, the incentive programs ultimately harm students as teachers engage in forms of “educational triage” to concentrate their limited resources on those students most likely to garner them accolades and raises (Amerin-Beardsley and Collins 2012; Berliner and Glass 2014; Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Goldstein 2014; Neal and Schanzenbach 2010). The most publicized case occurred in Texas, when Jennifer Booher-Jennings (2005) discovered that teachers were separating students into three groups to focus their attention on the “bubble kids” who were on the threshold of passing the “Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills.” Students who scored too high the previous year to show much growth and those with little hope of improving their scores enough to pass were left out of the concentrated efforts teachers gave to “bubble kids.” In other cases, education leaders have pressured principals and teachers to the point of “organized
cheating” on standardized exams to maintain high scores, and thus funding⁸ (Blinder 2015; Ravitch 2016).

Education scholars have critiqued the development of NCLB and RttT for including very few people who have been in the classroom on the planning board and call for more research into the effectiveness of the reforms and how the changes are shaping the school environment (Ravitch 2010; Tirozzi 2013). For example, recent books by education leaders Giroux (2011) and Kumashiro (2013) point to increased fear and malaise by students and teachers in public schools. Furthermore, public-school teachers and their organizations have protested neoliberal changes to education across the U.S. Many have written op-eds condemning the market-centered funding cuts, award-winning teachers’ resignation letters have gone viral, and marches, walk-outs, and protests are frequently front-page news across the nation. Moreover, the number of people entering the teaching profession, particularly in states leading neoliberal reform, are falling, while exit rates are increasing (Brenneman 2016; Hui 2016). If these trends continue, many education leaders worry that the future of the teaching labor force is bleak. Public schools will be understaffed with inexperienced teachers who are less credentialed than those currently teaching (Ingersoll 2003; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas 2016; UNC 2015).

Ultimately, holding public school teachers in the U.S. to the same as those who teach in private or charter schools, or to teachers in schools with different student-bodies, higher pay and greater status in other countries, undermines their ability to attain dignity at work. Next, I briefly outline Randy Hodson’s (2001) theory of dignity at work and the subsequent additions to the theory. Understanding why people work, how they achieve a sense of dignity, and the threats to

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⁸ The most well-known case of this occurred in Atlanta in 2010, after reporters discovered that the tremendous gains in standardized test scores the county saw in 2009 were actually due to teachers and principals erasing and replacing wrong answers on students exams to earn bonuses and avoid bullying by Beverly Hall, their superintendent (Ravitch 2016).
their ability to do so will help us better understand public-school teachers’ reactions to neoliberal changes to education. Furthermore, understanding how teachers attempt to safeguard their dignity at work will clarify the repercussions of their actions for their individual schools and the education institution.

DIGNITY

‘Dignity’ is tied to feelings of respect, worth, esteem, autonomy, and, freedom. Furthermore, a sense of dignity is cultivated through relationships with other people and institutions (Bolton 2007; Bourdieu 1986; Sayer 2007; Sennett 2003; Thompson and Newsome 2016; United Nations 1948). Bolton (2007:7) goes so far as to name dignity a “collective achievement, rather than an individualistic attribute.” Essentially, dignity is not a stagnant trait you are born with or even that you work on alone. Sociologists define it as a dynamic sense of self that people achieve, maintain, or lose through their interactions.9 Furthermore, sociologists find that individual-level feelings of dignity contribute to the health of an equitable and stable society. When people feel a sense of dignity, they participate in a ‘moral economy’ that holds them together (Durkheim 1971; Veblen 1994; Weber 1947). This process is paralleled on smaller levels within organizational cultures. Organizations that provide better conditions for their members to achieve dignity have lower levels of turnover, higher member-involvement, and better long-term outcomes (Crowley and Hodson 2014; Paull 2015).

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9 Dignity is akin to social capital in this way (i.e. Granovetter 1985; Lin 2001). Individuals can only develop and maintain it through their relationships to other entities. It differs from social capital because people can develop this sense and access in relative isolation through creations, or even patterns of behavior, that give them a sense of pride that connects them to a larger group – like humanity or a country – but is not directly connected to a person or organization.
**Dignity and Work**

Sociologists have long theorized that labor is the most salient way individuals attain this collective sense of themselves as part of a group (Braverman 1997; Marx 1974; Weber 1947). People work for extrinsic rewards like money and other pecuniary benefits tied to jobs. But, people define “good jobs” as those that also provide intrinsic benefits, including the abilities to help others, make the world a better place, and to enjoy their work (Kalleberg 2009; Jencks, Perman, and Rainwater 1988). Essentially, people seek out work in fields and organizations that will allow them the chance to attain dignity. For example, people who are internally motivated to make the world a better place, or to help others, tend to seek out public service jobs like teaching, public law, and police work.

Randy Hodson’s (2001, 2007) theory of worker dignity focuses on the conditions that make achieving a sense of dignity possible within the workplace. All three types of conditions that shape employees’ ability to work with dignity are relational, focusing on:

1. ability to take pride in your work as an active member of their workplace,
2. vertical conflict between workers and management, and
3. horizontal conflict between coworkers and customers.

The first condition encompasses an employee’s ability and incentive to engage in organizational citizenship behaviors – to go above and beyond the minimum of what is required for their position. This additional effort can be a source of pride for workers more firmly attaches them to their workplace (Hodson 2007; Organ 1988). Furthermore, these kinds of behaviors are a necessary complement to the technical aspects of a job to make production the best it can be (Drucker 1993; Smith et al. 1983).

Some level of vertical conflict, the second condition for attaining dignity as an employee, exists in all workplaces. Rarely do workers’ personal goals entirely align with the organization
they work for (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999; Edwards 1979; Edwards and Wajcman 2005; Prasad and Prasad 2000; Pratt 2000). This is especially true under neoliberal market philosophy, which always prioritizes efficiency and outcomes over worker wellbeing and dignity (Crowley 2016; Crowley and Hodson 2014). However, effective management strategies that respect workers and attend to their concerns maintain conditions for dignity (Mouly and Sankaran 1997; Hodson 2001, 2007; Rubin and Brody 2011). Finally, relationships and interactions are the most salient part of most workers’ jobs. Incivilities by peers or customers can negatively affect a workers’ ability to do their job properly, their desire to be in their workplace, or even further categorical inequalities (Hodson 2001; Morris and Feldman 1996; Roscigno, Hodson, and Lopez 2009; Roscigno 2007; Savicki and Cooley 1994; Sims 2005; Zapf 2002). Further, while many enter service jobs out of a desire to work closely with people, frustration arising from client interaction is a heavy contributor to service employee burnout (Kim and Wright 2007).

Conditions for Dignity in vs. at Work

Bolton (2007) further delineates Hodson’s conception of employee dignity as multidimensional, breaking “dignity” down into in and at work elements. She argues that breaking dignity down into these two dimensions allows for a more nuanced analysis of how employees experience work and challenges to their ability to attain dignity through their jobs.

Table 1. Bolton’s (2007) Multi-Dimensional Concept of Worker Dignity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dignity in Work</th>
<th>Dignity at Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workers have a sense of autonomy</td>
<td>Workers feel that access to opportunities is equitable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers feel that their labor is worthwhile</td>
<td>The workplace is safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers feel that the effort is recognized by peers and managers</td>
<td>Workers have access to the tools they need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workers have job security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workers feel fairly compensated</td>
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</table>
As broken down above in Table 1, achieving dignity in work concerns whether workers feel that they have a reasonable amount of autonomy, their labor is worthwhile, and peers and the company recognize them for their effort. Dignity in work falls largely in-line with the intrinsic, or intangible, benefits people desire from their work. The ability to realize dignity at work depends on the workplace’s structure and organization. Employees who have equitable access to opportunities and recognized collective and individual input into how the workplace runs. Dignity at work is also contingent on workplace safety, access to the necessary tools, job security, and fair compensation for labor. Most of the conditions for dignity at work encompass the extrinsic - tangible - benefits of a job, while including some of intrinsic benefits, like having a voice that is respected in the workplace.10

Workers often achieve one dimension of dignity without the other. For example, a well-paid employee in a secure position has the conditions for dignity at work, but without the ability to make decisions or a feeling that the work is worthwhile, they do not have the conditions for dignity in work. Likewise, an employee may achieve dignity in work if they have some autonomy and glean meaning from their job, but is denied dignity at work if the job is underpaid or unstable (Bolton 2007; Thompson and Newsome 2016).

Despite the common belief that people who are attracted to jobs with a high public service component, like teachers, do not want higher pay or benefits,11 all workers desire access to both intrinsic rewards and extrinsic rewards (Alonso and Lewis 2001; Kalleberg 2009; Jencks, 2007).

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10 I think it is important to point out how the dimensions of dignity and the categories of benefits overlap and differ because people tend to think and write about jobs in terms of the more tangible, extrinsic benefits and intrinsic, intangible benefits. This is especially salient when discussing “compensating differentials,” or why jobs with higher levels of intangible benefits, like teaching, pay lower than similar jobs with fewer intangible benefits (Philpott 2007).

11 Alonso and Lewis (2001) argue that this is a sexist assumption by managers and economists long used to pay workers in feminized jobs less than workers in similarly credentialed occupations. Teachers and nurses are the most commonly used examples.
Perman, and Rainwater 1988). Workers who want intrinsic benefits like helping children or making the world a better place often leave jobs that obviously align with those goals, like working in public schools, for those in the private sector or for other organizations, if the former does not also provide the structure and extrinsic benefits necessary for the worker to meet and reasonably maintain their original intrinsic motivations (Buchanan 1975; Christensen and Wright 2001; Steijn 2008; Taylor 2008; Vinzant 1998). These findings about people leaving jobs traditionally seen as the best place to fulfill intrinsic desires to help people underscore how deeply intertwined the dimensions of dignity in and at work are. Employers cannot maintain a fulfilled workforce without attending to the conditions for both. Workers will ultimately leave the workplace, the ultimate act of resistance, to find one with better conditions for achieving dignity on both fronts.

*Shaping the Conditions for Dignity in and at Work*

Managers, as the front line between owners and employees, hold the best position to shape conditions for dignity both in and at work (Crowley 2016; Jackall 1988). Thus, sociological research testing and expanding on Hodson’s (2001) initial theory of dignity at work largely focuses on “managerial citizenship” behaviors within organizations. For example, Rubin and Brody (2011) expand and clarify Hodson’s (2001) initial conditions that shape workers’ ability to achieve dignity to more heavily emphasize managerial responsibilities. Managers must provide a viable production system. They must respect their workers while supporting their struggles and recognizing their accomplishments to maintain and improve conditions for employee dignity. Furthermore, workers need to feel that managers are just in their dealings with both employees and customers. Finally, in-line with research on how dignity both in and at work is intimately connected with the ability to achieve dignity in relationships external to the
workplace,\textsuperscript{12} Rubin and Brody (2011) also emphasize the need for managers to be accepting, fair, and accommodating of personal and family needs.

Even with the additions Rubin and Brody (2011) made to Hodson’s (2001) framework for worker dignity, the theory and other assessments of worker dignity remain heavily focused on interactions and conditions within the workplace, using organization-level data. While this focus on the organization captures the most salient conditions for worker dignity, it does not allow us to fully examine how contextual changes outside of the organization – above and beyond managerial control – directly shape conditions for dignity and workers’ reactions to them. Middle managers have a lot of control over their workers’ day by dictating schedules, tasks, and work teams. But some forces that shape conditions for dignity in the workplace are not decided by middle-management. Furthermore, managers do not have an innate desire to undermine the conditions for worker dignity. In fact, making it harder for their workers to achieve dignity is counterintuitive – both from a productivity and from a basic daily job enjoyment standpoint. Front-line managers spend their shifts with their workers, and generally want to reduce tension to make their own workdays better (Smith 2016).

\textit{Threats to Dignity at Work}

Hodson’s (2001) theorizes four challenges to worker dignity. Exploitation and overwork are structural elements of a job that undermine a workers’ ability to attain dignity \textit{at} work. Most of the decisions about how much a position earns or how many people are hired for a workplace are controlled at the top-management level. However, middle-manager decisions and practices can also undermine dignity, particularly if the managers are abusive or incompetent. These forms of mismanagement constitute the second threat to achieving dignity at work. Mismanagement

\textsuperscript{12} see Rayman 2001 and Pugh 2014
can create chaotic work environments that allow, or even encourage, horizontal inter-employee and employee-customer conflict (Roscigno, Hodson, and Lopez 2009). The third challenge to worker dignity is limits to a worker’s autonomy (Hodson 2001). Dampening workers’ voices and power to perform their jobs as they feel best directly undermines conditions for dignity at work and indirectly undercuts workers’ abilities to achieve dignity in work.

The fourth challenge to dignity is also the least straightforward. Hodson (2001) theorizes that “contradictions to employee involvement” undercut workers’ ability to attain dignity at work (13). These “contradictions” occur when organizations and institutions blame workers for sub-optimal production or organization losses when the problems truly lie in the decisions made by upper management. Smith’s (1990) ethnography of a bank changing from a social contract employment strategy to a more neoliberal one best exemplifies this form of dignity denial. Top managers determined that the bank’s problems were due to poorly performing workers rather than the risks managers were taking, and losing, in the market. The top-level managers began overhauling the culture, demanding more output from workers, and firing those who ranked poorly under new evaluation criteria (Smith 1990). This contradictory logic created short-term gains, but undermined workers’ ability to attain dignity at work and pushed the bank’s real problems to the future (Crowley 2016; Crowley and Hodson 2014; Hodson 2001).

Beyond Managers

Vicki Smith (2016) noted this tension about managerial drive and goals and Hodson’s (2001) theory of dignity as she re-analyzed data from her previous ethnographies in a tribute to Hodson’s career. She found that the dignity framework allowed for a deeper understanding of her original data than the resistance framework she originally utilized. The initial studies (1990, 2001) struggled to explain why the middle managers in the neoliberalizing firms she studied
were dedicated to making the transition to new evaluation methods as smooth as possible for their workers. Instead of straight resistance to these challenges to their own autonomy, or utter acquiescence to the top managers’ mandates, the middle managers were striving to protect their own dignity and their workers’ ability to attain dignity in their jobs. The neoliberal changes passed down by top-management were eroding conditions for dignity at work with a new emphasis on competition and efficiency. All jobs in the bank were more precarious now that workers were directly ranked against each other and the lowest performing would lose their jobs. However, the middle managers worked to protect their remaining workers’ dignity in work by shielding their workers’ autonomy and relationships from the changes as much as possible.

Out of this new analysis of her past data, Smith (2016) proposes expanding Hodson’s (2001) threats to employee dignity to include a fifth: employment precariousness. She consistently found that outside market forces were a greater detriment to workplace conditions in these neoliberalizing organizations for achieving dignity than internal power struggles or incivility. Employees in her studies were grateful for any opportunity to work in one of the large firms she studied as a chance at least to get their foot in the door in the harsh labor market they had always known. Similarly, Thompson and Newsome (2016) found that vegetable-prep warehouse operators felt the largest push for higher line speed from increased customer demand. Market forces, rather than vertical relationships with managers, were undermining their conditions for dignity at work. The managers in each study were concerned with worker wellbeing, but felt their hands forced by the globally competitive market to undermine the worker protections that allow for dignity at work. Thompson and Newsome (2016) conclude that sociologists need to study how organizational managers can protect or further undermine their
employees’ ability to attain dignity in work even as market forces undermine the conditions for dignity at work.

_Safeguarding Dignity_

When confronted with threats to their dignity in and at work, Hodson (2001, 2007) theorizes that workers will undertake one, or a combination of, four types of action to protect their conditions for attaining dignity at work. First, employees may resist by slowing down production or even going on strike. Second, employees may do the opposite, and throw themselves even further into the work. By increasing their “organizational citizenship” and going above and beyond the basics needed for their position, a worker can attain a sense of pride in their work. Similarly, employees experiencing a threat to their dignity may come up with an “alternative meaning system” at work. They may come up with rituals to help them get through monotonous days or connect their work to a broader purpose to make it feel more worthwhile.

Finally, workers often turn to their coworkers to protect their dignity. Relationships at work can provide outlets for venting or humorous release from monotony and stress. Coworkers often comfort each other or help someone struggling to make sure everyone is successful. In some workplaces, employees may even create in-groups to gain and protect resources from other groups within the workplace. These practices of social closure and opportunity hoarding can create patterns of “relational inequality” within the workplace that further undermine the dignity of groups with less power in the organization (Tilly 2000, 2001; Roscigno, Hodson, and Lopez 2009).

_Relational Inequality_

Organizations are larger groupings of relationships, with friendships making up the "social glue" that holds them together (Fine 1986; Tomaskovic-Devey 2014). Interpersonal
relationships are the most salient defining features of our daily work-lives and have important implications for the health of the organization as a whole (Roscigno 2007; Crowley and Hodson 2014). Workplace friendships are an invaluable intrinsic reward that help workers continue, and even flourish, under harsh working conditions (Hodson 2001; Desmond 2007).

While these intimate relationships can protect workers and increase productivity, they can also create opportunities for the unequal distribution of resources. Friends want to help their friends, which can lead to the purposeful or accidental exclusion of those outside of their "small society" (Tilly 1999; Avent-Holt and Tomaskovic-Devey 2014; Tomaskovic-Devey 2014). The most extreme form of this is "hierarchy maintenance," when workers and managers engage in discriminatory actions against "othered" groups to hoard opportunities and protect the existing workplace social structure.

This process begins with a group making a "claim" over an increasingly scarce resource. They tend to rely on task competence and status within the organization to make their argument. If influential actors recognize the claim as legitimate, the group making the claim is allowed to pool the resources in question. This inequitable distribution becomes normalized and leaves room open for exploitative relationships and opportunity hoarding away from those considered members of the in-group (Avent-Holt and Tomaskovic-Devey 2014; Tomaskovic-Devey 2014). As friendships tend to be homophilous, formal rules and internal labor markets lead to a more equitable distribution of resources across institutions and within organizations across race and gender (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001; Roscigno 2007).
CHAPTER 3: DATA & METHODS

North Carolina’s latest neoliberal changes to education began in 2013. This study draws from an analysis of interview, observation, and survey data collected over one-hundred and six hours between August 2012 and August 2015 from two-hundred and twenty-three faculty working in four public middle schools in one North Carolina Learning Education Agency (LEA), Pierce County. Being in the field during this time-period allowed me to collect data before the changes started coming down from the legislature in the spring and summer of 2013. I was then able to focus on teachers’ reactions to the changes as they were rumored, debated, passed, and contested. I iteratively analyzed data as I collected it in different formats, using each wave to build and refocus my study as new themes emerged. This third chapter details this collection and analysis.

RESEARCH SITE

Learning Education Agency (LEA) Characteristics

I selected one LEA, rather than choosing schools from around the state, to control for variations between the ways different LEAs manage their schools. In North Carolina, the legislature typically gives a common mandate or goal, and then directs the individual LEAs to carry it out as they see fit. The State will also provide some money to fund the initiatives, but expects the LEAs to fund the remainder through their own tax base or by applying to federal and private grants. Furthermore, each LEA in North Carolina can pay teachers additional salaries to keep up with the cost of living, which is higher in more urban areas than in more rural ones. Pierce County contains both urban and rural schools and is home to large immigrant and refugee communities and did not offer their teachers supplemental pay to their base state salaries.

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13 All names of places, schools, and people are pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.
I chose Pierce because it represents an average of the conditions of North Carolina's one hundred and fifteen districts. It is not the largest, nor the smallest district, in terms of land-mass or population. Its budgets and yearly teacher salary adjustments fall near the middle of the spectrum across the State. Districts can pay teachers above the state rate if they can make up the money in their budget. Wake County is able to add the most to their teachers' salaries, at an average of $6,975 while nine districts are unable to supplement their teachers' incomes. "Pierce's" supplements fall close to the middle of this distribution (Leslie 2016). Pierce is home to both a large city-center and farm-heavy rural areas; the latter drawing in sizeable immigrant and refugee communities.

Pierce County traditionally made a practice of hiring teachers and faculty who grew up in the LEA and promoting from within. This means that all of the schools in my study had one, if not several, family connections to fellow staff or students in the school. For example, one school in my study had several mother-child teacher pairs and many spouses worked in the same school. The practice of recruiting from the area also translates into deep community connections as teachers combine their work and identities as educators with the organizations, family businesses, and churches they grew up with and still attend or moonlight for. To illustrate, one teacher discussed her family’s long history with the school where she now taught science and history through their family nursery business. At a different school, several faculty members discussed their second jobs in the funeral industry as a way they often connected with students and were able to provide emotional support both in and outside of the school walls.

Middle Schools

To account for more variation in the public-school teacher experience, I focused on just one level of education. I settled on middle schools because this is the level of education where
teachers must work together the most. Elementary students are traditionally kept with one comprehensive teacher during the day, at times leaving for electives. High school curriculum is highly variable, as students focus on different career and college tracts and have more elective and course-level choices. Middle school students, however, are generally assigned to a few teachers on their grade level, generally split into "teams." These "teams" of teachers form "Professional Learning Communities," or PLC's, tied together across their different substantive areas by the group of students they share. The middle school teachers are also members of PLC's within their grade-level and substantive area. These latter PLC's work together to make sure that all of the students in, for example, seventh grade, are receiving similar instruction in science or history. Middle school students are also notoriously difficult to work with. They are just entering puberty, are full of energy, and are pushing boundaries that they are not always emotionally equipped to deal with yet (Sacks 2014; Collette 2015). Middle school teachers also have the highest turnover rate for individuals either moving to another level of education or leaving the field altogether (Gootman 2007).

School Characteristics

I selected four middle schools to focus on in my interviews and observations\textsuperscript{14} that represented the diverse range of communities in the LEA to gain a better understanding of the range of issues and privileges that the educators in this LEA face from the immediate community they are embedded in. One was in a rural community with a large military population and two were suburban schools, one of these located in a higher-SES white community. The last school's student body was more than ninety-five percent low income black students living in government

\textsuperscript{14} The surveys were fielded across all of the middle schools in the county.
subsidized housing. The schools received State "report card" grades from "C" to "F." The schools received State "report card" grades from "C" to "F."\(^{15}\) Table 2 includes the general demographics of each of the four middle schools in the study.

Table 2: School Demographics\(^{16}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Extra Funding(^{17})</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Students with Free Lunch</th>
<th>ABC Performance Distinction 2012-2013</th>
<th>EVAAS Grade 2013-2014(^{18})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atwood Middle</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>School of Distinction</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butler Middle</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>School of Progress</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sattler Middle</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>School of Progress</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whedon Middle</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>School of Priority</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Atwood Middle was the highest achieving school in the sample when I began my study. It was designated as a “school of distinction,” under North Carolina’s ABC’s of Growth and Performance scale; 80 to 90% of its students are at grade level. Under the new evaluation system, “Education Value-Added Assessment System” (EVAAS), Atwood received a high “C”. EVAAS is scoring system developed and implemented by SAS that calculates a school’s grade based on its students’ “End of Grade” (EOG) test score total (weighted at eighty percent) and student growth scores (weighted at twenty percent).\(^{19}\) Located in a rapidly expanding portion of

\(^{15}\) These performance grades did not change from the 2013-2014 to 2014-2015 years when I was studying them. North Carolina adopted the A-F school grade scale for the 2013-2014 school year.

\(^{16}\) All information in Table 1, apart from the EVAAS letter grades, comes from NCreportcards.org.

\(^{17}\) Schools who receive significant additional operating money from outside of the traditional state and local tax base resources are designated as having “extra funding” in this study. This money may come from federal grants or other outside programs.

\(^{18}\) North Carolina switched to a new evaluation system based on “School Performance Grade” as calculated by SAS. The 2013-2014 school year was the first time it was used.

\(^{19}\) Controversially, EVAAS does not include data on student demographics, including the racial, SES, or special education make-up of the school. Consequently, there is a “near perfect correlation between [school] letter grades and economic disadvantage” under the system (Bonner and Hui 2015; Fiske and Ladd 2015).
the LEA, Atwood is also the most recently built and largest school with the most diverse racial population. Atwood received extra funding from a federal technology grant unrelated to NCLB or RttT.

Butler and Sattler Middle Schools were both designated as “progressing” on the growth and performance scale, with 60 to 80% of their students performing at grade level for the 2012-2013 school year. Under the new, EVAAS system, Sattler was ranked slightly higher, with a low “C” to Butler’s high “D”. Both schools were also located in more suburban locations on the periphery of the city limits. Butler, located in a slightly lower average-SES neighborhood, received Title I funding to provide qualifying students with free-and-reduced lunch and to hire additional teaching assistants in tested courses. Both schools had majority-white student bodies but included a mix of students from different ethnoracial groups.

Finally, Whedon Middle school is one of the lowest performing schools in the state, granting it a “priority” designation in the old rating system. Whedon Middle earned a low “F” under the new EVAAS system. Due to their Title I status, this school receives a portion of the grant money from North Carolina’s 2010 school improvement grant under RttT. Therefore, in addition to extra funding, this school holds frequent meetings and trainings with representatives from the State’s Department of Instruction (DPI) to help teachers and administrators plan schedules and curriculum. Whedon is the least racially diverse school in the study. Ninety-eight percent of the population receives free-or-reduced lunch, almost a quarter of the students qualify for special education and most of the students are black.

Each school in the study had similarly sized classrooms, at an average of 23 students per class. Each had also seen recent building renovations, with Butler Middle recently undergoing a
complete demolition and rebuild of most of its campus. Aside from Atwood, this meant that each campus was an eclectic combination of mid-century brick buildings, trailers, and modern wings.

Each school followed a block schedule with three-person teaching teams where one teacher handles two of the four core subjects (math, science, language arts, and history). All four of the middle schools included many elective courses, including: band, chorus, business skills, and consumer sciences. As a Title I school, Whedon also offered additional remediation labs in math and reading skills with their own coaches. All four schools had active sports teams and cheerleading squads. Clubs played a large role in the culture of each school. Students and teachers alike participated in many clubs before, during, and after school. These organizations deepened student and faculty commitment to the school by providing incentives, identities, and connections.

For support faculty, each of the schools had a social worker and school psychologist that they shared with their feeder schools, while Butler and Whedon Middle both had permanent school nurses and Atwood and Sattler shared school nurses who only come in a few days a week. Each administrative team had a bookkeeper in charge of school monies and a data manager to act as a liaison between state and LEA expectations and teachers about testing procedures and scores. All beginning teachers were under the tutelage of an instructional coach who served several schools and visited each once a week to check in and answer questions. There were no formal teaching mentors within the schools themselves. However, each grade level and subject concentration had a head teacher to voice the concerns of their smaller faculty group.

Funding

The four middle schools received the same population-based funding from the state, federal, and county governments. Aside from the grants individual teachers wrote from
classroom supplies, technology, and field trips, this was all the funding Sattler had access to. Atwood’s student-body did not have a high enough low-income population to qualify for federal Title I funds. However, their large military-family population gave the school access to military and Department of Defense Grants. Atwood took advantage of these opportunities, and used the additional funding for better classroom and campus technology.

Title I funds are part of a federal program under Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The goal is to provide additional services to students who are most at risk of failing. In North Carolina, Title I teams focus on students struggling with math and reading. This federal money is granted to individual LEA’s based on the demographic makeup of their population; at least forty percent of the children enrolled must come from low-income families. Each LEA then divides the money out to the school based on their own populations, while keeping some aside for district-wide programs designed to better the education outcomes of low-income students. While the funding can be used on a wide variety of supplemental trainings and programs, most schools hire additional teachers or paraprofessionals, including teacher’s assistants and tutors, with the funds. Other schools pick one or two major initiatives, like a computer lab, summer program, or remedial classroom to make use of their Title I funds. Each school’s Title I team selects the students they feel need additional support from and then implement their own programs and measurements of progress. (CCSSO n.d.; US DoE 2015).

In Pierce County,20 approximately twenty-five schools qualified for Title I funds. The LEA kept used some of the funds for county-wide programs to assist homeless, migrant, and pre-K aged children. Butler and Whedon both qualified for Title I funds because of the high

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20 This information was largely pulled from the County’s education website. I am not citing it in an effort to maintain the confidentiality of the LEA. For this same reason, the number of schools qualifying for Title I funds is approximated, rather than exact, here.
concentration of low-SES students in their schools; Whedon was granted more funding than Butler because of its higher low-SES concentration (98% vs. 75%). Both Butler and Whedon middle schools use their Title I funds for additional math and reading tutors and some individual programs for severely at-risk students. Whedon also created a computer lab for low-performing students to work on remedial math and reading programs at their own pace under the guidance of a dedicated teacher’s assistant.

Whedon also qualified for a School Improvement Grant after North Carolina won Race to the Top (RttT) funding while I was studying Pierce County. This was money the school received on top of Title I funding to provide for extra training opportunities, supplies, and supplemental assistant positions while Whedon was implementing one of RttT’s “Turnaround Models.” This funding came from a different “pool,” and had its own stipulations and guidelines. For example, Whedon was required to hire a “data manager” who was responsible for collecting and analyzing student performance data throughout the year. This person was tasked with helping the principal and teachers develop more targeted programs for student improvement. But, the additional funding allowed Whedon to be more flexible with the Title I money because their overall pool of funding for at-risk students was larger for the four years they worked under the grant.

DATA COLLECTION

Archival Sources

I began data collection by reviewing the North Carolina’s Department of Public Instruction data on school and Learning Education Agency (LEA) characteristics. I relied on the data, program and legislative information, and news bulletins published on the website for teachers and the general-public throughout the project. This resource allowed me to compare the conditions and themes I found in Pierce County to the broader state trends. I used the individual
report cards, school improvement plans, and reports from the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey\textsuperscript{21} to triangulate my findings within the four middle schools to data collected by others. These resources were particularly useful when I believed I was not getting the full picture of a school’s culture due to selection bias in who was agreeing to interview with me. The outside data were also useful for constructing the survey instruments because they gave me a broader picture of concerns NC has about its schools, as well as the teachers’ answers about their working conditions.

Throughout the research process, I routinely checked the national and North Carolina news for stories pertaining to education. Three days a week, I would log in to The New York Times, The Atlantic, Dianne Ravitch’s blog, The News and Observer, The Charlotte Observer, and Raleigh’s local WRAL websites to look for education stories. The papers focusing on Raleigh and Charlotte were especially useful for keeping me up-to-date on North Carolina’s latest legislative moves, protests, and court cases concerning legislation. I kept track of these on a timeline. The national papers and Dianne Ravitch’s blog alerted me to national news stories about education, including how other states were implementing or avoiding their own neoliberal shifts. Ravitch’s blog was particularly useful for alerting me to posts, op-eds, and speeches teachers made around the country that went viral. I used these to form better questions to ask and different things to observe when I was in the field.

I found that keeping abreast of the latest news about education was vital to understanding the environment public teachers work in. Few of the teachers I interacted with kept up with the news themselves. Education was constantly in the news, but little of what was reported came to fruition or directly affected teachers’ workdays. But, the presence of education in the news

\textsuperscript{21} This survey is run, in part, by NC DPI. DPI partners with the North Carolina Business Committee for Education to run the survey every other year and publishes the results at ncteachingconditions.org.
shaped the public’s perception of schools and the initiatives they supported to improve them. If a new program or law was passed, teachers would wait for the principals to let them know what it meant specifically for them. The discrepancy between my understanding of how contested school policies were in the news and teachers’ relative avoidance of it highlighted how far apart the two spheres are. Pierce’s teachers and administrators felt too far removed from the decision-making process to want to engage with it, even if it was on the periphery reading about possible changes and debates.

Gaining Access

After choosing Pierce County, I emailed the head of their Human Resources department, an assistant superintendent in the LEA, to propose my study ideas. With his tentative approval, I secured IRB approval for my study. This was followed by a meeting with eight members of Pierce County’s leadership team, including the superintendent, to present my study proposal and discuss the logistics and possible outcomes of the study. They granted me access to the schools and suggested different LEA administrators to keep in contact with throughout the process for help and guidance. They also asked that I include schools outside of the city “proper,” as others throughout the LEA felt that the inner-city schools received an inequitable amount of attention and resources. Sattler, Butler, and Atwood all met this criterion.

Observations

Between August 2012 and August 2015, I spent fifty-two hours observing the relationships and interactions between faculty by shadowing LEA administrators, school administrators, and teachers during their daily tasks. I also sat in on trainings, break periods, and meetings when participants invited me to join. I stepped in to volunteer with teacher, parent, and student tasks when welcomed, and participated in group meetings and trainings. While I
attempted to maintain theoretical sampling of schools and participants throughout the study, my data collection was largely pragmatic (see Stern 2006). Before entering the field, I passed the background check that all school volunteers must pass before working with students. Although the students were not the focus on my study, it was important that I have this approval while moving around the schools. I knew that I did not want to appear a nuisance or threatening to the schools I wanted to study.

I also quickly learned that teachers have unpredictable schedules, often called to meetings, trainings, last minute team meetings about troubled students, feedback meetings with superiors, and emergency parent conferences. After a few frustrating cancellations, I adopted an “everything is data” strategy (see Charmaz 2006), and vowed to maintain a very flexible and practical approach to interviews. I sought out alternative people to interview, something to observe, or someway to help out every time a scheduled interview was bumped at the last minute or was (more often) a no-show. This flexibility paid off by helping me build a rapport across the LEA and in one school, in particular. The rapport I slowly built throughout the LEA gave me easier access to participants I was having a hard time scheduling interviews with in this highly inter-connected LEA. For example, after building a relationship with an administrator at Atwood Middle School, she connected me with an administrator at Sattler Middle School, who she’d gone to high school with.

Whedon Middle School was the most open about and encouraging of my presence. As a Title I school, Whedon’s culture was welcoming of trainers and auditors sent in from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), volunteers, new teaching assistants, and various service personnel from around the LEA. I quickly found that any helping hand was a welcome one and made myself as useful as possible to the front desk, administrators, teachers, and Parent-Teacher-
Association Leaders (PTA). The familiarity allowed me to build a rapport with the exceedingly busy teachers who were wary of taking on yet another task or assessment, as many saw my initial asks for an interview.

Volunteering to do small tasks around the school also allowed me to get a better sense of the culture and climate of the school, as well as the more nuanced understanding of what public school teacher labor looks like in North Carolina after severe budget cuts and new mandates emphasizing accountability for standardized test-scores. I helped teachers track down resources and even students at times. I took children who needed food, belts, or other personal supplies down to the pantry the teachers set up in one of the special education classrooms so that a classroom teacher or aid would not have to take the time away from their other students to do so. I helped the PTA decorate the school for holidays and laminated the new emergency procedure cards for each classroom. At times, I would sit at the front desk to help parents sign in or answer basic questions to allow the person covering the front desk time to do their official jobs of bookkeeper, custodian, coordinator, or even administrator.

My flexible data collection methods meant that I often engaged in informal conversations with students or even helped them with their work during observations. I sometimes led small reading groups in literature classrooms or helped students struggling with multiplication or reading during periods of individual work.\(^{22}\) As pre-teens, middle school students are a curious group. Those growing up in high-poverty situations can be particularly open with strangers (Jensen 2009). I found that they were eager to talk to me whenever possible, and many wanted to touch my hair, jewelry at first contact just walking down a hall or entering a classroom to

\(^{22}\) I engaged in each of these activities strictly as a school volunteer. I took memos afterward on my own feelings and reactions during these sessions, but did not include information about individual students. I used these instances as a chance to better understand teachers’ work environments and out of a selfish desire to also be useful to these schools that opened themselves up to my study.
observe a teacher after they’d asked me to before or after an interview. Many of the students saw me as just another school helper, giving me hugs and asking me about my own life. They were particularly interested in what “grade” I was in and where they wanted to go to college.

These interactions allowed me a better understanding of the daily reality public-school teachers’ work that I would have missed in surveys, or even interviews, alone (Lewis and Russell 2011; Tope et al. 2005). I better understood the frustrations teachers and administrators felt when their daily struggles did not match the problems legislative mandates attempted to solve. I witnessed – in real time - how personnel cuts made everyone’s jobs more complicated and tedious. Teachers and administrators often had to focus more on lower-order, but necessary, school functions and student needs than planning, teaching, or running the school. Before funding cuts, aides and full-time counselors, social workers, and school nurses would take on tasks centered around hallway management, individualized emotional support, or finding basic supplies and snacks for students who did without at home. With these positions spread across schools or cut completely, teachers and administrators either had to pick up these tangential, but necessary building-blocks for learning, or leave the students to struggle with them alone.

Furthermore, being present in the school allowed me to see how quickly passed-down mandates could undermine months of planning and order in a school. For example, one night late in fall 2014, Whedon’s principal found out that one of her special education aides was being moved the next morning to another school. The LEA had finally received the budget numbers from the state for the 2014-2015 school year and had determined that this aide had to move to another school to make the new budget work. The principal allowed me to sit in on the meeting she held with the entire special education department to rework their classes around the teacher’s removal. The remaining teachers had to take on larger loads in the middle of the semester and re-
arrange their schedules to make as little upheaval for their students as possible. It was a frustrating exercise that undercut a lot of the innovative programs they were trying in the high-IEP population school.

Participating in Department of Instruction (DPI) trainings and check-ins with grade-level professional learning groups (PLCs) at Whedon allowed me to better understand what the new state mandates expected of teachers and how they wanted innovative pedagogical tools integrated into classrooms. Coming to accreditation preparation meetings gave me the chance to see how teachers worked together in their assigned groups to complete their tasks – mostly focused on collecting “artifacts” to show the school was fulfilling different expectations. Most importantly, working in these groups allowed me to capture spontaneous, real-time reactions to requests and the dialogue between teachers about their frustrations, concerns, or approval of questions they had to answer about the way their school addressed different parts of the accreditation criteria.

“Being there” also allowed me to better understand why teachers took on second and third jobs to be able to support their families while keeping their relatively low-paying, high-stress positions in the schools. Those who stayed loved working with middle schoolers, even when they said they were “crazy” to do so. They cherished the sense of accomplishment and their relationships with these immensely frustrating, but amazing kids who absorbed every ounce of affection, attention, and direction any adult in that school would give them. Without these interactions, I would have been hard pressed to truly understand the spontaneous dance party a data manager, teacher, and student had over the student’s 95% score on a vocabulary quiz at his grade level. Because I was there and open to understanding teachers’ and students’ daily
struggles, I knew how much they had all struggled to help him rise from a second-grade reading level to where he needed to be as a seventh-grader all year.

Interviews

I collected fifty-four hours of semi-structured interviews with sixty-one participants between August 2012 and August 2015. I recruited my first interview participants by emailing my IRB-approved recruitment letter to every person with a school email address who worked in the four middle schools I had selected. This list was provided by Pierce County’s Human Resources department. Eleven of the two-hundred and thirteen people I emailed (a five percent response rate) responded. After these first interviews, I found most of my participants through existing study participants or by introducing myself in a hallway, break room, or cafeteria between interviews. All interview and observation participants signed an IRB-approved consent form and kept a copy for their own records. As noted above, this technique for finding interview participants was most successful at Whedon. I believe this is due to two reasons. First, Whedon was the most open about letting me in at first, so I spent most of my time in the field there in fall 2012.

Second, after the Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting on December 12, 2012, the schools increased their security measures. While I previously needed a pass to go beyond the main office before, most buildings now required buzzing in and an appointment on the main-office books with someone already in the school. Within schools, they began locking more outside doors and different access ways to hallways, making it harder to move around on school grounds. Furthermore, whereas I used to feel comfortable walking down hallways to introduce myself to faculty after an interview or if the teacher I had scheduled an interview with was a no-show (a relatively frequent occurrence), the climates of every school were too wary after Sandy
Hook and the last thing I wanted to do was make anyone in a school setting unsettled by my presence.

While most interviews occurred during teachers’ planning-periods or after school in a teacher’s classroom or administrator’s office, some occurred in coffee shops, cafeterias, school libraries, conference rooms, and even in the hall during class change. Three of the interviews took place with multiple (2-3) participants in the discussion and several more took place with others in the room but off the recorder because it was what the participant(s) chose. Keeping a flexible schedule meant that my interviews also vary widely in length and structure. The average interview lasted an hour, but my shortest interview was only eight minutes long because it was all the time the participant could spare that day after postponing our meeting several times. I could make the most of these short interviews because I had already built a rapport with the participant during more casual interactions around the school. My memos from these prior interactions also allowed me to hone in quickly on areas I knew were of concern to them or thought might be. On the other end of the spectrum, my longest interviews were around two and half hours long. These took place after school hours with participants who wanted to share many details and stories about their lives as educators.

The interviews were semi-structured around an interview guide focused on topics about participants’ daily work experiences, connections, and future career plans. As the study was abductive, I would prompt participants to speak to emerging themes from my initial coding within the broader questions of the interview guide. At times, I would mention behaviors or posters I had noticed around their school or others to garner their understanding of and reaction to the incident or artifact. This served the dual purpose of member-checking emerging theories
about practices and processes and to build rapport more quickly with new interviewees because I could personalize and contextualize the questions in my interview guide.

Even when interviews took place in a teacher’s classroom, participants were open about potentially sensitive issues. Although some would tell me that it “wasn’t their place” to speak about things like legislation, most eagerly shared their opinions about the latest policy proposals. Most were upfront about their concerns with the LEA’s practices or their school administration. Many physically walked me to their closest friends on the staff to introduce me and tell them about my work.\textsuperscript{23} Overall, teachers were more comfortable about telling others in the school that they were participating in a study than I was, even after letting them know that I would keep their participation as confidential as possible.

\textit{Survey Data}

Between the two survey waves, I collected data from two-hundred-and-eighteen unique respondents using an instrument I created and fielded in Qualtrics, recruiting participants through the same email list provided from the LEA’s HR department that I used to recruit interviewees. Because HR sent out the first wave of survey invitations, I gathered data from all the middle schools in Pierce County.\textsuperscript{24} I constructed and pre-tested my survey instrument based on the emerging themes I found in my qualitative data collection during the fall 2012 (Kristensen et al. 2005).

I adapted network survey questions from Cole and Weinbaum’s (2010) study of how peers influence each other’s attitudes in an effort to understand how information, perceptions,

\textsuperscript{23} In all but Whedon, this rarely led to another interview. However, if the other teacher was on a planning block or it was after school and they had time to speak informally, I would ask them to sign a consent form so that I could include what we discussed in my fieldnotes for the day. If they did not want to sign a form, I made sure that they knew why I was in the school before we continued talking. Many teachers forgot I was there in a research capacity, frequently misremembering me as a DPI agent, student teacher, or aid.

\textsuperscript{24} I updated my IRB protocol accordingly for these data.
and emotions flow through the schools. I included a list of every person working in the respondent’s school and LEA leadership. They were asked to pick up to ten names of those they “seek out at work to discuss any problems that come up with teaching, other job duties, students, or your personal life.” Then, they were asked to choose how often they chose to each person about: 1) course planning, 2) problems with students, and 3) personal problems and events. To assess how “burned-out” the educators might feel, I included the “Copenhagen Burnout Inventory” (Kristensen et al. 2005). I also asked a question about general health and other personal characteristics, adapting these from the General Social Survey.

I also adapted teaching philosophy questions from the American Preparatory Schools 2008 survey and pulled in the shortened, ten-item version of the big-five personality inventory (Rammstedt and John 2007). I also created a series of questions about the importance of religion and the ways people practiced it to ascertain religiosity. I decided to include questions about whether a respondent had grown up in the LEA, how many leadership positions they held, how many community activities they participated in, and how they found their current and previous positions within the LEA because each of these was a recurring theme in my initial qualitative analysis. For the second wave of the survey, which I fielded in May 2014, I replaced some of the questions about community involvement with two questions about how participants felt about “The Excellence in Education” Act because the latter became a point of major concern across my interviews and observations during fall 2013.

In the end, I find that the open-response questions are the most useful parts of the survey data for answering the research questions that emerged from grounded theory analysis of the overall body of mixed-methods data. Therefore, although I pull extensively from the survey data in the third chapter, it comes entirely from the open-ended questions. The additional data from
participants in schools I did not observe or interview in the first wave of the survey (spring 2013) strengthens the arguments I make in the third chapter about how the overall changes passed down from the NC legislature to the, LEA shaped working conditions broadly. While not as detailed or nuanced as interviews and observations in each middle school would have provided, the surveys allowed me to capture the feelings of more teachers and administrators than I would have otherwise had access to, giving me greater triangulation of the broader experiences I found in the four middle schools I was able to interview and observe.

Exiting the Field

I stopped collecting data when I reached a saturation point; although individual stories had unique elements, I was no longer finding new information to either support or contradict my hypotheses (Charmaz 2006; Small 2009). Furthermore, the State and LEA were rapidly changing. The State and Teachers' Union were litigating over teacher tenure and other rights. Pierce County's superintendent retired, and the new superintendent brought a new wave of administrators, expectations, and emphases. Several of the principals in my study were moved to different schools or left the profession altogether. The State and LEA were still restructuring towards a more market-based approach to education, but the intensity of the 2013 changes was fading by the summer of 2015. Teachers and administrators were still concerned about the same overarching themes, alongside new policies and programs. However, the ways they perceived the changes and their relationships with each other were not shifting. I felt confident that I had captured processes that transcended one point in time and in one place.

ANALYSIS

My analysis is guided by convergent mixed methods rooted in an abductive grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2006; Creswell 2013). Each stage of data collection and analysis
informed the next, allowing me to assess emergent themes against data collected at earlier
timepoints and the existing literature.

*Convergent Mixed Methods*

Convergent mixed methods allow researchers to design studies that use the strengths of
different approaches at the same time to triangulate and complement the weaker aspects of
others for the greatest insight into research questions (Bernard and Ryan 2010; Creswell 2013;
Greene, Benjamin and Goodyear 2001). A mixed methods approach allowed me the best
opportunity to analyze the climate and culture of different schools in the same LEA. I was able to
harness the depth of understanding of the lived experiences gained from interviews and
observations as well as the breadth of information provided by survey research. Interviews and
archival resources yielded the best understanding of basic school features and overt rules.
However, observations allowed me to capture more latent norms, inter- and intra-group
dynamics, and patterns of behavior (Hodson 1999; Tope et al. 2005).

My goal was to develop emergent, grounded theory using complimentary and fully
integrated, qualitative and quantitative data for the strongest interpretation of how teachers are
experiencing the current shift in education (Woolley 2009; Yin 2006). Grounded theory was
initially conceived with the idea that researchers could use both quantitative and qualitative
methods to develop a deeper interpretation of the world, based on the experiences and views,
than might be accomplished through deductive reasoning alone (Charmaz 2006). I collected and
analyzed the data in a convergent, abductive manner as each type informed and shaped the
questions of the others. This required iteratively and constantly comparing the themes I identified
in my memos about my interviews, observations, survey data, and archival sources with the
extant literature on education, networks, and worker wellbeing.
Analysis

After each session of collecting interview and/or observational data, I took fieldnotes about the experience to include as many details as I could and to focus on emerging themes and directions for further inquiry. I also recorded and explored my own feelings as well as the reactions that participants and others in the environment had to me. After analyzing my fieldnotes, I wrote analytic memos, building on them at any time ideas occurred to me (as suggested by Charmaz 2006). These memos focus on the more general processes, themes, and connections to sociology of work literature and archival sources.

As a reflexive researcher, I recognize that I am a co-creator of the data I am collecting. My participants and I are interpreting reality together (Charmaz 2006; Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Furthermore, during my observations I often participated in the school day, volunteering to do jobs that would have taken others’ time. In these ways, I helped to construct the reality of what happened those days. I made sure to note and analyze my own emotions, views, reactions, and the way participants reacted to me to capture my own role in the data I collected (Burawoy 1998). For example, I noted the body language that both participants and I engaged in during interviews. I noted the feeling of interactions in hallways or meetings. I reviewed and questioned my emotional responses to the experiences my participants shared with me, questioning why something would make me surprised, angry, tear-up, or laugh during or after interviews or while reading through survey responses. This information serves as valuable data, forcing me to focus on my role as a researcher and to check my own biases and preconceived notions (Charmaz 2006; Hochschild 1979; Kleinman and Copp 1993). As someone who grew up with teachers and who has a partner in public education, I wanted to make sure that I did not
want to fall into the trap of being too sympathetic with my participants (Kleinman and Kolb 2011).

I also wrote analytic memos about how participants reacted to me. I wanted to make sure that I investigated how my self-presentation may have shaped how and what participants revealed to me (Bucerius 2013; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). I quickly realized that participants coded me as a middle-class, relatively conservative, Christian young woman. In this southern state, this image, whether a true reflection of my person or not, was helpful for building rapport. I also found that some participants who were less-than-happy with their current administration were more suspicious of me if they felt I was too close to the principal, assistant principal, or LEA administration. One Whedon faculty member who was considered a “mess” by the school administration went so far as to call me their “elf on a shelf” in December 2013.25

I merged the two waves of survey data on the participant and then linked this merged dataset with my interview and observational data. I pulled all my data, including quotes and stories from archival sources, into NVivo to code and analyze it. I began with open, substantive coding of my fieldnotes, memos, interviews, and survey data. I utilized many in vivo codes, especially when present across several interviews to help remain more firmly grounded in the data (Charmaz 2006). Codes were in the form of gerunds to keep the analysis focused on actions and processes, rather than simple description (Charmaz 2006).

I then wrote analytic memos to elaborate on these initial codes, subsequently returning to the original transcripts for more focused coding. The latter analysis allowed me to combine some categories, while firming boundaries between others, to further my exploration of processes

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25 This staff member gave an interview and filled out both surveys and did not overtly mind my presence or goals. They openly wondered if my study would help resolve some tensions between the new administration, student body, and teachers at Whedon. They made this “elf” comment jokingly, but it highlighted my outsider status and both the privileges and downsides it afforded me in the school community.
occurring on different levels of analysis (Charmaz 2006; 2014). Neoliberal business rhetoric was a frequent emerging theme, as were issues of dignity at work. Participants exhibited strong emotions, from sadness to outrage, to what they considered threats to their dignity, from the legislature, parents, administrators, students, and each other. Each chapter of this dissertation represents a line of emergent theory built from comparing back and forth across the data that I collected and the literature on workplaces, relational processes, and inequality.

**Theoretical Orientation**

As themes emerged from my initial coding and analytic memos, I found that many of the concerns teachers and administrators raised, as well as what I was observing, echoed the findings of many workplace ethnographies. In particular, themes like “protecting self,” “hoarding resources,” “expressing worry,” “putting children first” were coming together as a framework where teachers were choosing the best options for them – and their families – to protect what they loved about their jobs and what made them proud to be teachers. For some, this meant scoping out teaching jobs in other counties or states. For many others, this meant making the best of the situation by optimistically adopting the new curriculum and pedagogy while protecting what time and resources they could as the latter dwindled with every budget. Many teachers also took on second and third jobs to afford keeping their public-school teacher position. Randy Hodson’s (2001) theoretical framework, detailed in chapter two, for how workers gain dignity at work and what they do when it is challenged proved an invaluable tool for analyzing my data.
CHAPTER 4: CHANGING WORKPLACE CONDITIONS FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHER DIGNITY UNDER NORTH CAROLINA’S NEOLIBERAL SHIFT

“We don’t know how to feel anymore. It changes so much, and it's not changing, for me, to the benefit of students. It is starting to become more about adults than a student affair. So, it's…the art of teaching is dead. It's not about teaching anymore. The love of teaching you come in and when teachers go to school for that passion of being able to connect with students and being able to make learning fun. That is dead. The art of teaching is definitely not there like it was, you know, 10 years ago.” – Kingston, Whedon’s Assistant Principal in a 2014 Interview

Kingston used “the art of teaching” as a metaphor in my earliest interview with him to help me understand the limited autonomy he and his teachers felt they had under increasing mandates to standardize curriculum and pedagogy. It was the most poignant way a teacher had explained their feelings about the changes they were seeing other people make changes to the job they were passionate about. His critique of the changes echoed throughout my interviews. It was about more than respect or pay. The teachers felt that their ability to “connect with students and being able to make learning fun” was “dead.” I argue that Kingston’s “art” is the ability to achieve the sense of dignity he and others attracted to public education seek out when choosing their career.

This paper analyzes how the neoliberal changes North Carolina made to its education system since 2013 shape the conditions teachers and other faculty have to achieve dignity working in NC’s public schools. As outlined in Chapter 2, neoliberal ideology carried out with neotayloristic assumptions about work and workers emphasizes: (1) Efficiency, (2) Standardization, (3) Accountability & Empirical Measures, and (4) Competition & Flexibility. The purpose of this chapter is to explore how each of these four characteristics was present in North Carolina’s neoliberal education shift.

I use grounded theory methods to analyze archival, ethnographic, and survey data I collected from middle schools in one learning education agency (LEA) in North Carolina
between 2012 and 2015 as a case study of how the neoliberal shift is shaping public-school teachers’ work-lives. From here, I conclude that public-school teachers in NC are losing the ability to achieve dignity at their workplaces. The rapid, market-oriented changes to their field, coupled with salary and resource funding still frozen or cut far below pre-2008 recession levels, ultimately undermine “the art of education,” the teachers’ ability to achieve dignity in or at work.

EFFICIENCY

North Carolina (NC) participated in NCLB alongside the rest of the U.S. starting in 2000, but the neoliberal shift into market-based education policies ramped up in 2010 when NC successfully competed against 35 other states for one of the twelve second-round grants. At this point, NC was in its second year of budget freezes after the 2008 recession. The state was heavily cutting education funding to help boost the economy. For example, in 2010 the General Assembly reduced textbook funding from $116 million down to $2.5 million. This cut was originally intended as a temporary fix under extreme economic conditions. The Governor and Legislature intended to re-fund these materials after the economy bounced back (Wagner 2014).

The NC 2012 fall elections solidified the neoliberal shift in NC public schools as the governorship and both General Assembly houses became majority Republican for the first time in more than a century. In-line with current political party ideals, the new Legislature promised to cut taxes, in part, by making the public services they funded more efficient. The “Excellent Public Schools Act,” (the Act) was the pinnacle of these efficiency mandates (2013 N.C. Session Laws c.360). Under this 2013 Act, teachers and faculty in North Carolina lost tenure and increased pay for advanced degrees. This meant that public-school faculty entered the 2013-2014

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26 The “Excellent Public Schools Act” was part of the 2013 “Appropriations Act” Senate Bill 402.
academic year for a fifth consecutive year of pay raise freezes and steep budget cuts to supplies and additional personnel (ACLU 2013; DPI 2013; Wagner 2014).

This call for greater efficiency – for doing more with less - was evident throughout the lower levels of government as well.

"Why do we need Taj Mahal buildings to educate the students? You can have a great classroom in a dairy barn if you've got good teachers and good instructional materials." - Ed Jones, Chairperson of the Wake County Taxpayers Association, 2013

Ed Jones made this statement about a proposal for the first education bond on the ballot in eight years to pay for “the construction of eleven elementary schools, three middle schools, two high schools, and major renovations of at least six other schools” in the face of a rapidly increasing student population (Leslie, Simpson, and Burns 2013). The proposal to build new schools and update existing buildings was founded in research on student performance. Students who attend schools well-appointed schools that are large enough for their population feel better supported and invested in, encouraging them to be more successful in the classroom (Grubb 2008; MacLeod 2008). While supplies and teachers are important, as Jones (2013) emphasized in the quote above, the school environment places an important role in shaping the students’ learning and teachers’ work experiences that is often overlooked in the push for greater efficiency.

This emphasis on efficiency, of doing the best you can with as little as possible, undermines public-school teachers’ ability to attain dignity at work. Their benefits, including those for healthcare and retirement, decreased every year between 2008 and 2014 (Wagner 2014). Public-school teachers no longer had the right to due process and their salaries were frozen for five years. They are no longer rewarded for pursuing advanced degrees to better their knowledge and teaching practice. Several teachers I interviewed felt the most undercut by this last part of the Excellent Public Schools Act. Many, as Tyra explains, earned their Master’s
Degrees to earn a pay raise after so many consecutive years of pay-freezes. But, they felt they should be compensated for furthering their own professional credentials in ways that benefited the students and schools they worked for:

"I recently became Nationally Board Certified and earned a 12% raise by doing so. The 12% increase in pay was a big motivation for seeking the certification; however, it has greatly impacted my teaching. I am excellent in content area." - Tyra from Atwood on 2013 survey

Although she initially enrolled in the program for the pay raise, Tyra felt more confident as a teacher, and was glad that she had furthered her education. Others who had recently finished or were currently enrolled in master’s programs pointed out that the amount of debt they incurred to earn the extra degree was hard enough to manage on the low NC teacher’s salaries. Without the raise, investing in their educations would make little financial sense, even if it would make them better teachers.

Although the original cuts were meant to be temporary, teachers in NC lost the most in real salary out of all fifty states, losing 17.4 percent of their salaries between 2004 and 2014.

Students in NC also saw some the lowest spending per pupil in the country in 2014. The national average was $11,355 while NC’s rested at 45th in the nation at $8,632.27 At 47th in the nation for teacher’s salaries in 2014, many felt disrespected by and angry with the legislature28 (NEA 2015). Denise, a teacher from Butler, wrote on the Spring 2014 survey that:

"I am angry that being a teacher in NC, my children qualify for free lunch. I need a raise and better benefits on my health insurance. If something does not change soon I am going to make a career change. Shame on those who have prevented teacher raises. I am ashamed that I went to college and graduated with honors to be treated like trash by our state leaders. I am sick of being stepped over. I am trying to find a job or change in my career that pays me what I am worth."
The low salary was undermining Denise’s ability to achieve dignity at work, even though she was still passionate about teaching. By the spring of 2014, when it was clear that the cuts the legislature had initially promised were temporary were the new normal, Denise decided to look for alternative jobs to better support her family. These were conditions that had nothing to do with the internal workings of the school, and everything to do with the external market and legislative forces. As I shadowed LEA administrators on their rounds through schools and the community, I witnessed these higher level public school employees quite literally beg teachers to remain in Pierce County’s classrooms with each new wave of legislation. LEA administrators worried about the looming wave of retirements and the enticement packages surrounding LEAs and States were offering teachers to move.

Furthermore, this undercutting of dignity at work shaped teachers’ ability to attain dignity in work. Many teachers in Denise’s situation held second jobs to afford being teachers at the low salary, limiting the time and energy they could put into lesson planning or grading at home. Teachers in Pierce worked in funeral parlors, retail, direct sales, and as tutors. When asked why they took on these second jobs instead of finding one, well-paying job as others were doing, all replied that they “loved” teaching and the latter jobs allowed them to stay in the classroom. When asked why they did not cross state-lines to better-paying South Carolina, these teachers pointed to their roots in Pierce County and their commitment to this community, no matter its faults. Other teachers attributed their ability to stay in the classroom to their spouse’s

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29 LEA administrators, teachers, and faculty would sometimes ask to hold meetings over lunch or coffee out in the city. While some of these were more formal, semi-structured interviews, most were short, informal discussions about their personal and work lives. I took memos after these informal meetings, but did not record them as I did interviews.
salary. However, those in this situation often admitted wanting to teach in another area of NC or somewhere else in the country, but could not move because of their spouse’s job or a desire to stay near family. These latter teachers were just as tied to the community as their peers who grew up in the area.

2014 Teacher Pay Raises

In the 2014 legislative session, education was at the forefront of NC political discussions again. Governor McCrory advanced a new teacher payment schedule after the backlash against the 2013 legislation. Advocates lauded it as a landmark victory for teachers, asserting that public educators would receive, on average, a seven percent pay raise for the 2014-2015 school year. Teachers also got a one-time $1,000 bonus (Binker and Leslie 2014). However, critics pointed out that the new salary system subsumed longevity pay, resulting in a one-to-eighteen percent pay raise for teachers, favoring those with five or fewer years of teaching experience. Furthermore, the 2014 pay schedule set the new ceiling for public-school teachers at $50,000, far below what a teacher could make under the original scale (Kane 2015). By removing longevity bonuses and capping the top salary, the State was saving money by paying fewer teachers higher salaries over the long-term.

The salary revision was distressing for long-tenured teachers in the schools and increased horizontal tensions between teachers. Whedon’s Principal explained what she felt were the pros and cons of this legislative bill among her teachers:

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31 The new cap was set at $50,000, but did not reduce the salaries of teachers already making more than that by the 2014-2015 school year (Kane 2015).

32 Under the new State salary system, legislators and others in the State government kept their longevity bonuses and an additional five paid vacation days. The legislators also did not take longevity pay away from Highway Patrol troopers. State lawmakers can earn up to nineteen percent of their salary in longevity bonuses. Teachers were able to earn 1.5 percent of their salary after ten years and then 4.5 percent of their salary in longevity bonuses after twenty-five years of service (Binker and Leslie 2014).
“I do agree that teachers need a raise. They absolutely need a raise, ok, and NC is 46 in the nation for teacher pay. We need a raise because teachers are definitely not paid what they do every day...and when you stop and think that, for seven hours every day I've got 566 students here and parents out there hand their children over to us and...that community trusts us to take care of and educate that child so there should be a salary that compensates that because that's how important I see that job.

So when the legislature passed the raise for the beginning teachers, that is great, but what a lot of people don't realize, beginning teachers got this nice little looking 7-8% pay raise but your teachers who have been here 15, 12, maybe 10 years or more got nothing. I mean nothing. I mean and it was just disheartening for teachers.

So that in itself...affects staff morale, teacher morale. Those people who get up every single day and come here to do something we hope they're passionate about, ok, and then to not be compensated, but, you know, teachers don't, teachers don't really do it for the money - laughs - those ones who stay, those ones who stay past 5 years, they're not doing it for the money - you know they're not doing it for the money, I know they're not doing it for the money, because the money's not there…” – Deirdre, Whedon Principal in Fall 2014

At this point, Dierdre was extremely frustrated with the legislature for making her job of keeping her faculty’s morale up even harder than it would typically be in a high-poverty school. She felt that her teachers were demoralized by the Legislature’s plans to make the public-education system more efficient, particularly those teachers with the most experience on the job. As she points out toward the end of the above quote, she believed that teachers stayed in her hard-to-staff high-poverty school because they were passionate about these particular students. They “stuck with it” despite controversies and a five-year salary freeze because of their passion to help underserved middle-schoolers. Dierdre, Whedon’s Principal, emphasized repeatedly that they were not in the job for the money, but that the new legislation disheartened them because of what it signaled to them.

Across the schools, teachers saw the new salary schedule as a failure to acknowledge the expertise and sacrifice that comes with remaining a public-school teacher for a long time as a clear lack of respect for the work they dedicated their lives to. Trista, a teacher at Whedon,
expressed this sentiment on the spring 2014 survey when the new salary schedule was still a proposal:

"The proposals give validity to my belief that experienced teachers are truly UNAPPRECIATED (sic) in this state. Our time means nothing to our state lawmakers, and I deeply regret having given my life to service in this state."

Trista went so far as to say she now regretted following her passion for teaching because of the current treatment she was experiencing at the hands of the legislature.

Newer teachers were thankful for the raise because they needed it to keep up with the cost of living, but were upset that their more established peers lost so much in the deal. As Angelica, a teacher at Butler, put it in the 2014 survey:

"I am included in the part of the teacher pay raise. While I would like more money and find it necessary for living arrangements, I do not think it's fair that my mother who has been a teacher for 25+ years is not getting one. She has a masters and has been in the profession a lot longer than I have and making almost the same isn't fair."

Overall, the teachers felt that the new salary schedule was unfair and undermined their dignity in work, even when if they benefited from the new raise. Teachers felt that they, both individually and as members of a profession, were not being equitably rewarded and acknowledged for their work by their ultimate employer – the people of North Carolina.

Furthermore, to cover the immediate teacher-pay expenditure while keeping a balanced budget, the General Assembly pulled money from the budget for teacher’s assistants in the second and third grades and cut Medicaid assistance across the state. This decision fell under NC House-Speaker Thom Tillis’ idea to balance the budget by “dividing and conquering” those who opposed trimming down government services (Leslie and Burns 2014). Teachers and public schools were directly pitted against other vital public services, furthering painting teachers as self-interested actors more concerned with their own bottom-line than with putting students first. As Dierdre, Whedon’s principal, noted in the above quote, teachers are dedicated to the
community they serve. This meant that the new salary schedule undermined conditions for dignity at work, by lowering pay, as well as those in work, as they increased tensions between coworkers.

Continually debating teacher’s assistant funding undermined public school employees’ conditions for dignity at work, as well. The unease and months-long debates each summer about the necessity of teacher’s assistants and other school faculty highlighted the disconnect between the Legislature’s view of what students needed to achieve and what educators were experiencing in their classrooms (Ball 2015; Khrais 2014; Strauss 2016). This new precarity for non-core subject teachers was further underscored by each year’s push for smaller class sizes. Without the accompanying funding to open up more class space and hire additional teachers, schools are forced to cut non-core subjects and lower-ranking faculty members, like teachers’ assistants, to make their budgets (Duke 2015; Strauss 2016).

Moreover, having fewer employees in each school meant that principals needed to disperse their responsibilities across the remaining teachers. Each school handled the additional duties their remaining staff now faced in different ways, consistent with their own management philosophies. Whedon’s administration took on many of the duties themselves, and benefited from Title I funding to hire aids and tutors. Atwood’s principal equally split all duties among his staff members, regardless of subject taught or position held. Sattler’s administration gave more of the additional duties to its elective teachers, in an effort to spare the core-subject teachers’ planning times. Butler’s principal deferred to the teachers, most of whom were long-tenured at the school, to develop their own system for taking on the additional duties. For the most part, teachers in the schools saw their responsibilities increase and the ratio of adults-to-students decline as NC reduced funding for the more auxiliary positions each year.
STANDARDIZATION

Traditionally, teachers have been “masters of their universe,” able to determine what and how they teach behind the closed doors of their classrooms (Cohen 2011; Ingersoll 2003; Lortie 1969). School administration held power over the school, controlling teachers by manipulating the physical environment, textbook adoption, promotions within the building, and schedules (Cohen 2011; Gawlik 2007; Lee, Dedrick, and Smith 1991). Thus, you could find a broad variety of teaching techniques and content throughout and between schools, as teachers used their classroom autonomy to find their own, most effective, style. Since the Reagan-era, education reformers argued that this variety weakened the overall school system, particularly by underserving students most at-risk for failing. They argued that part of the reason these schools were failing was because they were focused on the wrong core student outcomes (Ladd 2007; Dee and Jacob 2010).

Neoliberal reformers gained traction in education, in part, because their emphasis on using empirical measures (data) to evaluate success and determine future steps fell in-line with the long-standing push by more traditional reformers to develop greater teaching infrastructure in the U.S. (Cohen 2011; Ravitch 2016). Unlike other professions in the United States and in education systems across the globe, U.S. teachers do not have the “extensive technical and professional affordances” that make skilled occupations successful. While there are programs that attempt to standardize credentials, such as the NBPTS established in the 1990s, there is no consistent set standards teachers must meet in the U.S. (Cohen 2011). There is no common curriculum or pedagogy that teachers learn or practice. Every test emphasizes a different way of learning and knowing the same thing, yielding a multitude of ways to teach the content and just as many ways to assess student achievement.
To address this issue, reformers across the political spectrum called for standardized curriculum (what is taught) and pedagogy (how it is taught) by central bodies, be it by a national or state-level council (Renzulli 2014). North Carolina participated in NCLB alongside the rest of the U.S. in 2000, then adopted the federal READY initiative when it won a nearly $400 million RttT grant in 2010. Under the program, they agreed to overhaul the schools at performing at the bottom 5% of the state. Each of the 118 schools implemented one of the four “Turnaround Models” designed by the U.S. Department of Education (USED) to revamp low-performing schools. LEAs could choose to close them or replace their existing leadership. The grant also meant statewide adoption of the new Common Core; individual LEAs would bear the responsibility of coming up with new accountability measures and ways to enforce them (Cohen 2011; NC DPI 2015).

Common Core began as part of the bipartisan American Diploma Project in the 1990s, which was dedicated to making students in the U.S. better prepared for both college and careers in the global economy (Achieve, Inc. 2011). In 2009, the NGA Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) released the copyrighted standards with a public license for the different States’ Departments of Education. States who adopt the standards agree to support the overall initiative and to fully attribute any use of the standards to its originators. The overarching goals of Common Core are to standardize teaching quality across the country while emphasizing critical thinking over traditional memorization. Forty-two states adopted the Common Core State Standards Initiative by 2013, with many, including North Carolina, moving to the standards as a condition of accepting RttT grants. In North Carolina, English/Language Arts and Mathematics teachers started switching over to the
new curriculum for the 2011-2012 school year. The 2012-2013 school year was the first year that every content area moved to the new curriculum and assessments (NC DPI 2015).

Overall, the teachers I interviewed liked the new curriculum and did not mind adopting different topics. Some loved the new “variety,” and most appreciated the renewed emphasis on critical thinking skills. However, many also felt that Common Core was simply a rehashing of old ideas that many of them were already executing in their classrooms:

"I think that we are going in circles. I have been teaching for 30 years, and this "Common Core" is just recycled education jargon that most of us know and have heard before…” – Tyra from Atwood on the 2013 survey open question

Furthermore, while the teachers received some training in the new curriculum, the schools were unable to buy new textbooks or supplies for the teachers to implement it. This tension between wanting to adopt Common Core but lacking the time or supplies to do so effectively, undermined teachers’ ability to achieve dignity at work. In this instance, the state, rather than the LEA or school administrators, mismanaged the adoption because they did not fix the structure to make the teachers’ success likely. Furthermore, the change in curriculum ended up undermining teachers’ ability to achieve dignity in work. While public-school teachers are accustomed to standards, the turnover to all-new standards with little training and supplies left teachers too little time to master the curriculum and make it their own. Deirdre, Whedon’s principal, explained how the new standards undermined how creative teachers could be in a fall 2014 interview:

“So, if you are a career teacher and you had taught under the NC Standard Course of Study before the whole Common Core thing came…you knew your standards, you could be creative with your standards because you got to know them.”

Ultimately, the content of the shift and how it was implemented undermined teachers’ autonomy within their classrooms. Deirdre described how she saw many teachers, at all levels of
experience, become more “robotic” in the classroom as a reaction to the combination of mandated changes and new standards:

“They're scared to even venture a little bit off from you know doing [goes into robot arms dance and says ch-ch-ch] almost robotic-like teaching. And that's sad. That's really sad.”

Her teachers reported to her that they were less confident in what they were teaching with each change and their ability to get the students to connect it.

Many teachers were re-assigned to cover subjects in grades that were now mandatory under Common Core, but were not in previous years. Stella, a teacher at Atwood, explained how her principal really embraced the practice of moving teachers around to put the highest performing teachers – largely regardless of previous content area or grade taught – into tested subjects and years.

“We are having to re-train and re-teach teachers about what our expectations are with PBIS (“positive behavioral intervention and supports” strategy). Also with rigor, our sixth-grade teachers are all brand new; he's shuffled teachers around. Some of the seventh-grade teachers are now teaching sixth grade. A lot of the eighth-grade teachers are now teaching seventh grade. He's done a lot of re-structuring within the staff. Last year he observed and he saw how teachers interacted and their test scores, I mean not their test scores, their end of grade scores, and their classroom management and I think he shuffled people around to benefit the kids.” Stella, Atwood in a 2014 interview

On the individual level, I found that some teachers enjoyed teaching new material, while others found the additional stress of a new age-group or new subject matter overwhelming. Many were taking online or night college courses to earn the credential in their newly assigned area.

On an institutional level, education researchers find that this form of skills-mismatch undermines workers’ ability to attain dignity at work and contributes to the overall deskilling of the teaching labor force (Ingersoll 2003). Even when teachers enjoy the change, their expertise in the new area is not as high as it was in the old. When many teachers experience this at once, the expertise of the entire school shifts down as the teachers work to master new content and pedagogy.
ACCOUNTABILITY & EMPIRICAL MEASURES

Under the traditional public-school model, teachers were only fired when their administrators could prove they had just cause to let the person go after following due process (Ingersoll 2003; Dee and Wycoff 2015). This system was not the most economically efficient, with reformers protesting that due process allows “bad” teachers to continue using the system long after they ceased being effective (Ballou and Podgursky 1997; Hoxby 2002). Furthermore, neoliberal ideology, paralleling neotaylor management philosophy, automatically assumes that there are poor performers in the system who drag down the total performance. Education reformers estimate that this means approximately one in eight public-school teachers are not doing a good job, and must be weeded out of the system to improve outcomes (Hess 2015).

Under NCLB school districts became increasingly “prescriptive about what and how teachers were supposed to teach” (CEP 2006; Dee and Jacob 2010). However, teachers reported feeling that the accountability measures introduced under NCLB made their schools more positive places to work and spurred them on to find more effective ways to teach their material (CEP 2006; Hamilton et al. 2007). This is, in large part, because positive teacher performance evaluations improve public-school teachers’ perceptions of their own work (Koedel et al. 2017). The feedback builds up conditions for teachers to achieve dignity in work, as the lines of vertical communication open and teachers feel appreciated for their individual contributions.

The North Carolina State Board of Education added “Standard Six,” designed to capture individual performance, to the original five standards used to evaluate teachers in February 2012. The original five standards, adopted in June 2007, stressed:

1) leadership in the classroom, school, and profession
2) the ability to establish a respectful learning environment for diverse populations of students
3) knowledge of their subject area and the ability to make it relevant to students
4) the ability to plan and use appropriate and modern instructional methods
5) reflection on teaching practice, including student learning and their own professional goals (McREL 2009).

For the first time, in the 2012-2013 school year, Standard Six would also now hold teachers directly accountable for their students’ test scores. The new standard would be entirely comprised of how much the students an individual teacher taught “grew” on their state-wide exams. The school-wide student growth score would stand in for teachers who did not have subjects with end-of-year exams. The mandate included a clause stating that every school district use the method developed and approved by the State Board of Education (McREL 2009; NC DPI 2013).

Keana Triplett, NC’s 2016 Teacher of the Year, viewed Standard 6 as “a punitive measure” against teachers (Hinchcliffe 2016). I did not find support for this sentiment among the teachers of Pierce County. Instead of feeling that the legislature was trying to “punish” them, participants felt that the lawmakers were well-meaning, but incompetent. Several teachers wished that the people making these decisions would visit the schools and spend some time “walking their halls” and observing students in their classrooms.

Whedon’s Assistant Principal most clearly represented this viewpoint when responding to my questions about legislative changes in a 2014 interview:

“I think that people in higher [legislative] positions make decisions about stuff they have no idea about. The concepts are great. I mean you know, in student achievement. When I did my masters, one thing I talked about is the achievement gap and there are so many different factors of the achievement gap. Some of that is here, poverty, yes, but in other places it is teaching a standard of education that maybe some children just didn’t get.

33 Directly after this part of our conversation, I asked him to clarify who he referred to when he mentioned “higher positions.” He responded with “the legislators.”
So, um I think the biggest factor is that there are not the right people in the right positions making the right decisions and it’s affecting us smaller people and we are having to try to make it work somehow but then the mandate of teaching is just so massive now that teachers are just so overwhelmed and were losing them. We are losing teachers. I’m getting paid $33,000 a year to do all of this and I don’t even enjoy it? Teachers are not even enjoying their jobs anymore.”

Kingston, the assistant principal, fully agreed that the students in his Title I school faced an uphill battle against poverty and racism. He agreed with the legislators who wanted to hold his students to a high academic standard, knowing through his own research that this was necessary to close the achievement gap. But, he did not agree with the way legislators were attempting to do this. In-line with reform critics, Kingston felt that “the mandate of teaching” was too “massive” for teachers to handle now. Neoliberal reformers expect individual teachers to make up for their students’ backgrounds while holding them to increasingly high academic standards. Furthermore, in NC, they are expected to perform these tasks for lower salaries and less per-pupil funding than most teachers around the country (NEA 2015). Holding them accountable for so much severely undermines teachers’ ability to attain dignity in work as they feel that their jobs are impossible and that their hard work – as the “smaller people” – is not recognized by the public.

*Profession of Human Improvement*

Teaching is a “profession of human improvement” (Cohen 2011:4). Thus, teachers work directly with people to help them better themselves, just as social workers, pastors, and therapists work with clients. Each of these professions faces the same paradox: no matter how skilled the practitioner, the person they are working with plays a large role in how successful they are. The human on the other side of the equation must be committed to success for these practitioners to be “successful” in their work. This defining feature of teaching makes holding teachers entirely accountable for student success undermines their ability to attain dignity in work. Teachers know
that student motivation is just as important for their learning as a teachers’ skill. However, neoliberal changes to education do not effectively incentivize student motivation (Goldstein 2014; Sass 2008). On the contrary, Pierce County teachers reported the opposite.

“Government needs to wake up! It is not the Teachers! Students have an I don’t care attitude...They know they are going to pass regardless of passing EOG's or MSL’s...so why should they even try???? and you base our pay and evaluations on that? How fair is that? If I can find another job...like many of my colleagues we are gone...” – Carol, Atwood Teacher on the 2014 survey

Carol’s opinion that lacking student motivation, not teacher skill or effort, as the root of achievement gaps and failing schools was well represented across the interviews. Some blamed families and community backgrounds, but most placed the blame on the high-stakes testing culture. Raising the stakes for accountability significantly increases how much teachers in tested subjects narrow their focus on content that will be on the exams and exam-taking tips (Hamilton et al. 2007; Hannaway and Hamilton 2008; Pedulla et al. 2003).

"I teach because I enjoy it. If not for my husband being an excellent provider, I would leave NC in favor of teaching ANYWHERE in the US (or abroad)…I have multiple degrees, 10 years experience, a love of working with kids, and NC has decided that schools are akin to testing factories. Wake up, North Carolina. The problem is not in teacher inefficacy. The problem is in spending an obscene amount of money on meaningless tests that do nothing more than stress out students, and degrade a once respected profession.” – Joyce, Butler Teacher on 2014 survey

Joyce echoed Carol’s concerns and delved even more deeply into the problematic nature of the stress on standardized tests as accountability for schools, students, and teachers. She felt that the heavy focus teachers had to pay to the exams made education less interesting for their students. On the one hand, the tests and learning outcomes were too easy for high-achievers, who were not interested in them. On the other hand, the standardized tests were too hard or anxiety-inducing for students who were struggling with school to begin with. As Gene, a teacher at
Whedon noted, his students primarily fell into this latter category, but were still passed along to the next grade because of policies inhibiting teachers and schools from “holding students back.”

"They've never been held responsible. We just pass them on and pass them on and pass them on. They don't really get "it" until they get to high school and need the grades to graduate. They all know that they will get to high school from middle school, so it's not an incentive. They want the degree of freedom they know they will have at the high school." Gene, Whedon Teacher in a 2013 interview

Either way, students across the spectrum disengage from test-focused education. Critics of NCLB and RttT point out that the federal programs do not incentivize student performance beyond the abstract, and often unattainable, goal of one day going to college (Ravitch 2016; Zoch 2004). This disengagement, with both students and teachers coming to view schools as “testing factories,” undermines the conditions for dignity in work because both parties find it harder to connect with the other. Without similar goals to move toward, teachers and students find themselves embroiled in more vertical conflict than horizontal collaboration over a shared learning experience (Connell 2011).

COMPETITION & FLEXIBILITY

At a professional development seminar for principals in 2015, Eric Guckian, Governor Pat McCrory’s Education Advisor, told the attendees that: “I think we need more charter-like flexibility around money, people, and time.” (Wagner 2015). Neoliberal philosophy asserts that organizations must be flexible to be competitive. Part of this flexibility comes from cutting out “extraneous” funding, supplies, and programs, as discussed in the efficiency section. At the organization level, this means removing poor performers and creating more, expanded job categories. Detailed under the accountability and empirical measures section, we know that these changes make workplace staffing more “flexible” and able to withstand swiftly changing consumer needs.
Furthermore, neoliberal education reformers behind NCLB, RttT, and NC’s more recent legislative changes see teachers as the key to fixing the “education crisis” (Kopp 2011; Goldstein 2014; Ravitch 2013, 2016; Rhee 2013). Most programs center on measuring and improving the performance of individual teachers. Under a neoliberal model, teachers are seen as rational actors who are working for money by gaining high achievement on tests by their students (the outcome). By this logic, offering teachers more money for higher outcomes will result in their harder work and ultimately accomplish better student performance.

*Introducing Individual Competition*

In addition to removing tenure status, the “Excellent Public Schools Act” of 2013 also mandated that all LEAs in North Carolina had to choose and inform the faculty they select as the “top 25%” for longer contracts than those offered to the other 75% of licensed educational professionals employed by the county, alongside compounding pay increases in exchange for early forfeiture of their “career status” (Crumpler 2013). The measure was opposed by teachers and LEAs across the state. Wake County Superior Court Judge Robert H. Hobgood ruled that taking away tenure from teachers who had already earned it was unconstitutional in May 2014, right after I fielded the second wave of my survey (McCloskey 2015). This meant that the merit pay program quietly slipped away. It had been designed to get the top performing tenured teachers to sign over their tenure status four years earlier than the Act would nullify tenure for all in 2018. Thus, although principals chose the top twenty-five percent of the teachers in their schools, they never notified these teachers and no one was even offered bonus pay through this program.

Over the previous spring, principals from around the county worked on a task-force to decide how Pierce County would implement the top twenty-five percent program. When I asked
Dierdre, Whedon’s Principal, how the committee felt about where the program was in summer 2014, she exclaimed: “We’re not doing that now. It’s like the people in charge decided it was a bad idea!” There was never an official announcement. The LEA administrators and DPI stopped sending emails about it, so she eventually assumed they had moved on to something else. She, alongside other LEA leaders had poured time and effort into making this legislation - that they did not agree with but were mandated to develop and enforce - practical. She had selected her top teachers and then cautiously waited to see when others were notifying teachers so as not to unnecessarily cause her workforce additional stress and tensions. Dierdre was pleased that she did not have to ultimately implement the program, but was frustrated with the lack of communication between the Legislature and the educators on-the-ground who had to develop and carry-out their plans.

This scenario highlights the flexibility NC’s DPI expects of its LEAs, schools, and administrators. The only bureaucratic brakes employed in this legislative mandate came after the state handed down a goal to the lower levels and demanded they make it work. Dierdre estimated that she spent at least twenty working hours on meetings and planning for this one initiative, alone. Then her work was made irrelevant after a court case without anyone even confirming the death of the program to her. This greatly undermined these principals’ conditions for dignity in work. Their labor was mandated, but the product was cast aside without any acknowledgement of the work they put into it.

This particular instance of flexible policy also underscored the transience of new policies and paperwork teachers felt defined changes in education. Much like the workers in Jackall’s (1988) study of managers, the teachers and administrators took each new initiative less seriously, believing that it was just the latest in a line of short-term fixes that someone else was using for
political gain. Teachers were hesitant to go into this in interviews very much, often stopping the line of inquiry by saying about how much they loved working with their students, no matter the environment. Lucy, a teacher at Atwood, explained that she felt the underlying problems in education were rooted in politics:

“A lot of the issues are political issues and it's difficult in our job because a lot of the people making the decisions are not in the classroom. I think that every teacher would have that opinion, whether your individual stance is something different, that's a collective result and a lot of people making the decisions haven't been in the classroom for a long time. If they ever even were in education.”

Lucy echoed critics of neoliberal reform and others in Pierce County in her assessment of how much the politicians making the changes really understood about what teaching in the current environment was like. More experienced educators, including LEA administrators, explained to me that, if people did not like proposed changes, they did not stress too much about it because they might not ever go into effect. The top twenty-five percent program was an example that several administrators pointed out to me in fall 2014. If the concerning change was implemented, it might differ after the next round of elections as education was currently center-stage in North Carolina politics (Duke 2015; Ravitch 2016; Strauss 2016; Wagner 2015a, 2015b).

Continued Attempts at Merit Pay & Bonuses

In-line with neotaylorism, reformers argue that “explicit incentives...will lead to innovation, efficiency, and fixes” by teachers (Hanushek and Raymond 2001). Under this assumption, North Carolina's General Assembly has continued to appeal the Supreme Court's ruling in an attempt to over-rule tenure status. North Carolina has also introduced other forms of bonus pay. For example, in the 2015-2016 school year, teachers of Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) classes were eligible for up to $2,000 in bonuses for their students’ high scores on those end-of-year exams.
“Opportunity Culture” in Charlotte under Project LIFT allows teachers to become “Master Teachers,” and earn up to $23,000 a year in bonuses for earning higher ratings and taking on additional duties like coaching lower-ranked colleagues and incorporating more technology into the classroom. While some of the money for this restructuring comes from grants, much is pooled into the newer positions by eliminating other jobs, including teacher positions, in the schools (Helms 2014). Education reformers, like Rick Hess, the education policy director of the conservative American Enterprise Institute, urge politicians to restructure teaching jobs into these kinds of tiers, with cleaner delineations across school employees’ jobs (Hess 2015). Good teachers should be able to spend less time on “distractions” like cafeteria duty and bus line (Helms 2014; Wagner 2015).

Opening Market Competition

“The Excellent Public Schools Act,” also allocated $10 million into a voucher system for charter schools. The money would come directly from the budget of the public school a child transferred out of to attend a charter school. A virtual charter school program was also approved. Although legally contested, the online school began enrolling K-12 students in February 2015. Proponents of vouchers claim that students will go to public schools first. Only if they find the more traditional programs lacking will they take the voucher option to attend a private school (Daniels 2011).

Pierce County teachers did not profess strong opinions about charter schools. Most were unaware that the money charter schools received came directly from funds originally allocated to public schools. None of the teachers mentioned wanting to move into the private or charter school system. When asked, some professed a disdain for the ethics behind what they saw as for-profit schools. Others noted their understanding – largely gleaned from their friend grapevine -
that teachers in charter schools had even less freedom to determine their curriculum and were expected to do even more work for less pay. In this way, North Carolina’s voucher programs did not directly undermine teachers’ ability to achieve dignity in work. Instead, the decreased funding for public schools and the increasing public perception that charter schools were better than their public alternatives, undermined the conditions for achieving dignity at work.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Overall, the changes North Carolina made to the state’s education system in this neoliberal shift are undermining the conditions for teachers to achieve dignity at work. Standardization, compounded by the lack of resources and quick initiatives turnover by the state and federal governments, makes public teaching an increasingly precarious occupation. Even when the positions are relatively safe from budget cuts, the threat of lower pay, greater job duties, and increasingly less autonomy undermine the conditions for teachers to achieve dignity both in and at work.

Sattler’s principal, Kevin, best explained how the confluence of legislative changes created a “perfect storm” for undermining teachers’ ability to attain dignity both in and at work:

“Our teachers are stressed about it…What our General Assembly has said is this: we are going to test your kids, and we are going to hold you accountable for your child's test scores, oh, and by the way we are going to move the bar on you and expect that bar to be moved anywhere from 30-35 percentage points…What they've done is they've re-normed and they are going to put higher cut scores in. And, we're going to change the curriculum on you. And we're not going to give you a lot of resources this year because we really don't have them. Oh, and by the way, we're not going to give you any textbook money and we're not going to give you any staff development money. So, it's a perfect storm. It's a perfect storm for our staff this year. That's stressful and I can say, honestly, there's more stress walking in our hallways and across the state than there's ever been. Ever been.”

Kevin summarized all of the changes his teachers faced between 2013 and 2015. The NC Legislature adopted Common Core, a new curriculum, without updating the textbooks or bringing education funding back up to the levels it operated under before the 2008 recession. At
the end of the year, the teachers were going to be assessed for the first time based on their students’ average test scores. These tests were created by the same body that created their new curriculum and were re-normed (the higher cut scores Kevin mentioned) to be a more rigorous measure of teacher effectiveness than the previous set. Teachers could now go on probation or lose their jobs if their students did not show enough growth through the year. The confluence of new content, new ways to teach it, new tests, few new resources, and additional personal accountability created instability in a work environment that already dealt with the inherently chaotic nature of middle-schoolers. This “stress” undermined teachers’ ability to attain dignity in work as they felt they had less autonomy over their curriculum and pedagogy. It also undermined their dignity at work as the teachers felt they were not going to be fairly assessed on their teaching abilities under new accountability measures.

Many core subject teachers felt that a combination of centralized authority and accountability tied their hands when it came to helping students through unpopular means, like having students repeat a grade:

"They are allowed to not be able to read...there is so much documentation to do to not pass someone along that and they can only be held back one or two times and it's just not helpful. It's not beneficial." – Carson, Whedon Teacher in a 2013 interview

Carson, working in Whedon, a very high-poverty school, passionately felt that the education system was doing a disservice to some of his students by making it too hard, or even impossible, to keep them in place to learn the basics before moving them on to accumulate and compound their knowledge gap.

Furthermore, teachers consistently felt that the North Carolina legislature was making these changes for political gain, not for the benefit of the students. Out of all the elements of
neoliberal reform, this was the one that angered and frustrated teachers and administrators in Pierce County the most.

"Our education system in NC is mixed up. There are too many people making rules and policies that are so out of touch with what is going on in the classroom. Politicians claim education should be first but their actions are totally the opposite. We are the first they hit when it comes to money and providing what we need to be effective teachers. To these people I say PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH!!!!!!" – Gayle, Butler Teacher on an open-ended question on 2014 survey

This exasperation with the political nature of school reforms pushed by the legislature was echoed in forums across the state. At a panel of state lawmakers in a professional development seminar for current and aspiring principals in NC, Senator Chad Barefoot (R-Franklin, Wake) admitted that elections and earning votes affect him when crafting legislation and implementation timelines. Administrators at the panel pointed to how this political side of education resulted in half-developed plans haphazardly implemented along election cycles as legislators chased re-election instead of prioritizing what was best for the students (Wagner 2015). The trend formed the basis for the instability undermining the ability for teachers to attain dignity in work I found in Pierce County. Teachers felt that the “art” of education was dead. They enjoyed their jobs less, even if they did love working with their students.

Changes coming from the top-down, from politicians and “bureaucrats,” are bound to be less successful than those coming from the organization itself because changes are best made through the organizational culture. Management practices form the bones of workplace culture and cultural change does not happen quickly. This is not to say that governments should not intervene in management strategies, especially when there are health and safety concerns or categorical inequality is being produced or reproduced in the industry or organization (Philpott 2007). However, when changes come from the government, they are less effective than when

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34 This professional development seminar was hosted by the Northeast Regional Leadership Academy.
they come from internal, cultural change. Therefore, intervention should always be assessed on each goal and policy basis. Gradual approaches propagated through central network actors within organizations, especially schools, are more likely to see successful implementation (Bidwell and Yasumoto 1999; Coburn 2001; Spillane 2000; Yasumoto, Uekawa, and Bidwell 2000).

North Carolina’s teacher turnover rose to an all-time high after the 2014-2015 school year, losing 14.8 percent\(^\text{35}\) of its 96,081 teachers, after increasing all but one year since the 2010-2011 school year (Hui and Helms 2015; NC DPI 2016). The percentage of NC teachers leaving to teach in other states had tripled since 2010, while the percentage of teachers leaving the profession altogether was sixteen times higher in 2015 than in 2010 (NC DPI 2016; Smith 2016). A forum on teacher retention with former teachers at N.C. State University in February 2014 found that “micromanagement” was consistently given as one of the reasons teachers left their positions (Helms 2014). It is not clear if this micromanagement was at the school or state level, but this current study suggests that it is a cyclical relationship. The Federal government demands more accountability by the states, which then pass down new regulations to the LEA’s who distribute them to the schools. Principals must demonstrate their successful implementation of the regulations through high growth scores or lose their jobs. This means that teachers are held under the direction of several levels of management, each under increasing pressure to meet the newest standards. These layers of control undermine teachers’ ability to attain dignity in work as there is so little room for their own discretion.

Teachers’ autonomy to pick classroom material and teaching styles is limited by the latest programs adopted by each level of management, both because of their lack of voice in the decisions and because they do not have the time to master the latest content and methods before

\(^{35}\text{The national average was 8\% over the previous decade (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond and Carver-Thomas 2016).}\)
the next are foisted upon them. Even when they like the new curriculum or styles, teachers are unable to fully implement them to their best ability because they change so quickly under the neoliberal logic federal and state agencies operate under in this moment. Moreover, the changes create job enlargement in ways that further undermine teachers’ ability to attain dignity. Many of the mandates the North Carolina Legislature instituted were not accompanied by the necessary funding. The Legislature frequently expected LEAs to find the funding within their current budgets to institute new merit pay programs by making cuts in other places, like hiring fewer new teachers, offering fewer electives, or cutting teacher’s assistants (Helms 2014; Wagner 2014). This practice leaves fewer people within a school to cover increasing numbers of students and tasks, undermining the conditions for dignity both at and in work.
CHAPTER 5: SAFEGUARDING DIGNITY IN PIERCE COUNTY

The ability to attain dignity at work is a primary motivator for staying in a job and for doing it well (Applebaum 1992; Hodson 2001; Nord et al. 1988). In the previous chapter, I established that North Carolina schools are undermining public-school teachers’ ability to attain dignity at work through top-down legislative changes to their job benefits and structure. In turn, this underfunding is also undermining public-school teachers’ ability to attain dignity in work by eroding teachers’ relationships with each other and their students. However, most teachers remain in the job year after year, and the majority of teachers in Pierce County reported still loving their jobs36, if not the way they are able to conduct them under the current public education system.

Although sociologists know that workers resist threats to and violations of their ability to attain dignity at work, the way teachers safeguard their dignity in and at work is not well studied (Connell 2009, 2013; Hodson 2001, 2007; Renzulli 2014; Smith 2016). Public school teachers’ tactics may differ from those seen in other white or blue-collar jobs, where the employees may be less emotionally or personally attached to the products they work with. Essentially, teachers may be less likely to sabotage production or hold back their emotional labor than employees in an auto-plant or even a server at a restaurant out of fear of harming their students. Furthermore, the ways teachers resist affronts to their dignity have implications for the students they teach and their school communities.

This chapter analyzes how Pierce County public school teachers worked to safeguard their dignity while the North Carolina Legislature’s neoliberal changes further undermined their

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36 Approximately 80% of Pierce County teachers agreed that, “Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn” on the 2014 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions survey. In comparison, 87.3% of teachers across NC agreed with this statement.
already shaky grounds for achieving dignity between 2013 and 2015.\textsuperscript{37} I use mixed methods data to analyze how the teachers resisted affronts to their dignity. While Pierce County teachers engage in many of the resistance practices listed in the workplace literature, I find that reliance on relationships with other teachers for workplace, but not personal, support is the most prominent tactic used. I conclude with a discussion of the long-term implications for teachers, schools, and students if public school teachers continue using these tactics to safeguard their dignity at work.

SAFEGUARDING DIGNITY AT WORK

As covered in the previous chapter, neoliberal strategies aim to maximize productivity by simultaneously streamlining resources and increasing individual competition. Tactics to accomplish these goals focus on removing worker protections, like collective representation and tenure, giving managers more on-the-ground discretion to incentivize and sanction individual workers. Neoliberal production strategies also emphasize empirical measures to make assessments more rigorous and less subject to human discretion (Crowley and Hodson 2014). While these management strategies do not, necessarily, undermine workplace conditions to achieve dignity at work, I found that they do when carried out with neotayloristic assumptions about worker skill and motivation.

Randy Hodson (2001) theorizes that workers safeguard their dignity at work in four ways: 1) resisting attacks, 2) increasing their “organizational citizenship,” 3) developing “independent meaning systems,” and 4) relying on their relationships. All four methods of safeguarding can make a workplace more productive as workers more closely align their own

\textsuperscript{37} By 2013, NC’s public school teachers had not been given their contracted raises in five consecutive years, even as the cost of living continued to rise. The textbook budgets were still well below the levels they’d been in 2008 before the economic downturn, leaving classrooms with outdated, if any, texts.
goals with those of the organization, even when done inadvertently. However, each tactic can also hinder the wellbeing of a workplace if it drives a wedge between managers and employees or between employees themselves.

CONCERNS ABOUT THE LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

The 2013 Excellence in Public Education Act included a “bonus pay” program, which served as the most salient push for competition at the individual level. Each District would choose who they considered to be the top twenty-five percent of tenured classroom teachers. These teachers would be offered small, cumulative bonuses for the next four years. I asked the principal of Sattler Middle School in November 2013 how the possibility of these bonuses was affecting his school. He replied:

“So yea, it's stressful right now and that goes back to your relationships and making connections and, um, it, that stress is going to be difficult...If I'm going to start being compared with the language arts teachers down the hallway and we're competing for our job, I'm not going to share what I'm doing in my classroom with that person down the hall... legislation is going to push us to become more departmentalized because our teachers are going to be less likely to share because, in their world, I'm competing for my job. I'm competing for all of these things, and I can't share what I'm doing with the person down the hallway at my expense... So that's something that I do worry about. I haven't seen it yet, but if this path - if the state continues on this path where it's going to start comparing teachers by their growth scores - I think you're going to see that.”

This principal was worried that the merit pay plan the General Assembly introduced would undermine his efforts to make his school a collective community. Administrators across the county were well-versed in the literature on school effectiveness, as most recently earned master’s degrees or PhD’s and were enrolled in continuing administrator education programs.

Pierce County education leaders reported needing the benefits strong teacher networks provided, especially during this time of fast-paced change in NC. LEA administrators told me

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38 Competing for the RttT grant took place on the State level, so the teachers were aware of the “race,” but it was not affecting them directly and they were not personally competing against someone else.
this in my initial meeting with the County Board, as one reason they were open to research into teacher satisfaction and relationships. Maintaining relationships between teachers means the difference between success and failure. Teachers with stronger support networks are more likely to successfully introduce new curriculum in their classrooms to improve student achievement (Spillane 2000; Yasumoto, Uekawa, and Bidwell 2000). When teachers have more support from colleagues within their school, they are able to adapt more quickly to new initiatives and changes in the workplace (Bidwell and Yasumoto 1999; Coburn 2001). Teachers situated in networks characterized by more diverse members, in terms of age, race, tenure, and sex are more likely to adopt an innovative curriculum than those with less diverse networks (Baker-Doyle 2012; Frank, Zhao, and Borman 2004). Additionally, studies focusing on change within schools find that informal and formal mentors are both essential for reducing burnout, retaining new teachers, and driving innovation (Baker-Doyle 2010, 2011; Baker-Doyle and Yoon 2010; Siciliano 2016; Thomas 2007).

*How Concern about the Top 25% Program Manifested on the Ground*

Sattler’s principal, from the quote above, introduced mandatory co-planning for teachers in the same grade-level subject to encourage more standardization and cohesiveness. He and his assistant principal would rotate through these meetings monthly to assist teachers in the substantive areas they once taught in and to check on their progression as a team. He worried that teachers would stop sharing lesson plans with each other out of fear that they would help someone earn more of a bonus, or maybe even keep their job, over them when the top twenty-five percent program was first discussed and then introduced. His concerns were echoed by

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39 One of the LEA administrators who allowed me to shadow him around the county would stop every teacher he saw close to retirement to ask them to stay for just a year or two longer to help train new people. His major concern was the wave of retirements coming up and the lack of new teachers coming in to replace them.
every administrator that I spoke with, including many of the principals I spoke with just before a county-wide meeting to decide on the criteria to determine how to choose the top 25 percent of teachers in October 2013.

Across the middle schools in the project, teachers also shared the Sattler principal's concern about decreased resource sharing. One survey question asked: "Will you be less likely to share resources and/or ideas with other teachers because those deemed the top 25% are eligible for longer contracts and higher salaries?" Forty-five percent of teachers responded that they would not. However, twenty-one percent responded with a firm "yes," they would be less likely to share resources if the merit pay program was to continue. Thirty-four percent were unsure. All told, this means that more than half of the teachers in these middle schools were considering withholding their support for their coworkers if it could help another teacher make more money, or even keep their position, instead of them.

In the open-ended responses to the question, several wrote in comments like the following: "I will not, but I'm positive others will be." This could help to explain why so many were not certain about whether they would stop sharing resources. They were torn between wanting to continue helping their coworkers, as they traditionally have in education, and protecting their job. The merit pay program left teachers feeling uncertain about the motivations of their coworkers and the strength of their relationships with each other. After five years of frozen salaries and the newly abolished advanced-degree pay under the Excellence in Education Act, many felt this might be the only way to increase their own salaries to better support their families.

Others reported concerns over what this kind of legislation was doing to relationships more broadly between teachers. One participant replied to the open-ended question with: “The
Bill is a divisive action that will cause most teachers to become alienated." Much like the Sattler principal, she worried that teacher relationships would suffer beyond decreased resource sharing. She felt that teachers would stop interacting with each other in all ways, resulting in isolated teachers who felt disconnected from their school community. Essentially, many teachers and administrators worried that the fabric of their school communities, something necessary for student success, would unravel if teachers were pitted against each other to compete for bonuses and status.

SAFEGUARDING DIGNITY THROUGH RESISTANCE

I asked the Pierce County administrators why they did not just tell the state “no” and refuse to implement the top 25% program. The principals were worried about it, none of the administrators thought it was a good idea, and people were more focused on figuring out how to trouble-shoot the problems the program was going to cause than developing ways to implement the State’s mandate. One administrator shrugged his shoulders and said “this is just how things are done.” He was so used to the federal and state governments passing down initiatives he did not agree with that this latest worried him, but did not spur him into active resistance against the State. The principals followed his lead, upset about the changes, but unwilling to challenge the legislation.

This response was paralleled by the teachers. Most were engaging in informal resistance by loudly exclaiming their displeasure but continuing to work around the neoliberal changes as best as they could. Teachers across the schools expressed their belief that expecting all students to pass the standardized tests was problematic. Further, holding the teachers in the lowest

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40 However, as discussed in the previous chapter, counties with more power and resources than Pierce blocked the program before it was implemented for the 2014-2015 school year.
performing classes and schools accountable for raising all their students’ scores was a Sisyphean task.

Teachers in Whedon were the most resistant to Standard 6 after it was announced. Carson described how being held directly accountable for his students’ test scores shaped how he found meaning in his work in a 2013 interview:

“
We care about the students growing. But we know that doesn't show us whether or not we can teach and it never will. I don't care how many standards they want to put on my evaluation. I will never judge my success by a standardized test. Ever. The student's success cannot be measured by a test given on one day when I have to differentiate everything in my class and I think that everybody is the same way around the board.” -- Carson, Whedon

Carson’s complete rejection of the use of standardized scores to measure his teaching skill was the most vehement reaction to Standard 6 that I found, and the clearest underscoring of how the new standard undermined teachers’ ability to achieve dignity in work. However, the sentiment was consistent across teachers in Whedon. They wanted their students to do well, and pushed them to achieve higher scores, but were aware of the consistent research findings that standardized test scores were more highly correlated with SES than learning or ability (Ravitch 2016). As a teacher in a ninety-eight percent free-and-reduced lunch eligible middle school, Carson knew that he could either discount the new standard or own the “below expectations” or “below standard” assessment he would get at the end of the year despite his principal assessing him at “exceeding expectations” based on her observations and year-long interactions with him and his classes. He determined to focus on the growth he could see his students making instead of the standards set by NC.

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41 I coded Carson’s reaction as resistance instead of an alternative meaning system because he wasn’t coming up with another way to make meaning out of his work. He was still working toward the same goal of teaching the students the material, but he was withholding his support of the exams. He was actively resentful of this aspect of his work.
More broadly, some teachers resisted participating in the DPI-led trainings and team-planning meetings mandated by school-level administrators. Teachers frequently scheduled parent-teacher meetings, make-up tests, and IEP meetings when they knew this kind of professional development meeting was scheduled. One teacher was particularly known for this practice at Whedon. She rarely attended any department or grade-level meetings and scheduled other meetings to take place at times so she could leave early or come into a training late. When I asked her about this practice, she explained to me that her mother, also employed at the school, had been teaching for decades. She felt that she could learn all that she needed to from her mother and abhorred “wasting time” in meetings that only looked good on paper.

The sentiment that professional development trainings by DPI were a “waste of time” was wide-spread. When I asked if I could sit in on some, one administrator was surprised that I was interested in the meetings and told me that “someone should get some use out of them.” At the meetings, teachers were largely disengaged, most checking email or social networking sites on their cell-phones. These small, informal acts by the teachers and administrators were resistance against the mandates passed down to them from the State or from their school administration. The teachers stated that they had no say in how these trainings were run, the content covered in them, or the time they had to take out of their already busy schedules to attend them when I asked about their opinion of the trainings. Most teachers appreciated pedagogical tips, but wanted concrete resources they could use in their classrooms to learn the new curriculum they were handed and then differentiate it across the different learning levels of the students in their classes. Teachers told me that the time would be much better spent talking to mentors about their individual difficulties and planning work to meet the needs of their own students.
Withdrawning from Personal Relationships

Were the teachers in these schools actually isolating themselves from their colleagues to increase their own chances of earning bonuses and protecting their limited resources? No. Teachers in Pierce County were not withholding professional support from each other. But, they were shifting their relationships in other ways to protect themselves and their work teams as much as possible in an intensifying work environment in. The most common resistance tactic that I found among teachers in Pierce County across demographic characteristics and schools was a desire to firmly separate personal lives from their professional ones. Lucy, a teacher at Atwood Middle School, explained that: “I think a lot of us choose that way. Not necessarily hang out with your coworkers.”

In interviews, most of the teachers in Sattler, Butler, and Atwood Middle Schools echoed Lucy’s original sentiment. They had people at the school they could rely on for help or an ear when they had problems with student behavior or curriculum, but they rarely referred to coworkers as “close friends,” despite regularly seeing each other outside of school. Teachers at Atwood mentioned that they all lived in the same large subdivision that fed into their rural middle school, and saw each other occasionally on the street. Sattler’s teachers were proud that their small middle school was firmly embedded within the surrounding community, and mentioned that they often bumped into each other, students, and their families when out shopping or at church. Butler is a larger middle school than Sattler, but echoed some of the same examples about “bumping” into members of the school community around town.

Teachers at Whedon listed more personal connections than teachers in other schools, often mentioning a family member or two who worked at this small inner-city school with them. Many of the teachers in Whedon were also active members in the same churches, and bumped
into each other several times a week in that capacity. However, some teachers at Whedon were glad that they lived outside of the city and attended churches elsewhere so they could keep those friendships, but not necessarily their religious views, separate from their work relationships.

When asked why they wanted to keep their personal and professional connections separate, teachers often cited the increasing amount of work and lack of time and space for making personal friendships. For example, Lucy explained that she felt most teachers did not have close friends at Atwood Middle because:

“We wear a lot of hats. Yea. We receive money. We do a lot more than just teach the content. You know, dealing with students that have poor home lives. Getting to know our students. Mentoring our students a lot. Trying to get to know them because obviously that affects their academic performance. You know, the closer that we can get to our students, knowing what's going on in their personal lives. It comes with that kind of thing. Social work, sometimes I feel like I do.”

Lucy felt that she needed to expend her emotional energy and small amounts of extra time getting to know her students, not her coworkers, on a more personal level, in order to do her job well. Pearl, a teacher at Whedon Middle School, further illuminated how increased duties dampened friendships:

“There's a lot of paperwork, and paperwork is a weak area for some people, so paperwork gets done wrong, there's, you have some team members who wanted to play the blame game and say that you told me to do this and you told me to do that...just working out those issues of...um..clear communication and follow through."

Pearl mentioned the increasing amount of federal and state mandated paperwork required for teaching children who need classroom accommodations. These individualized learning plans (IEP's), must be signed off and followed by the teachers each child works with, their parents, their exceptional children's (EC) main teacher, and the school's psychologist, social worker, and administration. This paperwork is filled out and filed in duplicate and must be updated for every student within the legally mandated timeframe for their specific condition. This responsibility
requires a lot of communication, and the forms and procedures change regularly with the development of new theories, tests, and laws to best accommodate all children. These procedures add a lot to any school's plate. In Whedon, where twenty-three percent of the students have IEP's, it results in a lot of pressure on teachers throughout the school and their relationships with one another. As Pearl mentions, the stress of this responsibility can hinder relationships between teachers who must work with each other to ensure the best education for all of their students, especially when there is federal oversight.

Patty, from Butler Middle, helped to further explain why increasing work expectations, devoid of additional time and resources to accomplish them, cut into teachers’ desire to make personal connections with their coworkers:

"There's not a lot of playtime. You know, you have to get along with each other. So we don't really get to know enough to not get along. You know what I mean?"

Along with the lack of time to get to know each other on a personal level, Patty also brings up the desire to avoid conflict. Several teachers mentioned that they did not want to invest time in relationships that might backfire and take up more of their limited time in squabbles unrelated to work.

This withdrawal from personal connections is a resistance tactic consistent with other neoliberal workplaces. The kind of "work intensification" under flexible production methods blurs the line between employees’ private time and aspirations with those of the organization, resulting in increased employee burnout and health problems (Kunda 2006; Chamberlain and Hodson 2001; Crowley et al. 2010; Pugh 2015). In an effort to protect their mental wellbeing, employees may start engaging in “social segmentation” by building boundaries between their home and work lives. This personal disengagement cuts workplace friendships off before they even start (Kunda 2006). Individual employees may even come to fear that their coworkers will
steal their ideas or rate them poorly, causing them to withdraw from individual relationships (Fraser 2001). Essentially, workers see their peers as possible hurdles to their own success if the peers fail to do their assigned tasks well and efficiently (Graham 1993; Smith 1997; Collins 2001; Anderson-Connolly et al. 2002). Ultimately, the intense pace and competition between workers in neoliberal workplaces harms productivity as people stop sharing information with each other and employees revolve out in-and-out of the workplace too quickly to establish an expert labor force (Crowley and Hodson 2014).

Additionally, the neoliberal shift in the United States since 1970 coincided with Americans' views about friendships more broadly (Luxton 2010; Pugh 2015). Americans began rating work time as more important than leisure time by the 1980s (Fay 1992). They also experience what Perlow (1999) terms, "Time Famine," - i.e. that they do not have enough time to accomplish all that they want or need to within a traditional workday. Therefore, workers cut down on interactions at work to preserve work time and often cut into their leisure time in the mornings, evenings, and weekends to make additional time for their individual work tasks (Perlow 1999).

*Sabotaging Self-Reviews*

In the fall of 2014, Pierce County was preparing for their next AdvancED Accreditation assessment. AdvancED is a collective board of educators that came together in 2006 to improve schools by analyzing whole “education systems” every five years. Every school in the district was tasked with completing an internal review. Each principal handled this duty differently, with two schools in my study assigning groups of teachers to each of the five required standards: (1) purpose and direction, (2) governance and leadership, (3) teaching and assessing learning, (4) resources and support systems, and (5) using results for continuous improvement. The groups
were each assigned compiling evidence of the school’s success in one of these areas. For example, classroom or grade level news bulletins sent home to parents and invitations to parent open house nights could serve as evidence that the school was reaching out to parents – a stakeholder in the community – under the resources and support systems standard.

Several of the teachers I interviewed in Fall 2014 showed me the work they were doing to help with the accreditation effort. They had to find time to coordinate with each other and send out calls for evidence from faculty and staff around the school to help with their assigned group’s particular area. I also observed one group meeting at Whedon Middle School, where the teachers came together after school in the media center to discuss progress in their evidence collection. The groups also took this meeting time to fill out long questionnaires, where each teacher ranked the school’s performance on indicators for the standards on a scale from one to five. The group I sat with took this job seriously. “Accreditation” by AdvancED signals to colleges and other outside agencies that a district’s schools are maintaining at least the minimum required standards. It is another form of accountability. However, the teachers also knew that these ratings would be used as a baseline for future growth.

They decided to rank their school – themselves – lower than what they felt they actually rated so that they “would have room to grow” over the next five years. Furthermore, they told me that they certainly did not want to rate themselves into a position they could only fall from. Together, these teachers decided that, although they were proud of their work with their students and each other, the best way to protect their school’s status was to assess themselves at a lower level than they thought they earned. The teachers distrusted the accreditation process and collectively sabotaged it for long-term security. This practice parallels the “soldiering” that workers in a factory setting may take to keep the production lines slower (Taylor 1947; Hodson
But, the teachers were not withholding their effort. In fact, the teachers made it clear that they were working as hard as they could; they were doing the best possible with the Title 1 students and limited resources they had. Instead of withholding their labor, they were making it appear they could do more to temper future expectations.

SAFEGUARDING DIGNITY BY INCREASING ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP

Organizational citizenship refers to workers taking pride in their work and going beyond the baseline tasks necessary to complete the job. When employees become utterly engaged in the work, they align their own goals to match more closely with those of the organization. This creative extra effort allows workers to feel better about their jobs, even in less-than-ideal working conditions (Borman 2004; Coleman & Borman 2000; Hodson 2001). Furthermore, workplaces benefit as the employees find independent, unpaid ways to increase their productivity (Crowley & Hodson 2014; Hodson 2001).

Education reformers want to increase teachers’ organizational citizenship. Every leading reformer urges teachers to go above and beyond the basics of teaching content to craft meaningful lessons and to dedicate their free-time to their students. In Michelle Rhee’s (2013) recounting of her experience in Teach for America (TFA), she remembers getting her family to help her cut out felt shapes for math lessons during her unpaid summers off. She used her family’s copy machines to run extra worksheets because the school she worked for did not have the resources. Education reformers hold up teachers who go above and beyond, who are “doing whatever is necessary to invest her students and their families in working” to earn higher test scores, as the example of what all teachers should be doing to be successful (Kopp 2001:159). TFA founder, Wendy Kopp (2001), lauds a teacher who starts up Saturday night basketball games for struggling students. KIPP founders Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin encourage teachers
to follow their own lead and stay late every school day to work with students. They also recommend taking students’ calls at night for help on their homework (Mathews 2009). The increased organizational citizenship these teachers poured into their schools is effective. Each reformer lauded these teachers and their methods because the students showed growth on their test scores.

In Pierce County, most of the teachers and administrators I spoke with and observed were fiercely proud of their students. A group of Atwood language arts teachers excitedly told me they had purchased tickets to go to the county’s fair one night to cheer some of their students on in the spelling bee. Teachers in every school decorated their rooms and hallways to celebrate and welcome their students. While speaking with a faculty member in Whedon’s conference room, a fifth-grade teacher came in excitedly waving a student’s math test. He had started the year on a 2nd grade level and was now passing grade-level exams. The faculty member I was meeting with jumped up and down in a circle with her, obviously proud of this students’ hard-won achievement.

Beyond these moments of pride and excitement about student achievements, I only found that teachers at Whedon were going beyond the structure of the school to create additional opportunities for their students in a way that increased their organizational citizenship. A group of teachers ran a chapter of a girls’ decorum group, meeting with the members at least once a week after school. The members wore name badges at school that were decorated with a row of gems the girls could earn or lose for their behavior around the school. Teachers and administrators would report to the teachers running the program, giving the girls extra incentive to behave well on school grounds. The faculty in charge of the groups dedicated their money, skills, and free time to this group that worked largely after school hours. Many of the teachers
would drive students home after the meetings and to group trips around town on the weekends so they could attend.

The faculty were extremely proud of the students in their group. They understood their Title I students faced significant economic and mentoring disadvantages and they dedicated themselves to these very active afterschool groups to ameliorate their students’ issues. The teachers leading the group were particularly worried about these girls’ futures because of their gender, and used the group to encourage abstinence. These teachers were going above their jobs to instill the values they felt their students needed to succeed in life, beyond the academic skills tested on the EOGs. Furthermore, teachers and administrators outside of the group welcomed the extra accountability for their students, some eagerly anticipating the beginning of the groups’ meetings so their students would be easier to discipline.

Whedon’s girls’ group pre-dated the neoliberal shift in NC. The teacher’s assistants and TA’s had developed and maintained the group for more than a decade before I came to study the county. Their increased organizational citizenship in this group was a way to protect their dignity at work under the harsh conditions of a very high-poverty school, rather than as a way to safeguard their dignity due to neoliberal changes. However, the number of teachers involved with the group and the school’s appreciation for the group’s ability to keep discipline increased as the curriculum was increasingly standardized. The faculty used the group as a creative and service outlet they felt they no longer had time for during the day. In this way, they could safeguard a sense of dignity in their work by bringing more meaning to their interactions with their students and each other.
When workers’ ability to attain dignity at work is challenged, Hodson (2001) theorizes that they may safeguard themselves by coming up with alternative meaning systems. Part of achieving dignity is being able to cultivate a strong sense of identity. When a workplace sets unachievable standards, or the work is too repetitive to allow for creativity or a sense of mastery, employees develop different patterns or standards for themselves. These independent meaning systems are a way for workers to meet their own goals while keeping them in-line with the company’s ultimate objectives. They differ from the increased organizational citizenship behaviors above because rather than voluntarily working harder to directly contribute to the organization’s goals, these workers find meaning through something tangential to the workplace.

I found two primary alternative meaning systems that teachers used in Pierce County. Respondents typically delved into these when I asked them what kept them going amid hormonal pre-teens, public distrust of their profession, declining resources, stalled salaries, and frequent legislative mandates. Most immediately mentioned their faith. Many kept Bibles on their desks, wore crosses, and carried bags with Christian sayings or their church’s name. Dayne, a teacher at Sattler, delved into how his faith kept him going at school:

“A spiritual force in school can help. I pray for my school each day. I have devotion. I have my Bible on my desk and sometimes my kids will ask me about that. Of course, I can't initiate that because of the law, but if a student asks me then they've engaged me and I can answer their question. So, that's not against the law. So, and it's not against the law to have my Bible on my desk, but I'm not presenting it to them…I pray for my school. I feel like there's, I feel that when I do that, when I pray for my school, and I pray for my students, and I pray for my day, my attitude, I ask God to change my attitude if I have something that will inhibit me from not being an effective teacher that day.”

Dayne had begun every day of his decades-long career with a prayer over the school and his teaching. For him, God and the good morals encompassed in religion were impossible to separate from his work and connections with others. He cultivated this alternative meaning to
keep him going at work. It also kept him engaged with others and helped him find new connections throughout the staff – the custodians, coaches, and groundskeepers - at his school. Many teachers in Pierce County turned to their faith to make sense of their work and keep going even when legislative mandates or misbehaving students made them question their role as teachers.

Students before Schools

Teachers across the schools were keenly aware of how important their students’ test scores were to keep their jobs. However, some expressed that they were teachers for the students, first. Patty, a special education teacher at Butler, provided the clearest example of a teacher putting her students before the well-being of the school. Patty ran a support and advocacy group for the parents of her special needs students. I coded this as an independent meaning system, rather than a broader example of organizational citizenship because she was open about how much more difficult parents educated on their children’s rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and subsequent education policies.

Patty was teaching parents how to “advocate” for their children and saw this as a personal goal because she fostered and adopted so many special needs kids of her own. She felt that parents were “deer in the headlights” during their IEP (individual education plan) meetings, and wanted to empower them to ask for more for their students.

“The other thing is that I’ve networked with disability rights and those people too so if I need them, I will call them because my first obligation is to these kids. You know, I’m not saying that, I’m going to always try to go through my school system first and work things out but I’m a person that I went into this for people and these are my clients, these children.”

Patty wanted her students to do as well as possible by the standards set by the school and NC. But, she made the students her priority and found alternative ways to those within the school
system to achieve this goal. She achieved a sense of dignity in her work by helping her students, even when it made the school’s job more difficult.

RELYING ON RELATIONSHIPS IN PIERCE COUNTY

Teachers in Pierce County found themselves professionally collaborating with each other more than before the recent legislative changes because they needed to cover new curriculum without receiving new resources to teach it. Some of this collaboration was facilitated by administrators like Sattler’s Principal, who worried about teacher networks eroding under the competitive pressures the legislators were passing down. However, despite the reluctance to form close friendships among coworkers, teachers were also coming together more informally, as well.

Rachel, a teacher at Whedon, said that: "teachers, just by nature, share. That's what we do." My observations and interviews support this assertion. Most teachers were sharing pedagogy and curriculum with each other, even those who chose not to start close friendships with their coworkers. New teachers often sought out more experienced teachers for help with paperwork, planning, and classroom management. More experienced teacher’s assistants took it upon themselves to help new teachers during their planning time. I routinely sat with teachers during their brief lunch breaks or after school as they talked with each other about how to best address behavioral problems or how to encourage students who needed that extra push.

Teachers had to work together to keep up with the new curriculum for the 2013-2014 year. All grade levels and subjects had just switched to the Common Core curriculum and assessments. This meant that teachers who were in the same grade level and subject the year before had entirely new subject matter to cover. As one Butler teacher said, "at least we are all
lost together!" Essentially, the teachers needed to work together to keep in front of their students in the curriculum. As Elizabeth, a core teacher in Sattler Middle School put it:

"Now that the new curriculum is here and we don't have a lot of resources, we have to rely on each other."

Coming into the 2013-2014 school year, teachers did not receive new textbooks that aligned with the new Common Core curriculum. They also had little planning time and no extra income to make or develop new resources. Instead, most teams of teachers in the middle schools I studied pulled together to make up for the lack of resources. In fact, the core teachers in Elizabeth's grade and subject worked together to write grants for new projectors for their classrooms. They were the only teachers in the school with them due to their collective efforts.

Elizabeth even wished for more connections across the middle schools in the county to share more resources and ideas. She told me that:

“It would be nice because we're sorta all in the same boat with resources, so what are you using that's making it happen, how are you pulling things and doing things.”

Overall, Elizabeth was one of the most enthusiastic teachers I spoke with or observed during my study about building connections to share ideas and resources. However, she was also one of the teachers who saw the least amount of change to her curriculum for the 2013-2014 school year. Her only big changes were in the curriculum for the one advanced, grade-eight level math section that she taught. As a math teacher, she had adopted the Common Core curriculum the prior year. For this one course, she said:

“They truly have to learn seventh and eighth grade math in a year and so that's...a time constraint that we're all kind of learning to deal with.”

Elizabeth was also in a school with one of the lowest teacher turnover rates in the county, and had been working with the same group of teachers on her grade level for several years at this point. I found that teachers with less stable positions and who experienced more changes at the
beginning of this year were less enthusiastic about making an effort to cultivate more professional relationships. Furthermore, even though Elizabeth was eager to build more relationships to share resources, she mirrored the teachers’ narratives in the previous section about friendships at school, in that she did not want to develop, or did not feel like she was able to develop personal relationships with her coworkers. When I asked if she had any close friends at her school, she replied:

“um........my partner, across the hall, who teaches language arts, she and I have taught together six of the seven years I've been here. Um, so we're probably closer, personally, than I am with anyone else on the hall. So sometimes emotional support. There's not a lot of time, so it's, at the lunch table we might touch base. I was asking her about her husband's having some health issues and little things like that. For the most part it is instructional support, you know, planning together and getting things kind of accomplished for the week.”

Teachers in the middle schools I studied were not withholding their effort from others, as many worried would happen with the introduction of merit pay. Instead, I found that teachers had to pull together to keep up with the changing curriculum, especially without additional material resources and support. Teachers wanted to work with each other to provide the best education possible for their students. However, as mentioned in the previous section, these relationships generally fell short of the closer ties that might provide more emotional support as teachers felt they didn't have or want to risk the time and energy to invest in deeper friendships.

**Relying on Relationships to Protect Resources**

Teachers came together to share resources and collaborate on curriculum and pedagogy. They also came together to guard the limited resources that they already had. This form of boundary maintenance often occurred when a resource was threatened, or when it became salient. The more dominant group in the situation would define themselves as deserving of the
resource and make a claim over it. Status and time were the most pressing resources for teachers in these schools.

Individual teacher status was threatened by a new State assessment model. The Whedon principal felt that the greatest difference in the work-lives of the teachers over her three-year tenure at the school was the addition of direct evaluation on student scores, through “Standard 6.”

“I think, I don’t know if it’s the Common Core, which also happened at the same time that, that the North Carolina Teaching Evaluation Model added in the Standard 6, okay, because that Standard 6 was added in about the same time all of this Common Core and that Standard 6 is nothing but your student test scores, ok, nothing but your student test scores, so, knowing now that it is just the, it had been the standards 1-5 knowing now that you have that block, that accountability standard where, you know, it is not even based on, I guess, if you even thought there might be some administrator bias or judgement. It is just the cold, hard facts, you know. Who passed, who didn’t pass. Did you make a difference? Did you not make a difference for your students?”

Low student scores in schools and teacher evaluations directly threatened teachers' pay and continued employment. Core teachers\textsuperscript{42} were especially worried about their classroom averages, and some worked together to keep their scores up by manipulating which students were in their team’s classes. One team of core teachers at Butler Middle School avoided and excluded the exceptional children [EC] teachers in an effort to keep their students out of their classrooms. Teaching, especially children who need more attention, is a collective act. If the teachers do not work together well, the students can suffer. EC teachers are particularly cognizant of this, and try to place their students with teachers they know they will do well with.

\textsuperscript{42} Core teachers are those who teach mathematics, language arts, science, or history. All other subjects are considered “electives,” and are generally not subject to standardized tests. Under Standard 6, elective teachers are evaluated by the school’s average exam and growth scores.
"You know, we have one group that's tougher for EC [exceptional children] to work with...they're used to teaching highly intelligent students and then all of the sudden a lot of teachers have a lot on them...Teachers nowadays are going to be held accountable. They are saying that our evaluations are going to be held accountable for our students' growth...when you get a student who's EC...you are talking about bringing their growth down. And that stresses them...I don't think that they want to end up being the group that they kinda get fallen back on for that." - Patty, Butler Middle

Patty reiterated that the core teachers she mentioned are not bad people, or even mean. In fact, she later came back to this group, unbidden:

“They are fun to be around. They are a fun group…I’m just saying that it’s just a little bit harder for them to understand we have to push the law. And sometimes that can really step on toes. So, that’s how we do it.”

She struggled to reconcile their behaviors as teachers with how she felt about them as individuals. In the end, she pushed for what she felt was better for her students and put them in classes with more welcoming teachers. This adaptation had the unintended effect of safeguarding the group’s scores while jeopardizing the classroom averages of the more welcoming teams of teachers on the grade level. The latter teams now took on more students who were less likely to pass the exams and more likely to take up individual instruction time in the course, thus possibly lowering the scores of students who could have made the highest growth.

Time was another limited and highly coveted resource among teachers. After years of budget cuts, schools in this district hired fewer people to cover a growing student population than before. For example, several schools in the county shared one nurse, one guidance counselor, one school psychologist, and one social worker. Therefore, the duties of the people who used to sit at the reception desk, monitor the halls, watch over children during lunches, or even collect permission slips and money for field trips and fundraisers, now fell to the classroom teachers. Core Teachers attempted to protect their planning time by claiming that they deserved their time...
to plan and meet more than the elective teachers did. Dayne, an elective teacher at Sattler Middle School told me that:

"It may seem a little trivial, but in some ways it kind of creeps up and like, some of the other teachers will be like...Why don't they get elective teachers to do that...Those are the kind of things like, ok, get the elective teachers. Why can't the elective teachers do that? Why do we have to do that as core teachers? Why can't the elective teachers watch the kids while we stay in our class and do planning?"

Furthermore, these core teachers avoided the elective teachers in meetings or other school functions. Earlier, I mentioned Dayne’s use of his faith to connect with other staff - but not core teachers – in his school. This distinction helps to underline the group boundaries Dayne faced at Sattler as an elective teacher. Overall, Dayne felt hurt by the slights and was frustrated that the principal agreed with the core teachers.

Margot, an elective teacher at Atwood Middle School, confirmed that this division of labor existed on her campus, too. I asked her how this was arranged in her school, and she replied that:

“I mean, being an elective teacher, I think our principal likes us having fourth block planning because we do all of the duties like bus and car rider duty and, you know, being in a middle school, nobody drives, as opposed to a high school, so we, you know, about quarter to three, we have to go out and get ready for dismissal and the classroom teachers have the kids and they can't."

I asked her how she felt about standing outside at the beginning or end of the day for at least half an hour – sometimes pulling both duties:

“I mean, it's not bad because it's a give and take. I mean, we don't have a homeroom. We don't have to worry about paperwork as much as the core teachers do. So, you know, it's a give and take.... It’s not bad.... It could be worse. That's my philosophy. It could be a lot worse.”

Unlike Dayne, Margot had been teaching for less than five years. She was comparing her experience in the school to what she saw going on in the increasingly insecure economy. Dayne was comparing his treatment in the school to his past experiences with the same people, in the
same workplace. The difference in their reactions to the use of elective teachers to pick up the work left by the cut support positions highlights how the changes occurring outside of the organization undermine the ability to achieve dignity in and at work.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Workers strive for dignity at work, and when the conditions to obtain it are undermined or threatened, workers find other ways to find meaning and satisfaction from their labor. This dedication to preserving the self while continuing to work towards the goals of the hiring organization – citizenship behavior - is what keeps workplaces going. The relationships between workers, workers and their products, and workers and their managers are the glue that holds an organization together, allowing it to innovate and reproduce successful means of production (Crowley and Hodson 2014; Fine 1986; Tomaskovic-Devey 2014; Zelizer 2005, 2011).

Hodson (2001) theorizes that overwork, a common outcome of neoliberal restructuring under neotayloristic assumptions about workers, severely cuts down on workers’ citizenship behaviors. If employees are too tired or stressed to get the basics of the work asked for them done, they are not going to go above-and-beyond, to put in more effort towards organizational goals. I only saw increased organizational citizenship on the part of the teacher’s assistants and elective teachers at Whedon. Teachers across all job titles in Whedon wanted to contribute as much as they could to their students, taking pride in even the smallest achievements. But, core teachers were overworked to the point that they could not go much beyond their standard job duties.

However, the non-core faculty were still exceedingly busy as well. The difference between core teachers in Whedon and the other faculty at the school was that the former were pouring everything they had into their standardized curriculum and keeping up with the
increasingly mandated paperwork for their students. Elective teachers, teacher’s assistants, custodians, and other school personnel were gladly increasing their organizational citizenship behaviors by offering extras that the core teachers offered and helped with before the neoliberal changes were implemented. More non-core faculty started engaging in student clubs, decorated around the building, took on additional faculty and student mentees, and built up a general feeling of connectedness around the school. Whedon’s non-core teachers safeguarded their dignity by increasing their organizational citizenship. They stepped into the roles that core-faculty and additional positions, now cut under decreased funding, used to fill. The overworked core-teachers protected their ability to attain dignity at work by resisting what they felt were meetings that “wasted” their time and turning to each other for help with their teaching.

Teachers in Butler and Sattler responded to the emphasis on competition and minimal resources differently, echoing the patterns sociologists find in neoliberalizing workplaces. Under neoliberalism, workplaces intensify jobs with increased emphasis on competition and efficiency. When workers face this kind of intensification, some react individualistically by competing one-on-one against their co-workers or by drawing firm boundaries between their home and work lives (e.g. Kunda 2006). Others identify with and define groups within the workplace to protect their emotional wellbeing (e.g. Leidner 1993), make up for lacking material resources (e.g. Bakker et al. 2005, 2006), or even amplify their voices to more effectively resist management (e.g. Roscigno and Hodson 2004).

Each of these reactions has implications for the well-being of the worker and for the workplace as a whole. To protect themselves, workers often engage in more individual and group conflict, turn over at high rates, and withdraw from personal friendships in the workplace. This breaking down of interpersonal relationships ultimately jeopardizes long-term organizational
health (Crowley and Hodson 2014). Furthermore, as people tend to draw group boundaries between those most like them versus those who are not, these kinds of protective maneuvers may create or exacerbate categorical inequality in the workplace (Avent-Holt and Tomaskovic-Devey 2013; Roscigno 2007; Tilly 1999; Tomaskovic-Devey 2014).

I found little support for teachers withholding professional support from each other, as the principals and county leaders feared they would. Teachers were engaging in social segmentation as a mental and emotional protective act, much as Kunda (2006) found that workers in an intense tech company did. But, these teachers were not withdrawing from professional relationships altogether. They still talked with their team members and collaborated on how to teach the new curriculum and how to handle students. They just "chose" not to let these relationships go any further. These teachers felt a “time famine” about their jobs and did not want to put the emotional investment into a personal relationship that might take more time than they felt they had to give under increasing pressures and duties (Perlow 1999).

Many teachers did not want to begin relationships that would end abruptly if their colleagues were moved by district or school management to another position or school. Some left of their own volition to other districts or states that paid their teachers higher salaries. Several recalled having those kinds of close relationships in the past and then losing part of what they loved about the job when those intimate relationships at work ended. They did not want to make themselves vulnerable like that again. Public schools, while a more stable workforce than most, are still seeing the "tumbleweed society" effect Pugh (2015) argues that this is happening across intimate and professional relationships around the country. The teachers in North Carolina's public schools are part of a national trend toward fewer, looser relationships in a "culture of insecurity."
The more striking findings are those concerning collective efforts at protection. Instead of atomizing and competing as individuals, teachers in these schools were identifying groups to make stronger claims on resources. At Whedon, a group of teachers collectively decided to rank themselves lower than they felt their school deserved to protect the school from what they felt were unrealistic and ill-defined expectations about future growth. This resistance parallels the acts of sabotage factory workers commit to machines on the line (Burawoy 1979; Juravich 1996). This instance of collective action identified the entire school as the in-group. The teachers asserted that they were doing a good job, a job they were proud of, but that they did not fully believe in what they considered an arbitrary measurement design of their work.

The other forms of collective action occurred between smaller groups of teachers within the schools. Core teachers were particularly apt to come together among themselves to protect their status and time as "classroom teachers." This is partly because they were the most affected by acts like the new Standard Six. However, they were also able to protect resources like time more effectively than other teachers because core teachers are viewed as more valuable in the neoliberal education system. Their subjects are standardized and tested, as well as compared cross-nationally to objectively rank education systems and students. The desire to protect themselves, coupled with their higher status in the system, allowed the core teachers to hoard opportunities like time away from elective teachers.

The second, subtler form of claims-making over "better" students in Butler Middle School mirrors the "educational triage" teachers around the country have performed. The most publicized case occurred in Texas, when Jennifer Booher-Jennings (2005) discovered that teachers were separating students into three groups to focus their attention on the “bubble kids” who were on the threshold of passing the “Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills.”
Students who scored too high the previous year to go any further and those with little hope of improving their scores enough to pass were left out of the concentrated efforts teachers gave to “bubble kids.” At Butler, the group of core teachers accomplished this kind of tracking of the lowest students out of their classes by working poorly with the exceptional children’s (EC) teachers. The latter felt so uncomfortable with their relationships with these teachers that they assigned their students to teachers who worked more readily with them.

These smaller-group practices of opportunity hoarding created inequality in these schools. But, this inequality was not drawn to reproduce inequality along categorical lines, to mimic larger patterns of social closure. Instead, they were drawn along interest conflicts between teachers with greater power and those with less within the system (Roscigno, Hodson, and Lopez 2009). Teachers outside of the in-groups were left with more duties beyond their job description, making their work lives more unpleasant and decreasing the amount of time they had to work on their own lessons and relationships with each other and students. The groups whose claims over students who were more likely to improve their growth scores gave them an advantage over other teachers, who were then at risk for lower average scores in their own classes and who now took on more students who needed additional paperwork, lesson-planning, and attention.

These kinds of small-group opportunity hoarding did not occur in all of the schools I studied. The teachers at Atwood and Whedon Middle School did not report these kinds of inter-departmental resource pooling. In fact, the elective teachers, custodians, and other school staff were just as involved in the schools’ running and duties as their core teacher counterparts. This leaves open questions about why the elective teachers at Butler and Sattler had different experiences. It could be that groups in all four of the schools were making claims, but only those in Butler and Sattler were recognized as "legitimate" by those in positions of power (Avent-Holt
and Tomaskovic-Devey 2016). This suggests that key organizational actors may have the power to encourage or hinder inequality between groups within an organization. I will examine the role of organizational actors and contexts in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 6: MANAGERIAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIORS, ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES, AND THE CONDITIONS FOR DIGNITY IN WORK

In the first chapter, I described how the legislative changes the NC General Assembly made to North Carolina’s public education system undermined teachers’ ability to attain dignity at work. In the second chapter, I analyzed data from four middle schools to ascertain how public-school teachers were safeguarding their dignity under the increasing neoliberal pressures to compete with each other using as few resources as possible. Each of the four schools, located in the same county and teaching the same grade levels, were under the same pressures to compete for new individualized incentives while adjusting to new curriculum and standards. However, I found that teachers in two of the four schools I studied were using their relationships to form in-groups and hoard opportunities – namely time and students more likely to show growth on standardized tests – from out-groups.

This discrepancy points to something at the organizational level shaping whether and how relational inequality forms within the schools. Sociological workplace literature points to managerial citizenship behaviors as a likely culprit, as managers hold the greatest responsibility to maintain a cohesive workplace culture (Crowley 2016; Ezzamel and Willmott 1998; Hodson 2001; Roscigno, Hodson, and Lopez 2009). Education literature similarly points to principals as the shepherd of their school’s culture (Fink and Resnick 2001; Hallinger and Heck 1998; Louis and Wahlstrom 2011; Ingersoll 2003; Rayner 2017). However, education researchers consistently find that principals have little impact on the effective adoption of neoliberal changes. Instead, the density and extensity of teachers’ network ultimately shapes whether innovations are successful and how they shape the school culture (Baker-Doyle 2012; Daly 2010; Rayner 2017; Philpott 2007). Additional research points to the limited efficacy managers
have over maintaining a positive workplace culture when resources are in short supply (Ariza-Montes et al. 2016; Huy 2002; Philpott 2007).

In this final substantive chapter, I use the mixed-methods data collected from Atwood, Butler, Sattler, and Whedon middle schools in Pierce County to analyze the differences between the schools that led to opportunity hoarding through social closure in Butler and Sattler. I start by briefly introducing managerial citizenship behavior and the challenges managers in a neoliberal market face to positively engage in this manner. This section emphasizes how organizational resources shape managerial effectiveness and relationships between coworkers. Then, I describe the two schools where I did not find evidence of opportunity hoarding, followed by a description of those where I did. I find that Butler and Sattler’s environments were more chaotic than the tightly controlled work-cultures of Atwood and Whedon Middle Schools. However, the latter two also benefitted from additional and more flexible funding than what is traditionally available to public-schools.\(^4^3\) This suggests that, while management styles matter for the prevention of inequality creation between groups in a workplace, organizational resources independently shape patterns of relational inequality as well. Higher-status teachers in more experienced workforces are better able to make successful claims over what they perceive as increasingly limited resources than lower-status teachers or teachers working in schools with higher turnover and more “early-career” teachers.\(^4^4\)

\(^{43}\) Butler Middle, one of the schools where opportunity hoarding was present, received Title I money. However, this federal grant money is less flexible than the grants and focuses more specifically on individual students than improving the school as a whole. Butler also received less Title I funding than Whedon because of its smaller low-SES student population.

\(^{44}\) “Early-career” teachers are in their first five years of classroom teaching.
MANAGERIAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOR

Managers are responsible for two major workplace characteristics: 1) providing and maintaining the physical and social resources necessary for production, and 2) ensuring that the relational aspects of the workplace environment are just and allow for worker growth (Crowley 2016; Hodson 1999, 2001). Satisfied workers feel that their management structure is stable and well-organized. They are provided with the resources they need to perform their goals, they are fairly compensated and recognized for their work, and their managers are receptive to their personal and familial needs (Ezzamel and Willmott 1998; Crowley 2016; Rubin and Brody 2011). Managerial citizenship behavior parallels the organizational citizenship behavior workers may also contribute (Hodson 1999; Crowley 2016). In both cases, employees and managers put forth more than the essential job requirements to ensure successful production. Furthermore, the presence of high managerial citizenship behaviors is correlated with high employee citizenship behaviors, suggesting managers set the tone for workplace norms around effort and cohesiveness (Crowley 2016).

When managers do not successfully exercise managerial citizenship behaviors, workplaces fall into organizational chaos (Roscigno, Hodson, and Lopez 2009). This is not to say that bureaucratic order falls away, but that the production process melts into disorder. The trust between workers or between workers and managers that keeps the workplace together erodes. Organizational chaos may arise when a manager is ill trained or abusive, but may also stem from a neoliberal labor market that emphasizes flexible production over all else (Kalleberg 2009; Roscigno, Hodson, and Lopez 2009; Sennett 1998). In these instances, managers are expected to buffer the ill-effects of the market-driven changes on their workforce (Huy 2002; Smith 1991, 2016). However, managers have little effect on how well organizations adopt top-
down innovations, particularly in the public sector. Furthermore, workers in public sector jobs may see attempts managers make to smooth transitions during times of change as more harmful than useful (Damanpour and Schneider 2008; Philpott 2007).

In chaotic workplaces, managers often turn to bullying and micromanagement to regain control of the organization, further undermining the ability of the workers to achieve dignity in their work (Hodson 2001; Roscigno, Hodson, and Lopez 2009). Even when managers do not turn to mismanagement in these situations, a lack of resources and increased job demands can still increase coworker tensions (Ariza-Montes et al. 2016; Rayner 1997). In chaotic workplaces employees with more experience, longer tenure, and/or higher status are the best able to defend themselves against abusive coworkers and managers (Roscigno, Hodson, and Lopez 2009).

If employees find themselves unable to achieve their goals in their workplace, they not only disengage from organizational citizenship behaviors, but also find ways to safeguard their dignity (Hodson 2001). Managerial incompetence, both real and perceived, most often leads to co-worker infighting (Hodson 2008). In many workplaces, employees leave for an organization more likely to help them achieve their goals (Buchanan 1975; Steijn 2008; Taylor 2008; Vinzant 1998). Public school teachers are no different. When teachers find that they cannot meet achieve their goals in their school, they commonly switch within the county or region to find a principal whose style they like better. Many teachers move with a principal they like if the latter is assigned to a different school (Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin 2011; Pogodzinski, Youngs, Frank, and Belman 2012). Schools also see higher turnover rates than usual after a principal’s first year as the latter starts implementing their own vision for the school (Fuller 2012).45

45 I found evidence for this often in my own data. Atwood saw high turnover when their principal took the position five years prior to my data collection. Whedon’s principal, in her first year when I began studying Pierce County, brought a significant number of teachers with her from her previous position.
SOCIAL CLOSURE IN CHAOTIC WORKPLACES

The emphasis on competition, coupled with fewer resources, under flexible production methods shapes how workers perceive and use their relationships with each other, especially when the workplace slips into organizational chaos (Hodson 1996, 2001). Work intensification under more flexible production methods can increase the number and quality of relationships between workers. Competition can increase worker engagement and employees may feel more attached to both the workplace and each other when given more autonomy over their work (Appelbaum 1992; Barker and Tompkins 1994; Hodson 2001; Knights and McCabe 2003; Batt 2004). Furthermore, these kinds of close relationships can serve as effective control mechanisms as workers feel like they have a voice and are part of the norms governing them than in a more top-down managerial approach (Barker 1993; Ezzamel and Willmott 1998; Sewell and Wilkinson 1992; Sewell 1998; Kunda 2006).

However, as workers come together in workplaces characterized by organizational chaos, they may engage in social closure projects to protect their groups’ interests. In-groups work to advantage their own members by restricting access to resources and positions of privilege away from those they define their out-group (Gerth and Mills 1958; Parkin 1979; Roscigno 2007; Roscigno, Hodson, and Lopez 2009; Tilly 1999). Workers may draw lines along interest conflicts, between positions that only hold meaning within that organization. Or, as people tend to draw group boundaries between those most like them versus those who are not, workers may distinguish their in versus out-groups based in larger social closure projects, like race, class, and gender (Gouldner 1954; Roscigno 2007; Roscigno, Hodson, and Lopez 2009).

The most extreme form of social closure within the workplace is "hierarchy maintenance," when workers and managers engage in discriminatory actions against "othered"
groups to hoard opportunities and protect the existing workplace social structure. This process begins with a group making a "claim" over an increasingly scarce resource. Many claims are made subtly, through acts like labelling materials or assuming ownership over a shared space for one group’s use over another. Worker-groups tend to rely on task competence and status within the organization to make their argument. If influential actors, namely the manager, recognize the claim as legitimate, the group making the claim is allowed to pool the resources in question. This inequitable distribution becomes normalized and leaves room open for exploitative relationships and opportunity hoarding away from those considered members of the in-group (Avent-Holt and Tomaskovic-Devey 2016; Tomaskovic-Devey 2014).

OPPORTUNITY HOARDING IN PIERCE COUNTY

While North Carolina saw unusually high teacher turnover during the general assembly’s neoliberal changes, most teachers stayed, especially those in counties like the one I studied (DPI 2014, 2015). In Pierce County, teachers were proud to be teaching in the school district they grew up in. They saw teaching in these schools as their duty and wanted to give back to the community that raised them. Most were deeply embedded in the community, with family close by and partners tied to their own local jobs. For these teachers, leaving was not an option, even as they became increasingly frustrated with the NC General Assembly and the conditions of their schools. The organizational settings, their schools, shaped what the teachers saw as their greatest needs and how they worked to achieve them. For the remainder of the chapter, I will describe the setting of each of the middle schools I studied, paying particular attention to their administration. I conclude the description of each school with an analysis of what factors present in the school led or discouraged teachers from feeling the need to hoard resources and/or successfully doing so.
Atwood Middle School

School Setting

This rural school was one of the largest in Pierce County and housed in some of the most recently constructed school buildings. The majority of the students were white, with less than a quarter identifying as black and around ten percent as Latinx. Around half of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch and almost sixty percent of the students performed on their grade level. Atwood earned a “C” on the North Carolina report card system, with the grades determined by the students’ average performance on the standardized end-of-year tests. The school also “exceeded expectations” for student growth, measured as the change in students’ scores on the end of year tests from one year to the next.

Almost twenty percent of Atwood’s students were from the active-duty military population, making it eligible for Department of Defense grants. The school successfully competed for one of these grants the year before I began collecting data. The grant aimed to increase technology in schools, and Atwood used the money to purchase fifty-seven security cameras and iPads for every teacher in the building. They were also able to purchase a few class sets of iPads for student use. The faculty were relatively satisfied with their school, with eighty-percent agreeing or strongly agreeing that the school was “a good place to work and learn” on the 2014 Teacher Working Conditions Survey. Atwood experienced high turnover when the principal first entered the position five years earlier. Teacher turnover steadied after his first few years and remained relatively low compared to other schools in Pierce County by the 2013-2014 school year.

The numbers given in these descriptions are approximate in an attempt to maintain the confidentiality of the schools.
Administration

Atwood Middle School was an extension of its principal; this administrator kept his staff and students under control using his system of fifty-seven cameras and walkie-talkies. Margot, an elective teacher, explained in a fall 2014 interview that:

“Yea, he's very hands-on, you know, making sure that nothing goes wrong and everybody's safe and the students are safe and, you know, that's why he has so many teachers that, so many duties and things, because he wants students to know that we are out and about and don't be doing anything that you're not supposed to be doing. And that's good, because we don't have any discipline problems.”

As Margot explained this to me, she showed me her binder of printed lesson plans that she submitted to the principal every Friday. She also brought out the bright pink flier with the day’s announcements, birthdays, and reminders that the principal personally handed out each morning to every teacher in the building. Atwood’s principal micromanaged everything that happened in his school, from his teachers’ schedules to the students’ movements between classes, which he signalled himself over the school’s loudspeaker system by his own watch. During class changes, he watched the halls, waiting for one set of students to clear the way before allowing the next set to move to their lockers and then on to their next classes. The principal paid similarly close attention to the whereabouts of each teacher, calling their room phones if he could not find them in their assigned hall or lunch duty spot between classes.

As Margot mentioned, the principal justified his intense management strategy as the best way to keep staff and students safe. Online, parents noted that he had run the school like a military operation since assuming the position five years earlier, for better or worse. Atwood teachers used the words “control freak” and “micromanager” when describing their principal to me, and in interviews and conversations the “he” or “him” they referred to always meant the

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47 I located parent reviews on greatschools.org, a website where people around the nation can review their local schools.
principal. However, the teachers at the school were fond of the principal. Lucy, a teacher who had worked in different positions across several schools in Pierce County, explained why she enjoyed working under him:

“I just like the structure of our school. There is never any question of what I am supposed to do and how I am supposed to do it. I like that. I think that teachers and students thrive on structure. Most days are the same. Students know what to expect. We have a lot of routines and procedures that we go over at the beginning of school and that makes most every day a successful day….I think that we have great, good leadership.”

In a time of great flexibility and down-sizing in NC’s public education system, teachers like Brenda appreciated the straight-forwardness of Atwood’s principal. They also appreciated the principal’s efforts to evenly distribute extra duties across the faculty and staff and his attempts to include everyone – from custodian to lead teacher – on committees. Brenda, another teacher explained that:

“Everybody's on a committee and everybody gets their input and school improvement plan. So, it works out really well.”

Teachers initially resisted the principal’s micromanagement. Turnover was much higher than usual during his first years, but those who stayed learned to safeguard their dignity through informal games. Emma, employed at Atwood for decades, laughingly told me that the teachers quickly learned which car the principal drove and would announce “the eagle has landed” when he arrived on campus over the intercom. When he drove away, someone would announce that “Elvis has left the building” to let everyone know they could relax. However, over the years, Emma felt that the principal had mellowed some and that they were used to his “quirks.” By this point, Emma strongly felt that she wanted to “stick with the devil she knew” than to deal with the unknowns a new principal might bring. Teachers and faculty echoed this latter sentiment often in interviews when I asked them how they felt about working under such heavy surveillance.
Atwood’s teachers were pleased with their principal because of his managerial citizenship behaviors. His extreme attention to detail would rankle as a form of mismanagement in many workplaces and did for many of the teachers initially employed at the school, as evidenced by the high turnover rate during his first years. But, at this tumultuous time in NC’s legislative history, Atwood’s teachers appreciated his predictability and obsessive dedication to safety. His managerial style was made possible through the grants the school earned from the department of defense, which allowed him to post the cameras. Furthermore, while the teachers wanted newer textbooks to keep up with the changing curriculum, they were pleased with the new iPads they all received under the defense grant. The teachers were also satisfied with their newly renovated and annexed building.

Overall, Atwood’s teachers did not feel the need to hoard resources. Because the principal tightly regulated every aspect of their schedule, they never mention actively working to protect their planning time as teachers in the other schools did. The technology grants from the defense department meant that each classroom was equipped with the latest educational tools and there were computer labs available for student and teacher use. These organizational-level characteristics buffered some of the impacts the neoliberal changes, including declining resources, that teachers in other schools were facing. Furthermore, if Atwood teachers had tried to hoard opportunities and resources from others, the principal would have addressed it immediately. He was firm in his ideas about keeping the task of students safe and the school running an equitable affair carried out by a team. Everyone felt his scrutiny equally.
Whedon Middle School

School Setting

Whedon Middle School was a Title I school receiving additional Race to the Top (RtT). Most of the nearly five hundred students were black and all received free-or-reduced lunches. All the students also participated in the Community Eligibility Provision, which served hot breakfast at school every morning. Many of the students walked to the school, which was located near the heart of this North Carolina city. When asked to describe how the context shaped the school, an assistant principal replied that:

"We have different fads every other month so, you know, one month it's like, ok, we’ll be good and the next week, it's like somebody got shot then it might disrupt our whole environment because that one person that got shot may be related to fifty kids here, or at least they say they are anyway...so here, everything around us affects what goes on in our school."

The school’s culture was largely dictated by what happened in the community surrounding it. As the one school assigned to all of the government housing projects in the district, the community was intimately connected to violence and death was a common topic in the school, as noted by the assistant principal above. In fact, many of the faculty held second jobs in the funeral industry, and were happy that they could comfort their students at school while providing a familiar face at funerals and wakes.

Whedon consistently received failing “report card” grades under North Carolina’s rating system and failed to meet annual growth expectations. Less than fifteen percent of the school’s students were on grade-level at the time of this study. Nearly one third of the school’s students had individual education plans (IEPs) due to intellectual, physical, and/or emotional needs that federally entitle them to additional classroom help. The number of students identified as Special Needs under the Exceptional Children’s program was more than twice the State’s average of
twelve and a half percent per school. Everyone in the county, including Whedon’s teachers and administrators, readily admitted that this an exceedingly tough place to work. Even the most dedicated teachers were prone to burnout.

The tense school environment made for a lot of turnover among classroom teachers; Whedon’s turnover rate was significantly higher than the state and LEA averages. Additionally, fewer of the teachers at Whedon had advanced degrees than the state and LEA averages, and fewer nationally board-certified teachers. The high turnover rate also meant that more of the staff was considered “beginning” teacher status, with less than three years on the job. Whedon also had significantly fewer senior teachers, defined as those with more than ten years of classroom experience than most of the other schools in the county. However, because the school was a Title I school, they received additional funding for tutors and other positions to help the students. For example, before my study, the school had full time hall monitors. By 2012, the LEA had cut the funding for this position, but the former hall monitors were now teaching assistants in the school, with some working to become certified classroom teachers.

Whedon’s faculty were very open about sharing resources and tactics with each other. Furthermore, when asked if unhappiness ever spreads around the school, Adele, a teacher, replied:

“Well, it don't spread. We, we, if somebody's down, we try to lift them up. We really do. And the one that’s happy, we just continue on."

There was an overarching theme, reiterated by teachers and administration, that the school was a “family.” Rachel, a teacher, illuminated the positives and negatives of this feel, which was unique to the schools I studied in Pierce County:

“I do think we're like a family. We support each other. We fight with each other just like a family does, but we kiss and make up and we move on. So I do think it's a family atmosphere here.”
The assistant principal echoed the teachers by telling me that one of his goals as a school leader was to make sure that the teachers worked together:

"It's very family oriented. Me and [the principal] have drilled that, that we are a team. We are a team...We understand; we are in this together. I love that, it's like my favorite part of the job, is to know that I can get on a teacher, hey we need to get this done, and they know that there is a love there that is beyond being a teacher. There is a lot of family orientation here at school."

The “drilling” the assistant principal mentioned referred to the year-long efforts he made alongside the principal to ensure that the teachers and faculty saw the administrators as partners and each other as resources in their common goal of keeping their particularly difficult student body safe and engaged. The administrative team was the first on the campus, greeting teachers and students as they came in, and the last to leave, often closing out the building long after the sun had gone down. The assistant principal deviated slightly from this routine when he brought the students who lived near him too and from school when they missed the bus, knowing they would otherwise skip the day altogether.

The principal believed in leading by example, and wanted to:

“give teachers ownership and buy-in into the decision making for the school, that makes it successful. Like this whole student club thing that we do on Friday that we started last year. That was my vision, ok, because I kept wanting to do something and I asked my instructional, administration coach, how do we do that and she shared how she did it at her school, at a school very similar to mine where kids couldn't stay after school, I gave, we, myself and the assistant principal handed that to the elective teachers and said, you create it, show us what it would look like, and see, now we have that buy-in, now my elective teachers are club advisors on Friday and they, at the end of last year, they came back and said, yea, we still want to do clubs, it's a wonderful opportunity for us to do something that's not really part of our curriculum, something we enjoy, something we like, and something that we can open up to students that we don't even see for electives but we can share that, so it's a win-win situation.”

Whedon’s principal worked to incorporate everyone on her faculty and staff into a cohesive whole, dedicated to ensuring the wellbeing and success of their challenging students. Well-read
in the current pedagogical and leadership research, she strove to motivate both her students and the elective teachers who might feel left on the margins of the school by giving them the clubs, mentioned in the quote above. She let the elective teachers and other non-core class teaching staff develop the framework and subjects for the clubs. Through them, she found the best way to use the clubs as a good-behavior incentive, as well. This latter function helped her address critiques the teachers had of her first year as principal: complaints that she was not doing enough to address disciplinary issues.

Furthermore, she petitioned Pierce’s County’s School Board to allow their school to open-up to students an hour and a half later than the 7:45am start time it traditionally used. The teachers’ new start time was forty-five minutes before the students would arrive. This gave the teachers more time to get their own children ready for school, and then allowed the principal to use forty minutes every morning for professional development meetings and planning. Teachers no longer had to stay after or use their planning time for these meetings.

Both the student clubs and the restructuring of the school day are evidence of the Whedon principal’s positive managerial citizenship behaviors. In the face of uncertain staffing, changing curriculum, and new standards, she made keeping her faculty happy within her school her priority. She gave her teachers the tools they needed to perform their jobs well, changing tactics when given feedback that something like the original discipline plan was not working. In this way, Whedon’s principal also showed the teachers that she respected them. They had a voice in their workplace and she worked to address their needs as fairly as possible. This is not to say that all of the teachers agreed with the principal’s changes or the administrations mandates on issues like discipline. But, all of the teachers were aware of their ability to bring up critiques and suggestions with the knowledge that the principal would, at the very least, consider them.
Instead of assigning new duties that popped up if a position was cut or a new program was mandated, the principal and assistant principal would take them on themselves instead of handing them down to the teachers. For example, the principal took bus duty every morning rather than assigning a rotating schedule of teachers or giving the job to the elective teachers, as other principals in Pierce County did. This managerial citizenship behavior paralleled that by Atwood’s principal; Whedon’s administrators were ever-present and reliable. Very few things slipped from administrative notice. Efforts to close off opportunities between groups of teachers would be addressed quickly to maintain the “family-like” culture the administrators strived to cultivate and maintain.

Like Atwood, Whedon was also able to keep the teachers relatively well-supplied through Title I and RttT grant money. Teachers in this school did not have the same copy-limits or lack of books teachers in the other schools across Pierce County complained about. The grant money also provided professional development opportunities and additional mentoring through the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). Furthermore, the grant money and over-assigned special education student body meant that Whedon benefitted from additional teacher’s assistants and special education aides. Thus, while Whedon’s teachers did not have over-flowing resources, they had access to enough that teachers did not feel the need to close off opportunities and resources from others in their school.

Butler Middle School

School Setting

Butler Middle School was a suburban school that enrolled more than six hundred students, with class sizes slightly above both the LEA and state averages. More than half of the students were eligible for free-and-reduced lunch, and slightly less than half were “on grade
level.” The school consistently earned a “D” on the new state report card system. However, Butler also “exceeded expectations” for student growth. This meant that the school’s students were improving from one year to the next, but that the students were still not meeting the standardized grade-level expectations. Most students were black, with sizeable populations of white and Latinx students, as well. Less than ten percent of the students came from military families.

Enough of Butler Middle School’s student population qualified for free and reduced lunch for the school to receive Title I funding. These additional funds allowed the school to hire floating classroom tutors for students struggling with math and reading. Title I funds were also allocated toward procuring newer technology for students across the school. For example, some of the math classrooms received smartboards through the funding.

Altogether, Butler’s teachers were some of the most experienced in the LEA, with more than sixty percent of the staff working in the school for more than a decade. This made Butler’s teacher workforce one of the most stable in Pierce County. More than a third of the teachers held advanced degrees, while upwards of ten percent were Nationally Board Certified. According to the 2014 Teacher Working Conditions Survey, teachers working at Butler were more likely than teachers in other schools around the state and LEA to respond that there was an “atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in this school.” Likewise, they were more likely to “feel comfortable raising issues and concerns” with the school’s administration than teachers across the state and LEA.

The school was undergoing construction during my data collection; a large classroom building was going up in front of the older school buildings. The latter, originally built as a school for black children during segregation, would remain in use after the new building was
completed. Many of the teachers, main office, and support services were in large trailers on the side of the campus. The older buildings on campus featured outdoor walkways, with most of the classrooms opening out onto sidewalks. The design provided few common spaces for teachers and students to congregate. Elective teachers were permanently housed in trailers connected by long wooden walkways behind the school. They would remain in these trailers after the construction was completed.

Administration

Butler’s principal had been in this school for more than five years when I began collecting data. The superintendent kept her in this school despite its consistently low letter grade because the students showed continued growth and the teacher turnover was far below the state and LEA averages. Her focus was on bringing the largely disadvantaged students who attended the school into the “global 21st Century” economy, as noted in the school’s mission statement. The teachers spoke highly of her understanding nature and tendency to give the largely experienced teaching staff more free-rein than other principals the teachers had worked for before. However, while I was collecting data, she was largely absent from Butler, as she was ill and spending most of her time in the hospital or on bed rest. I was unable to schedule and keep an interview with her while collecting data.

The absence of the principal led to minor organizational chaos, and the long-tenured faculty took it upon themselves to shape more of the programs, teacher team assignments and student team assignments in her absence. Most of the pressures teachers mentioned at Butler stemmed from outside of the school organization, itself. Standard six was particularly worrisome for many of the teachers, as they worried how their students would perform on the newly normed tests and how this would, in-turn, affect their compensation and job security under the new
program. This worry, coupled with a lack of strong leadership, gave one group of core teachers the incentive to protect their average scores by closing out the special education teachers, as mentioned in the previous chapter. No one in the administration stopped the practice of keeping special education students out of those classes. This legitimized the group’s claim to engage in interest-based social closure, allowing them to successfully hoard students who were more likely to exhibit growth on their standardized tests for themselves and away from other teachers.

*Sattler Middle School*

School Setting

Sattler Middle School was a smaller than the others I studied, enrolling just over four hundred students. This suburban school served mostly white students, with less than a third of the students identifying as black or Latinx. Half of the students at the school were eligible for free and reduced lunch, with more than fifty percent of the students on grade level. Sattler routinely earned a “D” on the State’s new report card system, and the students consistently met or exceeded the State’s growth expectations on standardized tests across the core subjects.

Teachers at Sattler were frustrated with the lack of attention and funding their school received. One teacher felt that it was “not fair that the inner-city schools” received additional funding and attention in the local news year-after-year even when they did not see significant gains in their scores. Before another interview started, a teacher lamented the new construction at Butler, pointing to a place in her wooden classroom floor where the back legs of a student’s desk had broken through the year before. Although Sattler’s teachers were proud of their students and surrounding community, they were upset with the relative disparities they felt the LEA gave to their school in comparison to others in the county.
Sattler’s culture was firmly established by teachers who had worked at the school for decades, many of whom grew up in the community and attended Sattler or other schools in the LEA. Like Butler’s teacher demographics, more than fifty percent of the teachers had worked in the school for more than a decade, with another thirty percent working at Sattler between four and ten years. However, the school saw frequent administrative turnover. In the past decade, principals remained at the school between six months and two years. One teacher termed this a "parade of lemons," while another wondered whether or not the school was “a reward for those on their way out or a punishment” for principals who failed to make other schools successful.

Teachers in Sattler were committed to their community, but unhappy with the constant change in leadership. On the 2014 Teacher Working Conditions Survey (TWCS), more than sixty percent did not feel that there was “an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in the school, a far higher rate than the twenty-seven percent across the state and twenty-six percent average for the district. The remainder of the 2014 TWCS indicated that the teachers felt that the principal was objective in his assessments, but that he did not support teachers, address “leadership issues” well, or handle student discipline in an effective manner. A long-tenured teacher at the school encapsulated this view of the principal in our interview, saying:

“I am currently working for the worst administrator I have ever had. He is a very nice person, but he should not be in charge of a middle school. He has tainted my views on my job at this school. But I must say I LOVE my job. I love the students and other teachers.”

Teachers’ frustration with their lack of resources, especially relative to schools who received additional funding for at-risk students, may have shaped their opinions about their principal. However, teachers expressed concern over this principal’s use of the resources and time they had access to. Several felt he was too focused on building his version of community spirit than on the daily business of teaching.
Administration

Sattler Middle School’s principal saw himself as the place where “the rubber meets the road” between federal and state legislation and the LEA’s mandates. He wanted to “encourage our teachers every day,” and worried about the stress they were feeling from a lot of the new pressures in the highly politicized environment surrounding education in North Carolina.

“That's stressful and I can say, honestly, there's more stress walking in our hallways and across the state than there's ever been. Ever. Been.”

He was also worried that his teachers would “departmentalize” along subject area lines and was deeply worried about the new legislation. When I asked him what he meant by that, he said:

“So, my fear is that, if we're not careful, legislation is going to push us to become more departmentalized because our teachers are going to be less likely to share because in their world, I'm competing for my job. I'm competing for all of these things, and I can't share what I'm doing with the person down the hallway at my expense. So that's something that I do worry about. I haven't seen it yet, but if this path - if the state continues on this path where it's going to start comparing teachers by their growth scores - I think you're going to see that.”

He wanted the teachers to help each other and share resources across subjects and grade levels, feeling that this was the best way to support middle school-aged students learn and grow. One way he tried to accomplish this was to implement teacher reading groups, having teachers come together across grade levels to discuss a book about teaching and learning in their subject area he assigned. In their faculty development and PLC meetings, he advised the teachers to be more present with each other and their students:

“I've told them all to beware of becoming a high school and becoming that departmentalized I'm going to come to school and I'm going to do my job and I'm going to leave. Stick around, go to some ball games. Do some things that are truly middle school things. Be around with your kids. Be supportive with your kids. And that's something that I recognized is something at the beginning of the year that we are trying to work towards and get a little better at.”
Sattler’s principal desired more organizational citizenship from his teachers, as evidenced by these requests of his faculty to “stick around” outside of the regularly scheduled school hours. Furthermore, he was adamant that this focus be on the teachers spending more time with students, rather than each other. Sattler’s teachers no longer had collective spaces dedicating to meeting without students. Between some of my first interviews in the school, I asked where the lounge was so that I could post a recruitment letter, or sit and try to talk to teachers between classes. The group of teachers I asked gave me an odd look and said, “We don’t take breaks here.” The teachers’ original breakroom was long ago converted into a classroom under rising enrollment pressures.

The principal tapped into the dissonance between how the long-standing school’s faculty wanted to work and the climate he was trying to establish when he discussed how the faculty were responding to his efforts to thwart “departmentalization:”

“I think that is what was happening when I was getting here and my staff, my younger staff, who have come on since I have been here, are far more open and far more willing to connect and to plan together and to do things as a group than some of my older staff who have been through that…I think the dynamics for our older staff would be, ‘I know what I'm doing, I'm going to come into school and get it done. I'm not going to really commit one way or the other because I might have a new principal next year.’ You know. And our younger staff, they're energetic and they want to connect. It's, they haven't experienced those things and so, we are kind of at that cross road.”

He found that the newer teachers, especially those who came to the school after he began his tenure as principal, were more likely to participate in his ideas. The more experienced teachers, who made up the majority of the school faculty, were less likely to actively participate. These teachers were accustomed to the “parade of lemons” they’d experienced over the past decade and knew that any changes a principal made were probably not going to last long.48

48 The principal I interviewed at Sattler was moved to a different school in 2015, continuing the high administrative turnover the teachers at this school lamented when I talked with them between 2012 and 2014.
In the previous chapter, I found that the core teachers were coming together to protect their individual and group planning time when new tasks arose. When I asked Sattler’s principal about any tension between core and elective teachers:

Principal: “If you are a core area, home room teacher, there is just a number of things that you're going to have to do that someone who does not have a home room is not going to do. And, um, [sighs] there is no way around that. No way around that. We see some of that tension. Everywhere I've ever been, there's been some of that tension.”

Me: do you find that when new duties come up, like bus duty, do they usually end up going to elective teachers?

Principal: “yes, they do…and that's one of the ways that we try to keep balance…there's always some inequity in everything that we do. At the end of the day, we've got to get the job done and that requires that some of us do two duties and some of us do one duty.”

This year, the principal had implemented a “smart block” of flex time in an attempt:

“to involve our elective teachers into learning activities and growth opportunities for our kids that might not be specific to their curriculum.”

But this block was not about having the elective teaches work with core teachers or pulling them more into the school’s main objectives. Instead, elective teachers were pulling students out to work on things like financial literacy.

Sattler’s principal fell into the trap of trying to keep his organization running as smoothly as possible during a time of great changes toward a more flexible model of schooling, and coming across as doing more harm than good by his teachers. Instead of finding his mandatory book clubs and planning sessions useful, teachers mostly saw them as micromanaging their limited work time. The principal was putting forth a lot of managerial citizenship behavior, but was unsuccessful in protecting his teachers’ conditions for dignity in work. In fact, teachers indicated that he was further violating their ability to attain dignity in work, when they spent time in their interviews with me detailing the extra time the principal required for professional development training that they felt did not directly apply to their courses.
Furthermore, Sattler’s principal fully legitimated the core teachers’ assertions that they need extra time for their more important work – prepping and grading for the material on the standardized exams at the end of the year – than the elective teachers did. Even with the best of intentions to buffer out the worst of the impacts NC’s neoliberal legislation would make on the teachers, Sattler’s principal only added more for the teachers to do. This, alongside the lack of additional school funding for technology and aides, led core faculty to feel that they needed to protect what time they had for planning and grading, and so they closed off the opportunity not to serve extra duties for the elective teachers they deemed their out-group.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

I find that the principals of the four schools I studied in Pierce County had a lot of power within their schools, in-line with the findings of earlier studies (Cohen 2011; Ingersoll 2005). However, this power to affect change is constrained by the resources the school can access and the power of the current teaching body. With the fast-paced changes coming down from the NC General Assembly after decades of federal reform, I hypothesized that principals worked more as human resource managers than ever before, that they would be largely removed from curriculum decisions. Instead, I found that principals are increasingly responsible for both the human resources aspect of keeping the workplace running efficiently while also ensuring that instructional programs are effectively adopted and followed (Garrison-Wade et al. 2007; Lynch 2012). In Pierce County, this was especially the case. LEA administrators moved principals around to achieve desired growth, firmly believing the right administration could turn declining and stagnant school cultures around. One administrator explained to me that:
“As leadership goes, or as the head goes, so goes the body. That's a natural phenomenon. If you take a rope and if I pull that rope from this distance to that distance, wherever I move the front of that rope, the rest of the rope will follow. Side-to-side or in a straight-line…it's actually true when you start talking about leadership and the culture of the school, it will flow that way.”

This sentiment runs throughout neoliberal education reform. Principals are on the frontlines for new legislative changes and the first to be replaced if a school does not “turn around” or show sufficient progress. Principals are the actors who decide how much and which teachers will be involved in different initiative. They can choose to take on more of the duties themselves when funding is cut or to pass them down to a group of teachers. Unless DPI is mandated to come into a school to help train teachers, then principals decide when and where staff meetings and trainings are held. Even if the teachers are required to go to mandated DPI trainings, principals may schedule additional meetings and trainings they must attend.

Principals are ultimately held responsible for their school’s “progress,” as measured by average standardized test scores. In RttT, this was built into the “turnaround” models; the first step in every plan is replacing the school leadership. This national measure was reinforced in Pierce County. Although everyone widely acknowledged that principals needed five to six years bring a school community in-line with their vision for success, the superintendent routinely moved principals who did not improve low-performing schools after two to three years. This short, theoretically impossible, timeline put principals in Pierce County under immense pressure to hit the ground running and make teachers fall in-line with their goals as quickly as possible.

In the four schools I studied, this translated into three very hands-on principals who took on the task of reshaping their school’s culture to heart. Atwood, Sattler, and Whedon’s principals engaged in managerial citizenship behavior, putting forth far more effort than the base required for their jobs. Each changed the climate of the school in ways shaped by their personalities,
experiences, and visions of a successful school. Atwood’s principal prioritized safety and order, and implemented strict security measures and detailed routines to ensure the teachers also focused on them. He wrote grants and allocated money to cameras and supplies that furthered his mission. In his first years, teachers who did not agree with his management style left for other schools and when I studied his school five years later, safety and predictability where the cornerstones of the schools culture. Whedon’s prinicpal and assistant principals stressed inclusion and treating all students as “whole” individuals after their starts in special education. They used the Title I and RttT funds they received to emphasize alternatives to traditional discipline and give teachers more ownership over the school and schedule to better engage students and faculty alike. Again, teachers who did not agree with the new administrative vision left or were asked to leave after the principal’s first year. The remaining faculty and those the principal hired thereafter were enthusiastic about administrations’ ideas and built them into the culture of the school.

Like the others Sattler’s principal also changed the culture of the school. He re-organized teams and schedules to enforce more collaboration because he was most worried about teachers becoming too insular. He incentivized going to more extracurricular activities to further his vision of a “middle-school” atmosphere dedicated to supporting students outside of the classroom. However, his changes to the climate did not successfully reshape the culture of the school to embrace these same ideas. There were two key differences between Sattler and the other schools that hindered his success: flexible resources and teacher demographics.

Sattler’s principal only had the basic school funding allocated by the state and county. He did not have access to additional funding that the principal could use to purchase supplies or hire additional people to make his vision of a more cohesive community easier for teachers to achieve.
His teachers were deeply unhappy with their outdated resources, and spent time writing grants for new technology. Instead of being able to add resources to change the climate, he was trying to reorganize the already limited resources, like time, the school already had to make a more intensive work experience. The lack of personnel resources also led to the principal’s need to cover additional duties, not usually taken on by teachers. He chose to give them to elective teachers, as he felt this was the most equitable division of labor when core-subject teachers had additional federally mandated paperwork and courses where the students’ scores determined the grade of the school and the principal’s future. In doing this, the principal legitimated the interest claims of one group over another, and allowed a new line of inequality to develop within the organization.

Furthermore, Sattler’s teachers were also some of the longest-tenured in the county, many choosing the school and remaining there because of their ties to businesses, churches, and family in the immediate area. These teachers did not see moving to a new school as a viable option like teachers at Atwood and Whedon did after a new principal came in and changed the school climate in ways they did not like. Furthermore, these teachers had experienced the “parade of lemons.” The fast principal-turnover was, itself, engrained in the school’s culture. Thus, the teachers were more set in their ways under an unshakeable sense that this principal was temporary. They trusted the institutional knowledge they held among themselves more than changes coming from administrators they saw essentially as interlopers in their community.

Butler’s principal, also working with a long-standing teacher workforce, deferred to her teachers to make more decisions around the school than other principals allowed. Both the climate and the culture of the school emphasized giving individual teachers and teams latitude over their schedules and adoption of new materials and students. Butler received Title I funding
and used this to ensure students had access to computers and to hire additional special education aides. Teachers at Butler wished for new textbooks and more supplies, but were most concerned about the impact of the new legislation on them, as individuals. Because their principal was absent, they did not get the reassurance that they would be ok that Atwood and Whedon’s principals conveyed through their presence and careful maintenance of the school culture. Whereas these latter principals worked to keep teachers from thinking about the implications of Standard Six, the teachers at Butler were left to wonder more about their futures. The school’s culture of allowing teachers greater independence over their schedules and resources allowed one group of teachers to shape their class rosters in ways that would protect their classroom scores.

These findings fall inline with recent theorizing about how inequality is reproduced relationally within organizations (see Avent-Holt and Tomaskovic-Devey 2016; Tomaskovic-Devey 2014). There must be a contested resource, even if the threat of its removal is perceived. When this happens, groups make a claim over the resource. Here, Butler’s teachers perceived a threat to their jobs because of the new Standard Six that would hold them accountable for all of their students’ scores. Core teachers at Sattler felt that their time was threatened by the principal’s efforts to make the culture more cohesive, as well as by the decreasing personnel who left behind duties still necessary to fill. In both cases, teachers made a claim on the resource. Butler’s teachers did this in a very subtle manner, closing off their relationships with special education teachers as a way to push the EC students into the other grade-level teams. Sattler’s teachers more openly proclaimed to the principal that their time was more important and full than the elective teachers.

These claims these groups of teachers in Sattler and Butler made may have ended there. If made, or attempted, in Atwood or Whedon, the latter principals most likely would have stopped
the inegalitarian distribution of students and/or duties. It was the legitimizing of these claims, either tacitly or overtly in Sattler and Butler, that allowed them to result in organizational inequality along interest-based lines. I did not find evidence that teachers in these Atwood or Whedon had attempted to hoard opportunities from other groups. The desire to hoard opportunities was not present in any discernable way in these schools.

The different opportunity hoarding outcomes suggest that managerial citizenship behaviors, organizational resources, and organizational demographics impact whether or not teachers feel the need to make claims over resources. When resources are limited, as they were in Sattler and Butler, teachers acted to safeguard their dignity at work and lay claim over the time or students (resources) they felt would give them better outcomes. Furthermore, the teachers in these schools were embedded in established work communities. This gave them the institutional knowledge and control over the school’s culture to successfully identify what resources they could hoard and how they could accomplish their goal. The principals in both schools legitimated these higher-status employees’ claims, in part, because allowing some groups of teachers access to opportunities others did not have was in-line with their vision of the school’s optimal culture.

Butler’s principal gave her long-tenured workforce leeway over their conditions in a lassiez-faire approach that kept her school one of the most stable in the county. As her teachers faced the same challenges to dignity at work that others faced in North Carolina with declining salaries, materials, and worker protections, she allowed them to protect their dignity in work. She gave them the leeway to perform their jobs the way they felt was best for their students. However, doing so allowed teachers with more power the ability to protect their way of teaching
at the expense of others. Sattler’s principal was worried about standardized scores in tested areas, and so protected those teachers’ time a little more than that of his non-core teachers.

Teachers in Atwood and Whedon did not express the same worries over internal supply distribution or relationships between teachers. In fact, they did not appear to even consider doing so as a way to safeguard their dignity. Individual teachers resisted claims on their time, but did not work together to close-off opportunities from other groups in the schools in an attempt to protect their dignity at work. This could be a product of their ever-present administrators, whose visibility served to comfort those who wanted more stability and willingness to step into the classroom made them feel supported. However, the lack of opportunity hoarding could also reflect the two schools’ ability to access resources teachers needed to successfully achieve the culture their principals envisioned. These schools also had newer teacher workforces than the others, suggesting that the teachers were less invested in how they had “always done things.” Thus, they were less likely to feel the need to protect a way of doing work they were used to – the ways they had always achieved their dignity in work - than those who had worked with the same group of people in the same school for decades.

Ultimately, principals are a necessary condition for successful opportunity hoarding to occur in schools, but they are not a sufficient condition in themselves. Teachers must perceive a threat to their resources before they stake a claim. Furthermore, teachers need to know each other and the school culture well enough to come together as a group to profess a claim over resources. It is only after both of the latter conditions happen that a principal can then legitimate or reject a claim that allows successful opportunity hoarding within the school. While a principal, as the school’s manager, determines the distribution of the resources and can shape the culture of a school through surface-level changes to its climate, each of these acts relatively independently to
lead teachers to determine that they need to safeguard specific resources and their ability to do so.

These findings suggest that teachers will do all they can for their students, especially if their students’ scores are tied to their own. But, as teachers are putting in as much effort as they can, they resort to hoarding resources and opportunities for their own peers and students to safeguard their dignity at work. In doing so, some groups may enact social closure mechanisms and further deny the dignity that teachers with less power in the school have both in and at work.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This study sought to understand what neoliberal education reform looks like to teachers on the ground from a sociological perspective. Research on the effects of standardization, competition, and efficiency initiatives in schools typically focus on students test scores or the successful implantation of a new policy or program. Activist and popular media reports portray teachers as overworked and heavily-blamed, angry about the changes and feeling voiceless in the face of large companies and governmental agencies (see: Ravitch 2016). But neither of these lines of inquiry illuminate how the changes shape schools as workplaces where these teachers return everyday to earn their living and attempt to attain dignity through their labor. To answer the call for more research into the actual labor of teaching (see Renzulli 2014 and Connell 2014), I conducted a mixed-methods study of middle school teachers in one of North Carolina’s LEAs, Pierce County. The analysis, built using grounded theory methods, illuminates how neoliberal changes are undermining teachers’ dignity as workers. These challenges to teachers’ dignity have implications for the wellbeing of the individual schools and the teaching workforce as a whole.

In the first chapter, I briefly outline the history of neoliberal market reform in the United States and its spread to public sector management, with education as its latest front (Condrey and Maranto 2001; Hays and Sowa 2006; Karmack 2007; Wilson, Roscigno, and Huffman 2013, 2015). Under the reforms designed to make schools more efficient, teachers are seen as the weak link causing the perceived lag between students in the U.S. and those in other countries. Thus, reforms focus on removing teacher protections that allow “bad” teachers to stay in the system while offering competitive rewards to incentivize “good” teachers to work even harder (Kopp 2011; Ravitch 2010, 2014; Rhee 2013). Education reforms also push to make the institution more
of a market to allow the forces of supply and demand to weed out ineffective schools while
giving private schools a chance to better meet the individualized needs of students (Goldstein
2014). Research up to this point finds that these strategies lead to questionable, if not negative,
outcomes for students, schools, and teachers (Amerin-Beardsley and Collins 2012; Berliner and
Glass 2014; Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Goldstein 2014; Jacob and Levitt 2003; Neal and
Schanzenbach 2010). The first chapter concludes with a brief history of North Carolina’s public
education system, explaining why this state provides the perfect case study for better
understanding the ways neoliberal legislative changes shape the everyday labor of teachers.

In Chapter 2, I detailed how Randy Hodson’s (2001) theory of dignity at work aligned
closely with the themes emerging from the data and helped to better explain how and under what
conditions teachers felt or acted the ways they did in response to NC’s legislative changes. I also
discuss Sandra Bolton’s (2007) theory about the multidimensional nature of dignity as an
addition to the broader sociological theory of dignity. Further, I pull in Smith’s (2016) recent
addition of including the stability of the marketplace as a whole as a threat to worker dignity.
This latter perspective proved particularly useful when trying to better understand how the
threats to teachers’ dignity, and their responses to these threats, had to span two levels. Changes
were coming from the state, rather than from managers within the organization.

In the third chapter, I explain the methods I used to collect and analyze data from two-
hundered and twenty-four faculty working in Pierce County between August 2012 and August
2015. I detail the characteristics of the County and the four schools who participated in the study.
I then explain how I collected archival, observation, interview, and two waves of survey data and
analyzed it convergently using grounded theory methods.
Chapter four concludes that the neoliberal changes NC is making to its public education system are undermining teachers’ ability to attain dignity both in and at work. The combination of neoliberal ideology and chronic underfunding, undergirded by neoTaylorist assumptions about worker motivations and abilities leaves teachers overworked as they pick up new duties and take on new standardized curriculum and exams without the resources to successfully implement them. In the end, public educators are frustrated with the changes being made that they feel they have little voice in, which is leading many to leave the profession, or to at least move to teach in a different state (DPI 2014, 2015). The constant and quickly shifting pressures are squeezing the “art” out of education, leaving teachers feeling more like pawns of the local government and corporations benefiting from the changes. Ultimately, I found that teachers were most worried about their students, who they felt were being left behind in the politically-charged decisions being made about education in North Carolina.

In chapter five, I analyzed the mixed-methods data that I collected within four middle schools in Pierce County to assess how teachers were working to safeguard their dignity, as it was threatened by the changes coming down from the state. I found that teachers were not withholding professional help from each other, as many worried would happen under the new emphasis on individual competition. Instead, teachers were withdrawing from personal relationships with each other as a means of drawing boundaries around their private lives to protect themselves from bringing the stress from being overworked home with them. I also found that some teacher groups were creating social closure projects around resources – time and students with a better chance of good growth scores – within two of the schools.

Chapter six utilizes relational inequality theory to understand why and how teachers in two of the schools, Sattler and Butler, would want to hoard resources and successfully do so.
There was no evidence of social closure projects designed to hoard resources in the other two schools. I find support for the relational inequality theory that managers play an important role as legitimizers in organization-based inequality. Principals, as managers, must tacitly or overtly validate interest-based claims over resources for the practice to take hold and become normalized in the workplace (Avent-Holt and Tomaskovic-Devey 2016; Tomaskovic-Devey 2014).

However, the teachers needed to both fear a threat to a resource and establish a group before making a claim on it. Atwood and Whedon both had access to additional monetary resources that the other schools did not. Butler and Sattler also had long-established teacher communities who were less flexible than the teachers in the other schools to adapting to new ways of running the school. This suggests that managers play a necessary, but not sufficient, role in preventing or allowing relational inequality over boundaries to form in workplaces.

IMPLICATIONS

This study has implications for dignity and relational inequality in organizations beyond the public school. Neoliberal reforms emphasizing standardization, accountability, and flexibility do not have to undermine the conditions for worker dignity. But, when carried out with neo-Tayloristic assumptions about lazy workers and poorly funded, workers are left with all of the most alienating aspects of both neoliberalism and neoTaylorism. When this occurs, teachers work to safeguard their dignity, just as sociologists find all workers do when their dignity is threatened (Hodson 2001; Roscigno, Hodson, and Lopez 2009; Smith 2016). While the tactics teachers use can build camaraderie, they can also result in further inequality, compounding the indignities some groups of workers face as threats to their dignity come from both beyond the organization and from people within it.

49 See Taylor 1947, Crowley et al. 2010 and Crowley and Hodson 2014
Although previous research on education changes finds that principals have little impact on the effectiveness of top-down changes, this study finds evidence to the contrary. Earlier research finds that teacher networks within and between schools ultimately shape the successful adoption of new initiatives (Baker-Doyle 2010; Daly 2010; Rayner 2017; Philpott 2007). These studies suggest that programs must be adopted by the most influential teachers within a school for their wide adoption and success. Initiatives implemented by the principal are more likely to come across as inauthentic, ultimately reaping less support by those tasked with carrying it out (Bakery-Doyle 2010; Daly 2010). I found evidence for these sentiments toward the initiatives passed down by the NC Legislature. Teachers and administrators alike in Pierce County expressed frustration over the lack of influence current classroom teachers held over budget, curriculum, and salary changes the state was making.

At the school level, however, I found that Atwood’s and Whedon’s principals were very successful at implementing the programs RttT and the NC Legislature passed down. In contrast, Sattler’s principal struggled to engage his faculty in programs he was initiating. Each had a clear vision for school improvement. Each put forth managerial citizenship behavior beyond the base requirements for their position. However, Atwood’s and Whedon’s principals were able to access additional resources that Sattler’s principal did not have to implement their selected programs. Atwood’s principal purchased an elaborate camera system, while Whedon’s principal focused her efforts on inclusionary programs. Sattler’s principal was asking the faculty to pull together and create a more cohesive community using the limited time and resources they already had.

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50 I am excluding Butler from this discussion because the principal was largely absent during my data collection. I am not arguing or implying that she or the school are any less important than the other three. But, this particular discussion is focusing on what shapes the success or failure of principals who are actively implementing new programs.
The organizational dynamics of each school also shaped the principals’ success. Sattler followed the pattern laid out in prior research. This principal’s initiatives came across to teachers as shallow efforts at community building that added unnecessary work to their schedules, especially among the more experienced teachers. Sattler’s faculty was comprised mostly of long-standing faculty who were invested in their way of teaching and managing the school. Moreover, this body of faculty was used to a “parade” of new principals after a decade of new assignments every year or two. Sattler’s principal faced high interpersonal barriers to implementing real changes that may have been better received if first adopted by central teachers within the school’s established teacher network.

In contrast, the principals at Atwood and Whedon were working with a larger percentage of beginning and early career teachers because the schools served less desirable student populations than Sattler’s suburban base. Furthermore, both saw high turnover rates after their first years in office. In-line with neo-Tayloristic management strategies, both believed that there were teachers who were “right” for their schools. Teachers who did not like working under their management were pushed out. At the end of the year, most who left put in requests for placement in a different school in the LEA. The principals simply didn’t renew others’ contracts. Being able to shape their teacher force was a key determinant in their success at implementing their visions. Not only were they able to remove people who hindered their progress, they also got to replace them with their own hires. Both principals brought in people who embodied the characteristics they were looking for in an ideal teaching force. Atwood’s principal looked for people who favored order. Whedon’s principal looked for teachers with experience in challenging classrooms who were also open to trying and developing new programs for the students.
These findings suggest that holding principals accountable for quick changes – they needed to show student growth after two years in the position – encourages them to immediately implement major changes to fulfill their visions. To ensure their success, these principals who can quickly identify and weed out teachers who will not get inline with their new strategies. Atwood’s and Whedon’s principals were both able to accomplish this because of their relatively inexperienced workforces who were not extremely attached to the school. Sattler’s principal, however, faced a very experienced teacher workforce who was deeply embedded in the community. These teachers were loathe to leave the school they knew well and that was interconnected with their family businesses and churches. Therefore, principals who were able to shape their workforce were more successful accomplishing their goals. As neoliberal changes increasingly remove traditional teacher protections, we may see this pattern of higher teacher turnover increase across schools, as teachers and principals seek out matches they prefer.

However, it is important to question whether or not the tactic of matching teachers to the visions of relatively short-term principal appointments is a viable long-term solution. By 2017, only one of the four principals in this study still held their position. Sattler experienced one principal exchange while Atwood has seen two new principals since I left the field early in the 2015-2016 school year. Each new principal comes in with their own improvement vision, each possibly requiring a new “type” of teacher. Stressing teacher adherence and buy-in to each new principal’s initiatives to quickly spur student growth could undermine teachers’ dignity in work. Teachers may have a harder time establishing a sense of autonomy in their worklives under relative frequent major changes to their schools’ administration. Furthermore, none of the schools in this study raised their EVAAS score, the standardized measure of student growth that North Carolina adopted in the 2012-2013 school year. Sattler dropped one letter grade, down
from a “C” in 2012 to a “D” for the 2015-2016 school year.\textsuperscript{51} This suggests that school effectiveness is more complicated than reforms focusing heavily on top-down administrative changes may be able to address.

In this vein, one of the major contributions of my dissertation findings is the lack of support I find for education reformers assumptions that undercutting the structure of the workplace will give “good” teachers more incentive and free rein to help their students grow. This logic is a textbook example of what Randy Hodson (2001) terms “contradictions in employment.” Many factors, including high poverty rates and diverse student bodies, contribute to relatively low scores in the U.S. when compared to other OECD countries (Carnoy, Garcia, and Khavenson 2015; Carnoy and Rothstein 2013; Loveless 2011; Reardon 2011; Rothstein 2004). “Good” teachers who put in more effort are probably not enough to make up for these differences between the countries that lead to lower scores (Berliner and Glass 2014; Ravitch 2016; Reardon 2011). The problems lie in broader social issues, including poverty. Blaming the teachers and taking away resources and support at the school level just further constrains teachers, denying them the ability to achieve dignity in work and ultimately pushing the creative, high achieving people neoliberal reformers want in classrooms out of them.

Teachers largely enter their profession because they want to help students or to make the world a better place (Henoch et al. 2015). They stay in their jobs because they feel that something about their vision or dedication to teaching is correct. The students are better for their being in a classroom and the teachers will do what they can to reach their vision of what they feel their students need (Cohen 2011; Ingersoll 2005). Accomplishing these goals is how

\textsuperscript{51} Scores taken from NCReportCards.org.
teachers attain dignity in their work. Once their school stops providing them with the ability to fulfill their vision of how to best help students, teachers work to safeguard their dignity.

Many teachers engage in organizational citizenship, using their own money to decorate their classrooms or provide supplies to their students to achieve a greater sense of dignity in their work. Teachers may also resist school or county-wide mandates they do not like by refusing to participate in them, venting about them to others, or even holding back on their effort in those areas. At times, teachers may come to feel that dignity in and at work is undermined to the point they decide to commit to leave the state or profession altogether. When teachers’ dignity is undermined by state-level forces, as seen under North Carolina’s neoliberal shift, teachers across the state may choose this form of resistance. Utilizing Hodson’s (2001) theory of dignity at work and Smith’s (2016) attention to market-level forces lends insight into why North Carolina experienced such a high teacher turnover rate between 2010 and 2015, especially as many of these teachers left to take-up the same positions in surrounding states (Clark 2015; Clauss 2015).

Organizations have better long-term outcomes when they foster established workforces with senior members. The latter cultivate institutional knowledge that makes production as efficient as possible and provide informal mentorship to newer members (Crowley 2016). In this sense, schools are no different than other kinds of organizations. Researchers across disciplines consistently find that teachers with more experience produce more growth in their students on multiple measures (Papay and Kraft 2015). Furthermore, teachers who remain in the field longer are more likely to invest further in their credentials, which Nationally Board Certified teachers proving more effective in the classroom than those who are not (Cowan and Goldhaber 2015). Ultimately, students grow more and perform better in schools with higher levels of trust between teachers and between teachers and administrators. This trust is built over the time and stability
that comes with low teacher-turnover (Adams, Olsen, and Ware 2017; Ladd and Sorensen 2017; Louis and Wahlstrom 2011).

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

As an observer, I was never a true insider. This was often to my benefit because teachers could open-up to me knowing that it truly would not affect their jobs. I could shadow administrators at Whedon and Sattler, and move at-will around Whedon. I could ask questions of every adult I encountered in the schools because I was there as a researcher. I would not have been able to do this as easily if I was there as a member of the staff or faculty. I would not have had the time and I would have been tied to one area of the school as a faculty member. Furthermore, teachers and staff would have been suspicious of someone from another part of the school asking for their opinions on legislation and their job. I only got some teachers to talk about these issues after repeatedly assuring them over several interactions as a researcher that I was the only person who would ever listen to our conversation.

However, being an outsider made it harder for me to build the rapport I needed to really capture the thick descriptions of Atwood, Sattler, and Butler that I could of Whedon. These latter schools, as typical of most modern public schools, were more insular and closed off than Whedon. Their chief concern was safety and they discouraged anyone from wandering around the school, even researchers who passed background checks with the LEA. Students and faculty in these schools were wary of anyone in the school outside of their typical boundaries and would check for a name badge or visitor’s tag if they saw you in a hallway. Whedon’s faculty was also concerned with safety, but they were used to experts, auditors, and helping hands from an array

52 These interactions were a part of the fieldnotes I analyzed to better understand the school environments, but I did not analyze conversations I had with people who would not sign consent forms. I scheduled longer interviews with those who did sign consent forms. Talking to people in the schools informally was the best recruitment strategy I found for interview participants.
of agencies tasked with assisting the Title I school. After a few weeks, many categorized me as one of these adults in the building and accepted my presence.

The safety concerns ramped up in all the schools in December 2012, after the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Connecticut. Peirce LEA and the individual schools reviewed and tightened their security measures. For example, Whedon made it more difficult to go from the front building’s vestibule back into the classrooms and administrative offices. The shooting was carried out by the son of a teacher, so having any unnecessary personnel, even if tangentially related or somewhat familiar, was unwelcome on school grounds for the remainder of the year. I understood and did not want to make people uncomfortable with my presence. Thus, I pushed even less than I had before for more access to faculty at the three other schools. This was most detrimental to my research collection at Butler. I benefited from principals who welcomed research at the other middle schools. The lack of principal presence, spread out and under-construction condition of the campus, and fear for school safety undermined my ability to interact with teachers as much at Butler as I did on the other campuses.

If I had been a teacher or a teacher’s assistant in one of these other schools, I may have learned more about their cultures. But, conducting that form of participant observation in four schools would have been a tremendous amount of fieldwork. Data collection would have spanned a much longer time-period, affecting the time-period I was in the schools. Because the North Carolina was changing legislation quickly during this time, I would not have been able to capture the comparative data on the reactions between the schools as well. Furthermore, moving from school-to-school as a member of the faculty would have also hindered my ability to keep up with participants across the schools as new legislative developments occurred. Future researchers could enter the schools as someone who has access to several campuses, possibly as
a school psychologist, specialist, or lead teacher. These positions would allow the researchers more of an insider-status while still allowing them relatively free movement through and across schools.

Future researchers may also want to locate themselves in the main LEA office. Taking a job as an assistant would give greater access to the LEA administration’s response to the legislative changes. Because the LEA is the first level of statewide programs, presence in these offices would allow researchers to better understand how people at this first cut both frame and divvy up the legislation. There are implications here for inequality, as some schools or principals may be given more power over developing the way legislative mandates are implemented.

CONCLUSION

Public schools are undergoing a massive change towards a more open-market model of education. Critics of this marketization point to its foundation on neoliberal principles, which many see as antithetical to the socially democratic foundations the “common school” ideal the U.S.’s current public education system rests upon. Connell (2013) explains that education is “inherently socially inclusive…An exclusive education is a corrupted education” (105). But the fundamental goal of neoliberalism is to create a market, which means that access to goods must be restricted. There must be some who have less to generate incentives to buy and seek out more and better goods (Harvey 2005). Neoliberalism is an ideological viewpoint rooted in economic rationalism that views competition as the most efficacious form of organization. External regulation is good only so long as it only ensures that everyone has a right to compete. Collectivism and redistribution are seen as counterintuitive and even harmful to the system as a whole. Inequality is inevitable. There must be “losers” in a neoliberalist system for there to be “winners” in the competition (Brodie 2007; Connell 2009, 2013; Renzulli 2014). In schools, this
means that there must always be schools that are “losing,” and taking their students and teachers with them.

North Carolina became a fore-runner in this shift in 2010 and continues this trend towards greater marketization forward in 2017, with the approval and creation of an “achievement district.” This legislation hands the lowest performing schools across the state over to a privately-run charter company. This, and other neoliberal changes, continues to have broad political support, although sociological and educational researchers question the implications for education equality (Connell 2014; Dee and Wychkoff 2015; Hanushek 2007; Ravitch 2014; Renzulli 2014).

This study found that the neoliberal changes to public-schools to emphasize accountability and efficiency are undermining teachers ability to achieve dignity both in and at work. I found that teachers in Pierce County, North Carolina do not feel that they have the instructional tools, training, or number of coworkers they need to adequately serve their students. Their declining salaries and worker protections further undermined their sense of dignity at work. The perceived lack of appreciation teachers had because of these benefit changes, coupled with the increased accountability for student scores on newly introduced curriculum and exams threatened teachers’ sense of dignity in work. Like all workers, these public school teachers worked to safeguard their dignity, to find meaning in their work and make sense of the changes legislators were making to education. While some of these actions spurred more work-related camaraderie, most undermined the long-term stability of the schools. Some created inequality

53 Students in Tennessee’s Achievement District, which North Carolina modeled its after, saw lower math scores than their peers in traditional schools in its first year. In years two and three, the schools in the district saw moderate increases over their traditional school peers in math, and mixed results in science and reading test scores (Zimmer, Kho, Henry, and Viano 2015).
within the schools as more powerful groups hoarded opportunities for themselves and away from lower status groups.

The findings from this study suggest that future changes to schools should include more teacher input to help protect their dignity in their work and better ensure successful implementation (Philpott 2007). As schools continue to fill more roles for their students than ever before, they need the funding to hire more paraprofessionals and professionals who specialize in emotional, physical, and material support and have the resources to provide them to students in need. Giving teachers this support would protect their time and energy to focus on teaching the curriculum and connecting with their students over the material, protecting their dignity in and at work. Furthermore, all new initiatives should be accompanied with the supplies teachers will need to implement them in the classroom successfully. Asking any worker to perform new tasks without the materials they need undermines their dignity at work; it essentially sets them up for failure from the start. These suggestions must be implemented from above the individual school or LEA level because these major neoliberal education shifts are passed down from states and the federal government. The changes politicians make from capitols have real impacts in the classroom and those carrying them out on-the-ground need the support to carry them out well and with dignity.
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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The questions labelled “a, b, c, etc.” under the subheadings were the opening questions I used for these topics. Anything indented below was used as a prompt, if needed.

1. **Opening/Background Questions**
   a. How long have you been teaching?
   b. Did you hold any other full-time jobs before becoming a teacher?
   c. Have you been teaching at this school for the entire time you have been a teacher?
   d. Do you have any plans to leave the school in the future?

2. **Questions about Professional Well-Being**
   a. Are you currently satisfied in your job (i.e. with curriculum, ability to connect to students, association with other faculty members)?
   
   b. Has there ever been a time when you were not?
      i. If so, what helped you moved past it?
   
   c. In your opinion, what goals are most important in your school right now?
   d. Do you feel that the current programs in place to help teachers achieve these goals are working (i.e. curriculum initiatives, mentorship programs, retreats, or faculty meetings)?
      i. Are there aspects that work alongside those that need improvement?
         1. If you feel that aspects of the programs could be improved, how would you improve them?
   
   e. Do you feel that there are initiatives in place to help prevent teacher burnout and increase retention?
      i. If so, do you feel that they are working?
      ii. If not, or if you do not feel that there are any initiatives at the moment, what would you like to see change, if anything?

3. **Questions about Formal and Informal Networks**
   a. Do you currently have, or have you had, an officially assigned mentor or lead teacher?
      i. Do/did you rely on them often for professional advice? If so, what problems do you usually come to them with?
      ii. Do/did you rely on them for emotional support? If so, what problems do you usually come to them with?
   
   b. Is there anyone that you consider a mentor who was not officially assigned the position?
i. Do you go to them more for professional or emotional advice and support?

ii. Do you ever turn to them instead of your formal mentor or lead teacher, if you have one?

c. Are there any people in, or associated with, the school system that you consider friends?
   i. If so, are they fellow teachers, other members of the school faculty?
      1. Do they work in this school?
   ii. If not, do they work in this district?
   iii. Are any of the people you talk to most often with about your job parents, students, or other community members?
      1. What insights do you feel these friends provide that are different than those you gather from other school employees?

d. In your opinion, are the people you interact with most at school happy in their job?

e. Do you feel that the moods and attitudes of those you talk to most often affect yours?
   i. If so, does this influence who you choose to interact with?
APPENDIX 2: SURVEY CONSENT FORM

Thank you very much for taking this survey. I am conducting this study for my dissertation, the last step on the journey towards my PhD!

It is very important that every person in the school take the survey to have their own voice and experiences heard. The goal of the project is to better understand how teachers and faculty in this school work and interact with each other, as well as how these relationships change and are changed by your job. Every individual is an important part of the whole, and I don’t want to miss anyone!

After I finish the study, I will share the general results with the county administrators. They will be able to use the findings to review current initiatives and create new ones to make the school, as a workplace, better for you. Ultimately, your participation can help make your school and county better for you, your coworkers, and your students! Your individual answers will remain completely confidential; only I, Lindsay Hamm, will ever have access to them. I will never share individual answers or names with anyone else.

The survey should only take 15 minutes to complete. The survey will remain open until the end of June, so please come back to it later if you don’t have the time to complete it now!

Thank you again for your time! I truly appreciate your help.
APPENDIX 3: QUESTIONS FROM THE SURVEYS USED IN THE DISSERTATION ANALYSIS

**Section 1:** First I am going to ask you a few questions about how long have you worked for [Pierce] County Public Schools and what jobs you have held here.

Your Name:

Your Current Job Title:

Which School You Work for:
- Multiple choice for embedded flow

How long have you worked in [Pierce] County?
- Pull down for number of years

Is this the first school you have ever worked in within the county?*
- Yes or no

Is the position you hold now the first job title you have held in this county?*
- Yes or no

**Section 6: Survey Conclusion**

Is there anything that I have not asked about in this survey that you thought about or want to mention about your school and your experience as a teacher?

**Section 7: Questions added to the second wave of the survey about Bill 402**

This past summer, the North Carolina Legislature passed “The Excellent Public Schools Act,” which is part of the “Appropriations Act,” Senate Bill 402 (2013 N.C. Session Laws c.360). This bill ends tenure for all faculty in 2018. Additionally, at the end of the 2013-2014 school year, each LEA will select the top 25% of its faculty for the option of a four year contract and cumulative raise if they give up their tenure at the end of the school year.

How do you personally feel about Senate Bill 402?
- Strongly in favor of Senate Bill 402
- In Favor of Senate Bill 402
- Not in Favor of Senate Bill 402
- Strongly Not in Favor of Senate Bill 402

Will you be less likely to share resources and/or ideas with other teachers because those deemed the top 25% are eligible for longer contracts and higher salaries?
- Yes
Governor McCrory is pushing forward a bill raising new teacher (employed 0-5 years) base salaries by $4,000 over the next two years. The bill does not include increased pay for teachers who have been working six+ years.

Which of the following statements most closely matches your personal feelings about the Governor's proposal?

- I hope that the bill passes as is.
- The bill should raise base salaries for all teachers, regardless of time employed.
- The bill should raise salaries for more experienced teachers instead of new teachers.
- The legislature should not raise the base salary for any teachers.

If you would like, please use this space to further explain your personal feelings about Senate Bill 402 and/or Governor McCrory's base pay for new teachers proposal.