

ABSTRACT

TONISSEN, JOHN ANDREW. But What do the Teachers Think? A Multiple Case Study to Understand Teachers' Perceptions of Accountability Policies. (Under the direction of Dr. Lance Fusarelli and Dr. Beth Sondel).

Public school districts across the United States have steadily embraced accountability policies since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. These policies reflect a neoliberal shift in education to a system that embraces market principles to maximize student achievement. This multiple case study explores how teachers perceive these accountability policies impact their profession and their students. Teachers were selected from four schools in a large, urban district in North Carolina. Two of these schools were labeled as high performing by the recently created North Carolina Report Card system, and two were labeled as low performing. Teachers across the cases reported that they felt pressure for their students to perform well on their state-created End of Course Exam. However, this pressure had more significant impacts on teachers at the lower performing schools, creating a two-tiered curriculum where teachers at the higher performing schools emphasized literature, while teachers at the lower performing schools emphasized testing skills.

Copyright 2019 by John Andrew Tonissen

All Rights Reserved

But What do the Teachers Think? A Multiple Case Study to Understand Teachers' Perceptions
of Accountability Policies.

by
John Andrew Tonissen

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Educational Research and Policy Analysis

Raleigh, North Carolina
2019

APPROVED BY:

Dr. Lance Fusarelli
Committee Co-Chair

Dr. Beth Sondel
Committee Co-Chair

Dr. Carol Pope

Dr. Andy Overstreet

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving and supportive wife, Leah, my parents, Anne and Jock Tonissen, my sister, Stewart, my daughter, Kate, and my other parents, Mark and Laura Spears.

BIOGRAPHY

Drew Tonissen was born in Charlotte, North Carolina. After graduating from Myers Park High School, he enrolled at Sewanee, the University of the South to study English Literature. Upon graduation from Sewanee, Dr. Tonissen moved back to Charlotte and began a brief career in finance before quickly turning to the world of education.

After less than a year in the financial industry, the department Dr. Tonissen worked for was sold and all employees were laid off. Dr. Tonissen took this opportunity to teach English abroad in Prague, Czech Republic. Upon return to Charlotte he was hired by the Charlotte Mecklenburg School system as an English teacher. Over the following years, while teaching 9th and 12th grade English, Dr. Tonissen earned a Masters in English Literature from The University of North Carolina at Charlotte. His public teaching experience, coupled with this degree, led him to pursue a doctorate at NC State University, where he worked as a graduate assistant for three years.

Dr. Tonissen currently teaches 10th grade English in the Charlotte Mecklenburg School system. He resides in Charlotte, with his wife, Leah, and daughter, Kate. He enjoys being outdoors, reading, and spending time with family and friends.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Beth Sondel for her inspiration. A research talk she gave in my qualitative methods course in the spring of 2014 opened doors of critical analysis that I did not know existed. She provided me with the vocabulary and framework to identify the problems in education I experienced as an educator. Without her guidance and instruction, this work would not be possible.

I would also like to thank my dissertation committee, Dr. Lance Fusarelli, Dr. Beth Sondel, Dr. Andy Overstreet, and Dr. Carol Pope. They spent numerous hours reading the numerous drafts of this work, and dedicated their time to providing the feedback that led to its completion. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. Lance Fusarelli for providing academic and friendly support over these years, which has proved invaluable. As his advisee, I felt that I was part of not only a degree program, but also a community.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Purpose of the Study	5
Significance of the Study	6
Overview of Methodological Approach	8
Organization of the Study	10
 Chapter 2: Literature Review	 12
Introduction.....	12
Neoliberalism: Definition and History.....	13
The Intersection of Neoliberalism and Race.....	16
Neoliberalism in Public Education	18
Accountability Policies and their Impact on Public Education	19
How Accountability Policies Affect Teachers.....	27
The ‘Good Sense’ of Accountability Measures	29
 Chapter 3: Methodology	 32
Research Design and Rationale	32
Selection of Participants and School Sites.....	37
Data Collection Procedures.....	40
Data Analysis Procedures	42
Ethical Issues	42
Positionality	43
 Chapter 4: Findings	 45
Introduction.....	45
Teachers’ Perceptions of Neoliberal Policies and Their Impact on Curriculum	45
Case #1: Dorothy Merrifield High School.....	47
Autonomy	47
Pressure	50
Literature and Writing.....	56
Case #2: Lakeside High School	58
Autonomy	59
Pressure	61
Literature and Writing.....	63
Case #3: Swann High School.....	65
Pressure	65
Literature and Writing.....	72
Case #4: W. Percy High School.....	74
Pressure	75
Literature and Writing.....	79
Overview	79

How Teachers Perceive the Effects of Accountability Measure on Their Students	80
Ambivalence	81
Frustration	82
Summary	83
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion	85
Introduction.....	85
Summary of the Study	85
Discussion of Findings.....	86
Pressure	86
Curriculum.....	86
The Effects of Accountability Policies on Students	88
Connections to Previous Research.....	89
Narrowed Curriculum.....	89
Inequality.....	89
Race	90
Positive Impacts	93
Teacher Turnover	93
New Public Management	94
Implications for Educational Practice.....	96
Implications for Research	98
Summary	99

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Official School Report Card Grades, 2016-2017 School Year	33
Table 2	School Demographics, 2016-2017 School Year	34
Table 3	Teacher Education and Experience	35
Table 4	School-wide Performance on the English II End of Course Exam, 2016- 2017 School Year	36
Table 5	Student Socio-economic Status, 2017-2018 School Year	37
Table 6	Participants	40

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Public education in the United States is under siege. Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, politicians from both sides of the aisle have been critical of public education; they declare that the system is inefficient, that our teachers are under performing, and that the future of our children is in jeopardy (Ravitch, 2013). The solution to this problem has been a steady march towards a corporate model of education; public schools should be run like businesses, with managers holding students and teachers accountable for their performance on standardized tests (Hursh, 2007; Ravitch, 2013). Furthermore, free markets should be introduced into the system, providing parents with choices about where their children attend schools, and the resulting competition between schools ensures that a rising tide will lift all boats (Ravitch, 2013). It is a compelling narrative, one that has emerged as the commonsense solution to our education problems.

However, many researchers have argued that the accountability policies proposed and put into place as the solution to education's woes have, in fact, created an entirely new crisis (Apple, 2006; McNeil, 2000). Such policies, which include high-stakes testing and standardization of curricula, lead to privatization (Apple, 2006; Hursh, 2007; Saltman, 2011), the deskilling of teachers (Anderson & Cohen, 2015; McNeil, 1986, 2000), and have been associated with a neoliberal reform movement that has been reshaping education in the United States over the past several decades (Apple, 2006; Hursh, 2007; Lipman, 2011). While neoliberal education reforms are often described as measures to increase educational outcomes for low-income students, they

actually have negatively affected public education in the U.S. through privatization, high-stakes testing, and accountability measures (Apple, 2006; Hursh, 2007; Lipman, 2011; McNeil, 2000).

The emergence of neoliberal education policies in the United States began after the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (Hursh, 2007; Lipman, 2011). This document and its prescriptions launched a new model for public education and set into motion "...two decades of restructuring public education through new forms of top-down, punitive accountability and prescriptive standards, increased business involvement, and school leadership redefined as (corporate) managerialism" (Lipman, 2011, p. 46).

Neoliberalism is an economic theory, rooted in the philosophy of Adam Smith, that posits free market capitalism is the solution to all of society's ills, including public education (Apple, 2006). According to Anyon, "The neoliberal paradigm assumes that free markets – labor, monetary, financial, educational, and housing markets, for example – will regulate and stabilize themselves without government regulation or the need for taxation to support them, and the resulting prosperity will 'lift all boats'" (as cited in Apple, 2006, p. 4). In other words, "...what is private is necessarily good and what is public is necessarily bad" (Apple, 2006, p. 31).

Stakeholders in education policy often note that public schools are failing, and the solution to this is to increase accountability, most emphatically through high-stakes standardized tests. However, others (Apple, 2006; Hursh, 2008) argue that the crisis in education has been manufactured, and that the real crisis in education is, in fact, the proposed solution. Anyon (2011) argues that the problems in education stem from U.S. economic policies:

Policies such as minimum wage statutes that yield poverty wages, housing and transportation policies that segregate low-income workers of color in urban areas, and

industrial and other job development in far-flung suburbs where public transit does not reach, all maintain poverty in city neighborhoods and therefore the schools. (p. 5)

Berliner (2013) notes that while pushing for higher standards and greater accountability from students and teachers is noble, it likely will not have a great effect:

The current menu of reforms simply may not help education improve as long as we refuse to notice that public education is working fine for many of America's families and youth, and that there is a common characteristic among families for whom the public schools are failing. That characteristic is poverty brought about through, and exacerbated by, great inequality in wealth. (p. 16)

While the neoliberal education model and its accountability policies have their critics, they have managed to emerge as the commonsense solution to our so-called failing schools.

However, not only have critics pointed out that these policies have not been successful, they have also demonstrated that they are harmful to educators and their students. Accountability measures have been shown to deprofessionalize teachers (Anderson & Cohen, 2015; de Saxe, Bucknovitz, & Mahoney-Mosedale, 2018), narrow curriculum and encourage teaching to the test (Nichols & Berliner, 2005), and have shifted the purpose of schooling from a Jeffersonian model that emphasized a liberatory curriculum to an industrial model, where students are trained to become workers in a capitalist society (Bowles & Gintis, 2011). The standards that are frequently coupled with accountability policies only reinforce basic skills (Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003). Furthermore, research indicates that schools labeled as lower performing are more likely to experience greater negative impacts of accountability measures (Plank & Condliffe, 2013), while schools labeled as higher performing are often not subjected to such measures (Diamond & Spillane, 2004). For example, research demonstrates that accountability

policies influence school leaders at lower performing schools to make superficial and punitive reforms, such as trying to impress external observers, while leaders at higher performing school emphasized rewards and praise for teachers (Diamond & Spillane, 2004).

Other research demonstrates that high-stakes testing, frequently coupled with accountability policies, is harmful to educators and students, particularly at schools labeled low performing. Several studies indicate that teachers at low-performing schools are more likely to teach to the test (Abrams, Pedulla, & Madaus, 2003; Groves, 2002; Jennings & Bearak, 2014; Jennings & Sohn, 2014; Reback, Rockoff, & Schwartz, 2014), and that schools that face more accountability pressure are more likely to implement cosmetic reforms, as well as reforms that target particular groups of students at the expense of others (Diamond & Spillane, 2004). Madaus and Russell (2010) found the following effects of high-stakes testing:

First, teachers give greater attention to tested content and decrease emphasis on non-tested content. This narrows the content and skills taught and learned within a discipline. Second, a high-stakes test preempts time and coverage from disciplines not tested. This narrow the curriculum across subject fields. Third, there is a ‘trickle down’ effect. The content and skills covered on the high-stakes tests at the upper grades displaces the content and skills of non-tested lower grades, altering the curriculum across grades. (p. 26)

In the neoliberal model, education is no longer viewed as a way to raise informed citizens who can be critical of society, but rather to create economic producers (Bowles & Ginitis, 2011; Hursh, 2008; McNeil, 1986). Such a vision for schooling fails to produce the thinking citizens we need to improve our society. The current model ensures that what we will have instead of

thinkers is workers, and the very system we rely on to alleviate issues of inequality may in fact only serve to reinforce the class structure in the United States (Bowles & Gintis, 2011).

Purpose of the Study

This study examines how teachers in an urban district in North Carolina perceive their profession and their students impacted by accountability policies rooted in neoliberal ideology. It examined 14 teachers across four different schools, two labeled with an A grade, and two labeled with a C grade under North Carolina's state-wide grading system. Under this system, schools are given a grade based on how their students performed on standardized state tests (80%), and how much their students grew academically during the school year (20%). The nature of this study is comparative; since research indicates that lower performing schools and at-risk students are disproportionately affected by accountability policies (Diamond & Spillane, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Plank & Condliffe, 2013), it was important to determine if this is was case for the schools in question.

The purpose of this study, broadly, is to examine teachers' perceptions of how accountability measures, rooted in neoliberal ideology, are impacting their profession and their students. The study examined teachers at four schools in an urban district in North Carolina. This particular county provides a unique case of neoliberal reform, largely because of the new school grading system implemented in 2015. These new grades place even higher stakes on tests administered to students, and reinforces the idea that the only important outcome of schooling is performance on standardized tests. The specific questions are as follows:

- How do teachers experience the neoliberal policies in the context of recent state legislation in North Carolina?

- How do teachers at schools labeled high performing (A) versus teachers at schools labeled low performing (C), within an urban county in North Carolina, perceive the effects of accountability measure on their profession?
- How do teachers at schools labeled high performing (A) versus teachers at schools labeled low performing (C), within an urban county in North Carolina, perceive the effects of accountability measure on their students?

Significance of the Study

In the past several years, North Carolina has received national media attention about the state of its education system. In 2010, the state elected its first Republican controlled General Assembly since Reconstruction, followed by the election of a Republican governor in 2012. In the following years, these lawmakers enacted numerous policies that negatively affected the teaching profession, including salary freezes, the elimination of pay for advanced degrees, the elimination of tenure, the negation of the right to contribute to teachers' organization via paycheck, and the introduction of an A through F grading system of all individual schools in North Carolina. While lawmakers did grant teachers a raise in the 2014-2015 school year, those new to the profession saw the biggest increase in salary, while the most experienced teachers received a much smaller increase. This trend has continued in recent years. In 2018, teachers were granted an average raise of 6.5% (Doran, 2018). However, as of 2018, North Carolina ranked 37th in teacher pay and was \$9,600 short of the national average. (Hui, 2018).

In addition to these local education policies, North Carolina teachers have also been subjected to the national movement towards accountability, standardization, and high-stakes testing, put into motion by the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), and continuing to the present through *Race to the Top* (RTTT). As a result, in the 2014-2015 school year, North Carolina high

schools administered 21 standardized tests across different subjects. While this number decreased in the 2015-2016 school year, the high-stakes nature of the tests remains, as schools are now assigned grades based on how students perform on them. Critics of this grading system note that the grades schools receive are directly related to poverty levels. Indeed, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction released a report explicitly showing the connection between poverty rates within schools and their assigned grades (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2015).

Education is often spoken of as the great equalizer for the American economic system. After all, children in all fifty states are guaranteed a free, public education. However, guaranteed access does not guarantee equity (Kozol, 1991). Teaching, already a difficult profession, has been made more difficult in North Carolina through these state-level and national policies. Some educators have been forced to enroll in Medicaid to support their families (Kosher, 2013). Turnover rates are high, and many teachers are leaving the state for other opportunities. This study explores how teachers perceive the effects of these policies and gives some context as to why teachers are leaving the profession and what might be done about it.

Moreover, this study sought to examine how accountability policies are impacting different types of schools. Research demonstrates that schools under the most accountability pressure, in this case schools receiving a C grade, are more likely to experience the negative effects of accountability policies (Diamond & Spillane, 2004; Jennings & Bearak, 2014; Plank & Condliffe, 2013). Therefore, this study examined whether this phenomenon was occurring in this particular county.

Overview of Methodological Approach

This study used the case study method. Case study research enables the researcher to “understand a real-world case and assume that such an understanding is likely to involve important contextual conditions pertinent to [that] case” (Yin, 2014, p. 16). The case study method was appropriate for this project because the central research question, how do teachers perceive their profession and students being affected by accountability measures, seeks to provide understanding about a current, real-world phenomenon. More specifically, this project was a multiple-case study design to better understand teachers’ perceptions across different types of schools. Case study research often involves more than one case, and each “is instrumental to learning about the effects of the marking regulations but there will be important coordination between the individual studies” (Stake, 1995, pp. 3-4).

This study was comprised of four cases that were compared with each other. Cases 1 and 2 were schools that received an A grade, and Cases 3 and 4 were schools that received a C grade. The use of two schools receiving an A grade and two schools receiving a C grade allowed for replication that increased perspective and gave increased validity to the study (Yin, 2014). Each school made up a case, because “each case is a specific entity” (Stake, 2006, p. 2). While similarities may exist in schools receiving similar grades, the complexity of the school environment warrants that each school be its own case.

Furthermore, “The logic underlying the use of multiple-case studies is the same [as multiple experiments]. Each case must be carefully selected so that it either (a) predicts similar results (a literal replication) or (b) predicts contrasting results but anticipatable reasons (a theoretical replication)” (Yin, 2014, p. 57). This study had the benefit of replication within the

cases, and theoretical replication across the cases, as it was anticipated that accountability measures will affect teachers' perceptions more at schools labeled with a C grade.

Yin (2014) gives an example of a multiple case study similar to the one proposed here:

A common example is a study of school innovations...in which individual schools adopt some innovation. Each school might be the subject of an individual case study, but the study as a whole covers several schools and, in this way, uses a multiple-case design. (p. 56)

For this study, the "innovation" was accountability measures, and the cases were schools subjected to these policies.

Furthermore, "the case study is preferred when examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behavior cannot be manipulated" (Yin, 2014, p. 12). This aligns well with this study; teachers' perceptions are very much current events, and this study comes at a time when accountability measures have intensified over the past decade. Moreover, the researcher served as an interviewer, observer, and analyst, with no means of directly impacting the inter-workings of the cases that were studied.

A successful case study must be bounded (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014); therefore, this study required definitions of what was to be studied as well as time lines for completion. The immediate topic of the case study was 10th Grade English teachers, and the reasons to select this specific group of teachers were threefold. First, I taught high school English in an urban district for eight years, including five years in which English students took the state-created End of Course (EOC) exam. This gave me some amount of experience in preparing students for a high-stakes test where students and teachers are evaluated based on how students score on the test.

This gave me some credibility during interviews, as I had shared experiences being “down in the trenches.”

The second reason for the selection of 10th Grade English teachers as the main focus of the case study is that I have an understanding of the curriculum and how it may be impacted by accountability measures. Finally, I believe that English classrooms are in a unique position to be negatively affected by accountability measures. One of the main purposes of English education is to promote inquiry and develop critical thinking skills, which may also be negatively impacted by teachers coaching students to perform well on standardized tests. For example, the EOC in its current formation contains 68 items based on 7 to 9 reading passages. The overwhelming majority of these questions are multiple choice, and there are only 3 to 4 questions that require students to write. For these “short response” questions, students are given a formulaic response template to follow and can receive full credit for writing only a few sentences. The lack of writing required on the exam may limit the amount of classroom time devoted to developing writing skills, a critical tool in developing inquiry and critical thinking.

Data collection included teacher interviews, meeting observations, and document analysis. The use of multiple sources of data will aid the study in developing converging lines of inquiry through a triangulation of data sources (Yin, 2014). Interviews were transcribed and coded, as were field notes.

Organization of the Study

The following chapters of this study include a review of the literature and a more detailed section on the chosen methodology. The literature review will define and give the history of Neoliberalism, analyze how it has become embedded in public schooling in the U.S., and review extant studies on how it has impacted teachers. The methodology section will provide details on

data collection and analysis procedures, as well as address ethical concerns. Chapter 4 will analyze findings, and Chapter 5 will summarize and discuss the findings.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter reviews the relevant literature pertaining to the development of neoliberalism, how it has worked its way into U.S. public schools, and how its policies are impacting teachers and students. Much of the extant literature on neoliberalism and its impacts focuses on its history and development. This study will seek to add to the smaller body of literature that examines how teachers perceive these policies affect them.

Neoliberalism, a theory developed primarily by Friedrich von Hayek in the 20th century and brought into public discourse by Milton Friedman, proclaims that unregulated free markets are the best solution to societal and economic issues (Apple, 2006; Saul, 2005; Sondel, 2013). The neoliberal model suggests that markets, not government intervention, are the only way to maximize individual freedoms, which will supposedly increase societal and economic outcomes for all (Apple, 2006). Since this ideology was introduced to the American public in the 1970s, it has become common sense, influencing our institutions and collective identities (Harvey, 2005, 2006; Sondel, 2013).

Neoliberalism, with its roots in economic theory, has worked its way into the world of education reform. Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, education reform has become a popular topic across the spectrum of American politics. The report indicated that schools in the U.S. were failing, and that drastic measure needed to be taken to preserve our democracy. In famously inflammatory rhetoric, it declared:

...the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future – as a nation and a people. What was

unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur. Others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments. (p. 5)

Going a step further, the next paragraph asserted that if a foreign power "...had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war" (p. 5). What followed was the implementation of neoliberal education reforms, which transformed public education into a corporate, standards-based enterprise, focusing on the development of human capital (Apple, 2006; Bowles & Gintis, 2011; Lipman, 2011).

Neoliberalism: Definition and History

Neoliberalism originated in the writings of Friedrich von Hayek and was developed into a broad social theory by Milton Friedman (Apple, 2006; Harvey, 2005; Saul, 2005). Harvey (2005) describes it as the following:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political and economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. (p. 2)

While such an ideology may be familiar to Americans, our society was not always structured in this way. Neoliberal policies began to be implemented in the late 1970s, as U.S. economic policies shifted away from a Keynesian model of economics, one that envisioned the creation of a tax structure to create a welfare state (Harvey, 2005). The popular perception amongst citizens as well as politicians was that the Keynesian model had failed. Saul (2005) notes: "What the public saw was an odd debate between ebullient, optimistic, amusing, theatrical Globalists and

lugubrious, self-absorbed, technocratic and obscure liberal managers. This produced a vague public feeling that government was increasingly a failure” (p. 63).

While the sentiment that government was failing was popular, many economists and researchers have suggested that the economic downturn in the 1970s may not be attributable to the Keynesian model. Hursh (2007) suggested three major reasons for the economic downturn in the 1970s that led to the implementation of neoliberal policies: corporate profits fell as a result of deficit spending due mostly to the Vietnam War, the formation of OPEC and rising oil prices, and the inability of corporations to pass higher costs on to consumers due to the emerging competitive global economy. Davidson (1991) argued that the Keynesian economy was never implemented in the U.S. in the way it was originally intended. American Keynesians “reduced Keynes’s analysis to that of merely providing a ‘quick fix’ for the short-run disruptions that shocked the economic system” (p. 15). This was in contrast to what Keynes intended, which was a more permanent role for government to regulate the economy.

While many were critical of the sluggish growth of the economy by the late 1970s, the post-war Keynesian government did manage to deliver high rates of economic growth until the late 1960s (Harvey, 2005). However, while the middle class was faring well in this economy, the wealthiest 1% of the country did not make gains, and when the economic crisis of the 1970s occurred, this portion of the population began to sustain losses as stocks and other investments were losing value (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberal policies were then implemented as a result of the economic crisis and the impact it had on the wealthiest Americans (Harvey, 2005; Hursh, 2007).

Harvey notes:

In the U.S., for example, the share of the national income taken by the top 1 percent of income earners fell from a pre-war high of 16 percent to less than 8 percent by the end of

the Second World War, and stayed close to that level for nearly three decades. While growth was strong such restraints seemed not to matter. To have a stable share of an increasing pie is one thing. But when growth collapsed in the 1970s, when real interest rates went negative and paltry dividends and profits were the norm, then upper classes everywhere felt threatened. In the U.S. the control of wealth (as opposed to income) by the top 1 per cent of the population had remained fairly stable throughout the twentieth century. But in the 1970s it plunged precipitously as asset values (stocks, property, savings) collapsed. The upper classes had to move decisively if they were to protect themselves from political and economic annihilation. (Harvey, 2005, p. 15)

Instead of wealth trickling down, as politicians promised throughout the 1980s, it has since trickled up to the wealthiest Americans. In the period from 1977 to 2007, GDP in the U.S. has doubled (Duncan & Murnane, 2011). However, income levels at the 80th percentile have grown 37%, while income levels at the 20th percentile have only grown 7% (Duncan & Murnane, 2011). While the question of intent may never be answered, the results cannot be denied; the neoliberal shift has been associated with a restoration of class power for the wealthiest Americans (Harvey, 2005).

While neoliberalism began as an economic theory, it has since been put into practice in broader social policy. In the U.S. and elsewhere, this has meant broad deregulation, privatization of assets and formerly state-run organizations such as prisons, lower taxes, especially for the wealthy, the removal of progressive income taxes in favor of flat taxes, hostility towards unions, and the implementation of free markets, which has led to an increase of competition across all sectors of society (Anyon, 2014; Apple, 2006; Harvey, 2005; Jones, 2012; Saul, 2005). Evidence of the effects of these policies abounds; union membership, at 23% for all workers in 1980,

dropped to 11.1% in 2014 (Press Release, 2015). Perhaps the most influential neoliberal policies were aimed at deregulating the stock market; the repeal of the Glass Steagall Act in 1999 allowed banks to make ever-riskier investments, eventually leading to the crash in 2007-2008 (Anyon, 2014).

So what do these policies have to do with public education in the U.S.? A critical tenet of neoliberalism is that where markets do not exist, previously the case in public education, they must be created, by state intervention if necessary (Harvey, 2005; Means, 2005). The next section will examine how the neoliberal project has impacted public education.

The Intersection of Neoliberalism and Race

Scholars have noted that neoliberal policies often have the most damaging effects on minorities, especially in countries with a history of racism, like the United States. Phelps (2014) describes three eras of racism in the United States: chattel slavery, Jim Crow, and the new, neoliberal era. This new era employs the language of “common sense,” and this “rhetoric obscures from the discussion preexisting inequalities that have been shaped by race and class” (Picower and Mayorga, 2015, p. 9). Furthermore, neoliberal reforms “...increase wealth inequality and maintain White supremacy” (Picower & Mayorga, p. 1). Goldberg (2009) argues that neoliberalism is a reaction to declining White power in the United States in the post-Civil Rights era:

Neoliberalism accordingly can be read as a response to this concern about the impending impotence of whiteness. Neoliberalism is committed to privatizing property, utilities, and social programs, to reducing state expenditures and bureaucracy, increasing efficiencies, and to individual freedom from state regulation. As the state was seen increasingly to support black employment, to increase expenditures on black education, and to increase

regulation to force compliance, white neoconservatives found neoliberal commitments increasingly relevant to their interests. (p. 337)

Others have argued that neoliberalism perpetuates racism by removing race itself from any and all discourse. According to Enck-Wanzer (2011), “Racial neoliberalism is marked, first and foremost, by an active suppression of ‘race’ as a legitimate topic or term of public discourse and public policy...the significance of and relevance of race and racism are rejected as antiquated concepts in the post-civil rights era” (pp. 24-25). When the concept of race is dismissed, policies that negatively impact people of color can take on the definition of being race-neutral, or colorblind (Bonilla-Silva, 2002).

Goldberg (2009) presents a similar argument, and explains that the neoliberal project, in its mass privatization effort, has privatized race itself:

It was but a short step from privatizing property to privatizing race, removing conception and categorization in racial terms from the public to the private realm. It does not follow that the state purges racism from its domain. Rather, the state is restructured to support the privatizing of race and the protection of racially driven exclusions in the private sphere where they are set off-limits to state intervention. (p. 337)

In this way, neoliberalism and racism are intertwined. This does not imply that those who favor neoliberal policies are necessarily racist, but rather that neoliberal policies often have negative impacts for people of color without using any racial terms.

Racism also becomes intertwined with neoliberalism due to its theoretical idea that success is directly correlated with effort (Roberts & Mahtani, 2010). However, “What becomes clear is that this ideal relationship is not equally realized by all members in society” (Roberts & Mahtani, 2010, p. 253).

Neoliberalism in Public Education

Neoliberalism became entrenched in education policy as part of a larger shift in the United States away from democratic principles (Hursh, 2007). The very idea of democracy in the U.S. has been transformed, “making it only an economic concept, not a political one” (Apple, 2006, p. 15). Means (2005) describes how neoliberalism has transformed our understanding of the world:

...neoliberal rationalities take as given the natural efficiency and ethical neutrality of the market and the supposed inefficiency and corruption of the public sector. Here, all social relations from environmental protection, education, health and child care, to conceptions of democratic and civic engagement can and should be brought under the competitive domain of the market and the supposedly rational economic decision making capacity of the individual citizen who is recast as an entrepreneurial-consumer citizen. (p. 18)

One of the central tenets of neoliberalism is that competitive markets must be created for efficiency (Brathwaite, 2016; Harvey, 2005; Ravitch, 2013). According to Apple (2006), “For neoliberals, one form of rationality is more powerful than any other – economic rationality. Efficiency and an ‘ethic’ of cost-benefit analysis are the dominant norms. All people are to act in ways that maximize their own personal benefits” (p. 31). Therefore, we see that the neoliberal model proposes that decisions should be made based on economic rationality, even in the case of education, which has led to the creation of markets within the system.

The purpose of education in the U.S. has always been a matter of debate, with some arguing for a Jeffersonian model designed to create thoughtful citizens, while others believe that the primary focus of education should be preparation for employment (McNeil, 1986).

Neoliberal reforms fall distinctly in the latter category as they

...are presented as necessary to increase educational efficiency within a world in which goods, services, and jobs easily cross borders. Increased efficiency can only be attained, argue neoliberals, if individuals are able to make choices within a market system in which schools compete rather than the current system in which individuals are captive to educational decision made by educators and government officials. Furthermore, if individuals are to make decisions, they must have access to quantitative information, such as standardized test scores, that presumably indicated the quality of the education provided. (Hursh, 2007, p. 498)

The creation of markets within schooling systems necessitates that quantitative data must be collected from schools and districts for the purpose of comparison (Au, 2016; Brathwhite, 2016; Hursh, 2007). After all, one cannot make decisions in a market system without data to inform that decision. Therefore, the creation of markets has in part led to an increase in accountability policies, where standardized tests measure students' and teachers' performance. The following section will examine how accountability policies are impacting public education

Accountability Policies and their Impact on Public Education

The neoliberal education model emphasizes the use of standards and accountability measure in public education. Holding schools accountable, especially schools that are perceived as failing, makes common sense to the American public. According to Orfield (2013),

Wealthy business leaders who insist on data rather than theories in their own businesses pour money into charter schools based on a simple faith that markets relying on individual choice have transformative power and that governmental regulations and unionized work forces are the only basic obstacles to educational equity. (p. 17)

However, we can observe many unintended consequences resulting from the overzealous, high-stakes testing that results from accountability measures. While quantitative researchers have demonstrated that accountability measures may have positive effects on student achievement (Braun, 2004; Hanushek & Raymond, 2005), qualitative research indicates that standardized tests may have harmful, non-cognitive effects. High-stakes testing has been demonstrated to undermine confidence (Feeny & Freeman, 2014), cause stress (Landry, 2006), increase feelings of fear, and increase negative physical symptoms such as stomach aches (Militello & Militello, 2013). Kearns (2011) found that students who failed standardized tests often experienced feelings of shame, humiliation, embarrassment, and degradation, and also increased the likelihood students would drop out of school altogether.

Research also indicates that increased accountability measures encourage teachers to narrow curriculum and teach only what is to be tested (Landry, 2006). Koretz (2008) also concludes that the emphasis placed on success on standardized tests narrows curriculum and artificially inflates test scores: “The rub is that instruction is nearly a zero-sum game, and devoting more resources to topic A entails fewer resources for topic B. Scores become inflated when topic B – the material that gets less emphasis as a result of reallocation – is also an important part of the domain” (p. 253).

Moreover, research indicates that schools facing the most accountability pressure, low performing schools, are most influenced by accountability policies. Several studies have demonstrated that teachers faced with strong accountability pressure focus resources on select groups of students (bubble kids) at the expense of other groups (Booher-Jennings, 2005; Jennings & Sohn, 2014). Others indicate that accountability policies actually lower teaching quality and promote only basic skills (Groves, 2002; Jennings & Sohn, 2014; Plank & Condliffe,

2014). Reback, Rockoff, and Schwartz (2014) found that 84% of teachers performing below the AYP margin reported emphasizing topics expected to be on the state test, while only 69% of teachers at schools performing above average as measured by AYP reported doing so.

Furthermore, 100% of teachers at schools performing below average as measured by AYP reported looking for particular styles and formats of problems in state tests and emphasizing them in their instruction, as compared to 67% of teachers performing above the AYP average. Such practices “may bolster scores without improving other measures of achievement (Jennings & Sohn, 2014).

Proponents of accountability measures contend that it is necessary to provide a way to measure student achievement to inform stakeholders about the quality of the schools, and to hold teachers and students accountable (Jones et al., 2003). According to Ravitch (2013), “The [school] reformers’ big idea is to establish a free market of schools, and assumes that the resultant competition will improve all schools” (p. 93). However, opponents argue that high-stakes tests do not actually accomplish these goals because of the complex nature of education and testing (Jones et al., 2003). Furthermore, high-stakes testing has been shown to have unintended consequences, including increased teacher-centered instruction, reduced teacher creativity, and a lack of curriculum diversity (Jones et al., 2003).

Students, teachers, schools, and districts are measured in many ways; however, test scores have become by far the most important measure of success. This has led teachers to focus on test material at the expense of other knowledge (Ravitch, 2013), and in some cases has led to outright cheating, in the case of Atlanta (Vogell, 2011). Additionally, Saltman (2011) connects standardized testing and the standardization of the curriculum with the neoliberal project, “in part

because of the ways it treats knowledge as a commodity to be produced by experts, delivered by teachers, and consumed by students” (p. 5).

As earlier discussed, a key part of the neoliberal project is the creation of markets where people can make rational decisions. In education, this is sold to the public as school choice, and is often wrapped in the rhetoric of individual freedom (Apple, 2006). Accountability measures require standardized testing, which produces quantitative data that allows schools to be measured against each other, which theoretically will enable families to make intelligent choices about where to send their children to school. However, due to the expense of transportation, lack of information, and decline in real wages for working families over the past several decades, many of the poor will not be able to make these choices (Apple, 2006). Consequently, the poor can be labeled as making bad “consumer choices” (Apple, 2006, p. 50).

While school choice was once irrelevant to educational policy, it now dominates the discussion because it reflects the basic beliefs of many Americans (Orfield, 2013). In the neoliberal education model, students and parents essentially become consumers in the education market, supposedly having the freedom to make educated choices about where they will spend their education dollars (Apple, 2006). However, this ideology ignores the reality that some citizens have more choices than others. In an apt metaphor, Apple (2006) compares school choices to a supermarket:

...there are individuals who indeed can go into supermarkets and choose among a vast array of similar or diverse products. And there are those who can only engage in what can best be called ‘postmodern’ consumption. They stand outside the supermarket and can only consume the image. (p. 32)

Students from impoverished, minority communities will not have the same choices as their wealthy, suburban peers. The basic assumptions of market theory do not hold true even for simple goods and services, much less something as complex as a human child (Orfield, 2013).

To put it another way, wealthier students will have the option of consuming the best products (schools), while others will only be able to watch from the sidelines, either due to lack of access or information or both. Furthermore, Giroux (2010) argues that the creation of an educational market conveniently eschews any mention of democratic values such as social justice, ethics, or equity, allowing those who are successful in the system to label those who are unsuccessful as lazy, bad decision makers, or simply having bad luck. However, school choice policies appeal to many because they share the economic and conservative ideology that suggests market competition creates value in and of itself (Orfield, 2013).

The neoliberal rationalization that choice in a marketplace will benefit everyone ignores issues of inequality and racism that have consistently plagued American society (Apple, 2006). The U.S. maintains a high rate of child poverty, ranking only ahead of Romania on a scale of 35 developed countries (Adamson, 2012). There are 15.8 million (22% of all people under 18) children in the U.S. living at or below the federal poverty threshold, defined for a single parent household as making \$16,057 annually or less. Including those within 200% of the federal poverty threshold, these numbers increase to 31.8 million, or 44% of all children under 18 (Jiang, Ekono, & Skinner, 2015). Such poverty has significant impacts on students; indeed, the income achievement gap, defined by a student from the 90th percentile of the family income distribution compared with a student from the 10th percentile, is now roughly twice as large as the black-white achievement gap (Reardon, 2011).

Not only does poverty affect how and if students and parents can navigate a free market education system, it also affects how children learn. According to Rothstein (2004),

Children who are raised by parents who are professionals will, on average, have more inquisitive attitudes toward the material presented by their teachers than will children who are raised by working-class parents. As a result, no matter how competent the teacher, the academic achievement of lower-class children will, on average, almost inevitably be less than that of middle-class children. (p. 2)

Not only do children from the professional class enter school with advantages, children from working classes enter with detriments:

Lower-class children, on average, have poorer vision than middle-class children, partly because of prenatal conditions, partly because of how their eyes are trained as infants.

They have poorer oral hygiene, more lead poisoning, more asthma, poorer nutrition, less adequate pediatric care, more exposure to smoke, and a host of other problems.

(Rothstein, 2004, p. 3)

Indeed, the problem of poverty in education has been addressed by researchers who suggest that the education problems in this country cannot be solved by education reform alone (Anyon, 2014; Fusarelli, 2011). Anyon states: “As a nation, we have been counting on education to solve the problem of unemployment, joblessness, and poverty for many years. But education did not cause these problems, and education cannot solve them” (p. 5).

While school choice has been presented as a panacea in today’s public education climate, this has not always been the case. Many cities in the South embraced desegregation policies that bused students to create a more equitable system. However, social justice and the value of democratic education are being replaced by neoliberal market values, as the public’s common

sense has been altered. American value choice and freedom; indeed these may be the values Americans hold most sacred. Bastian (1992) posits that arguing against school choice “is a bit like being asked to burn the American flag at a VFW meeting. You have every right to do it, but who really wants to? After all, choice is a bedrock American value and the watchword of personal liberty” (p. 96).

However, the American public needed to be convinced that school choice was good for all citizens, which was accomplished through the creation of what political philosopher Antonio Gramsci termed “common sense hegemony.” According to Gramsci, the ruling class maintains power through two functions: domination or coercion, and intellectual and moral leadership (Femia, 1981). The latter function constitutes hegemony, “which refers to an order in which a common social-moral language is spoken, in which one concept of reality is dominant, informing with its spirit all modes of thought and behavior” (Femia, 1981, p. 24). In the U.S. and other developed nations, the common sense understanding is that choices made in free markets best serve the individual, and the freedom to make choices will benefit all. These ideals are reflected in a shift over the past several decades towards a New Public Management in the public sector. This model emphasizes “an outcomes-based, entrepreneurial, corporate model of management” in schools and elsewhere in the public sector (Anderson & Cohen, 2015). However, an education system that is based on markets and accountability ignores inequalities inherent in the system, and suggests that those do not effectively participate in the market have made bad decisions.

Race also plays a critical role in academic achievement, as historically Black Americans were subjected to slavery, segregation under Jim Crow, and all of the injustices that this entails, leading to what Ladson-Billings (2006) labeled “the education debt.” However, neoliberal

accountability policies are often colorblind (Giroux, 2010; Leonardo, 2009) and neglect to provide any special consideration to marginalized groups. According to Giroux (2010),

Under neoliberal globalization, capital removes itself from any viable form of state regulation, power is uncoupled from matters of ethics and social responsibility, and market freedoms replace long-standing social contracts that once provided a safety net for the poor, the elderly, workers, and the middle class. (p. 195)

Au (2016) argues that standardized tests themselves are part of the problem:

...given their presumed objectivity, such standardized testing fundamentally masks the structural nature of racial inequality within an ideology of individual meritocracy, an ideology that advances a racialized neoliberal project that reconstitutes 'anti-racism' as being against the very act of naming race itself. (p. 40)

Policies rooted in this ideology have no answers for how we should approach the ever-present problem of race in our schools. Instead the focus is placed solely on individual freedom (Apple, 2006; Giroux, 2010), in this case the freedom of where to attend school. However,

Appeals to freedom, operating under the sway of market forces, offer no signposts theoretically or politically for engaging racism, an ethical and political issue that undermines the very basis of a substantive democracy. Freedom in this discourse collapses into self-interest and as such is more inclined to organize any sense of community around shared fears, insecurities, and an intolerance of those 'others' who are marginalized by class and color. (Giroux, 2010, p. 198)

While individual freedom to choose schools has commonsense appeal to Americans, we must also seek to understand the complexities of race in this country and how they have impacted education, in the past and in the present.

Derrick Bell (1979) argued for the theory of interest convergence, which suggests that policies that benefit Black Americans, such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, are only passed when they benefit Whites as well. He posited that *Brown v. Board of Education* was not passed solely out of moral or ethical ideas, but rather because it benefited Whites by increasing the United States' international standing during the Cold War. If the U.S. was to be successful in recruiting South American nations as allies in this fight, it could not be seen as a discriminatory power, especially because citizens of the countries it was recruiting were mostly brown and black.

Echoing neoliberal thought, Leonardo (2009) suggests that NCLB places the responsibility of success in education squarely on the individual, rather than acknowledging any sort of inequality or issues having to do with race:

When the white referent of NCLB is not discussed, these [minority] communities receive the impression that they are failing non-racialized academic standards. The upshot is that the fault is entirely theirs, a cornerstone of color-blind discourse that conveniently forgets about structural reasons for school failure. On the other hand, when largely white middle class schools and districts meet or exceed their target, they receive a similar but beneficial message: that the merit is entirely theirs. (p. 130)

Accountability policies that fail to take race into consideration may only exacerbate the racial problems extant in U.S. public schooling today.

How Accountability Policies Affect Teachers

A growing body of literature exists on how teachers have been affected by accountability measures since the passage of *No Child Left Behind*. These accountability measures have arguably altered the day-to-day life in schools and districts more than any previous policy to be

enacted (Booher-Jennings, 2005). While accountability measures are presented as a way to improve education, they often have negative impacts on the teaching profession. Accountability measures were found to stifle teacher creativity and increase measures of control over teachers (Achinstein, Ogawa, & Speiglmán, 2004; Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Finnigan & Gross, 2007; Sleeter & Stillman, 2007), reallocate time and resources away from students whom teachers thought would not pass state tests (Booher-Jennings, 2005), cause turnover (Crocco & Costigan, 2006), and affect poorer districts over more affluent ones (Achinstein et al., 2006). Moreover, other research indicates that accountability policies foster resentment on the part of teachers (Louis, Febey, & Schroeder, 2005), may redefine the purpose of teaching to producing test scores (Katsuno, 2012), have a "...negative impact on some teachers' ability to use effective teaching methods, especially developmentally appropriate practices (Jones & Egle, 2007, p. 238), and influence principals to terminate teachers who resist (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006).

If accountability measures and standardization were having positive impacts on student achievement, we might accept these negative consequences; however, research indicated that these measures are instead harmful to education for both students and teachers (McNeil, 2000). Instead of improving education for our most vulnerable population, they actually have the opposite effect:

Standardization reduces the quality and quantity of what is taught and learned in schools...The long term effects of standardization are even more damaging: over the long term, standardization creates inequities, widening the gap between the quality of education for poor and minority youth and that of more privileged students. (McNeil, 2000, p. 3)

Since it appears that accountability measures are negatively impacting students and teachers, and may have the opposite effect of its intended purpose of closing the achievement gap, more research is needed to understand how teachers perceive the profession is being impacted by these measures. This study seeks to further understand this phenomenon in North Carolina, where teacher turnover has reached a five-year high (Associated Press, 2015).

The ‘Good Sense’ of Accountability Measures

While one may observe many negative effects resulting from the movement towards increased accountability, the movement did not arise from a vacuum. Federal and state governments have become increasingly involved in education due to a perception of failure (Fusarelli & Fusarelli, 2003). Indeed, despite decades of reform, student test scores remained low throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Fusarelli, 2002). To counteract this low performance, “...the federal and state governments have become increasingly involved in education through mandates and the implementation of top-down command and control structures” (Fusarelli, 2002, p. 565). Or in other words, what were once loosely couple systems have become more tightly coupled (Fusarelli, 2002).

One result of the increased involvement of the federal and state governments was the implementation of the New Public Management (NPM), which became popular in other public domains throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Fusarelli & Johnson, 2004). NPM sought to streamline and improve public services during a time in which bureaucracy became perceived as inefficient by definition (Fusarelli & Johnson, 2004). NPM has essentially redefined public education as it now “...includes charter schools, for-profit corporations running charter schools, and market-based accountability reframed as public accountability” (Fusarelli & Johnson, 2004, p. 120).

Proponents of increased federal and state involvement in education contend that the “alignment of standards, curriculum, and assessment is essential to creating high performing learning systems in schools” (Fusarelli, 2002, p. 572). Indeed, Hanushek and Raymond (2005) found that the implementation of accountability policies had a positive impact on student achievement, although it did not appear to impact the achievement gap. Dee and Jacob (2011) found NCLB and its accountability measures had significant, positive impacts on 4th grade math skills, but little to no impact on reading. Additionally, NCLB’s testing and data collection requirements have

...forced [states] to build new systems for data gathering and dissemination and produced greater transparency in public education than ever before. Parents, advocacy groups, the media, and policymakers now have access to a wealth of disaggregated student performance data that they have used to shine light on previously dark corners of neglect in the education system. (McGuinn, 2013, p. 224)

However, despite these success, the increased focus on standards, curriculum, and assessment has uncovered a conflict between a positivist and a constructivist vision of schooling (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008). The increased use of standards and accountability in the NCLB era has created a dilemma:

...some evidence suggests that approaches associated with NCLB reforms, although admirable, place competing sets of demands on teachers and schools by simultaneously implementing standardized routinized high-stakes testing while expecting schools to turn out students who are creative thinkers and real-world problem solvers. (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008)

How to achieve the goals set by NCLB while also preparing students for the 21st century has proven to be a difficult task for educators:

The pressing need to be innovative and to prepare students with 21st century skills while complying with and meeting the many mandates of NCLB creates tension among school leaders and teachers who feel as though they are being pulled in opposite directions.

Many conscientious school leaders are trying to be simultaneously responsive to calls for innovation, critical thinking skills, adaptability, and creativity (21st century skills) yet still meet the demands and adequate yearly progress (AYP) testing targets of NCLB. (Shoen & Fusarelli, 2008, p. 182)

Like all aspects of education, accountability measures and high-stakes testing are complex issues, and may not be the silver bullet school reformers of the past several decades believed it to be.

This section has reviewed the literature on neoliberalism and its history, how it has influenced public schooling in the U.S., and how it has specifically impacted teachers. It is this last section that this study seeks to contribute most. It is possible that this study replicated some of the findings mentioned earlier. However, it also examined a unique case: the perceptions of teachers in an urban district in North Carolina, where state and federal policies have been especially harsh on teachers. Chapter 3 will provide a detailed account of the methodology, Chapter 4 will discuss findings, and Chapter 5 will provide a summary and recommendations for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Research Design and Rationale

This study was completed using the case study method. Case study research enables the researcher to “understand a real-world case and assume that such an understanding is likely to involve important contextual conditions pertinent to [that] case” (Yin, 2014, p. 16). The case study method was appropriate for this project because the central research question, “How do teachers perceive their profession and their students are being affected by accountability measures,” sought to provide understanding about a current, real-world phenomenon. More specifically, this project used a multiple-case study design to better understand teachers’ perceptions across different types of schools. Case study research often involves more than one case, and each “is instrumental to learning about the effects of the marking regulations but there will be important coordination between the individual studies” (Stake, 1995, pp. 3-4).

This study was comprised of four cases that were compared with each other. Two of these cases, Dorothy Merrifield High School and Lakeside High School, received an A grade on the North Carolina rating system, while the other two cases, W. Percy High School and Swann High School, received grades in the low C range. Table 1 shows the specific scores of each school.

Table 1

Official School Report Card Grades, 2016-2017 School Year

School	Grade
Dorothy Merrifield	A (94)
Lakeside	A (86)
Swann	C (57)
W. Percy	C (63)

Note. Data obtained from North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

The use of two schools in each grading category allowed for replication and comparison across the cases. Furthermore, “The logic underlying the use of multiple-case studies is the same [as multiple experiments]. Each case must be carefully selected so that it either (a) predicts similar results (*a literal replication*) or (b) predicts contrasting results but anticipatable reasons (*a theoretical replication*)” (Yin, 2014, p. 57). This study benefitted from replication within the cases, and theoretical replication across the cases as accountability measures affected teachers’ perceptions more at the two cases in the low C range.

Stake (2006) describes multiple cases as making up a quintain:

In multicasestudy research, the single case is of interest because it belongs to a particular collection of cases. The individual cases share a common characteristic or condition. The cases in the collection are somehow categorically bound together. They may be members of a group or examples of a phenomenon. Let us call this group, category, or phenomenon a “quintain.” (p. 6)

For this particular multiple case study, the quintain can be described as accountability policies in schools. The individual cases are the schools where such accountability measures were being

implemented. Each school shared the common characteristic of being subjected to these policies, which bound them together. However, schools differed in how they responded to accountability policies, which makes them unique cases, worthy of study and comparison. While schools that shared similar grades may have shared other characteristics, each school environment is a diverse and complex ecosystem, worthy of its own case. Table 2 demonstrates the demographic differences amongst the schools:

Table 2

School Demographics, 2016-2017 School Year

School	African American	American Indian	Asian	Hispanic	Multi	White
Dorothy Merrifield	12.5%	0.1%	17.8	8.2%	2.4%	58.8%
Lakeside	10.2%	0.3%	2.5%	9.0%	2.5%	75.1%
Swann	46.0%	0.4%	6.9%	42.8%	1.7%	3.1%
W. Percy	60.5%	0.3%	3.6%	16.6%	2.6%	16.4%

Note. Data obtained from North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

The two schools receiving A grades were majority White schools, while the two schools receiving C grades were majority minority, with the largest group being African American.

The selected schools also differed in teacher education and experience levels, with the high performing schools employing more teachers with advanced degrees and higher levels of experience, as seen below:

Table 3

Teacher Education and Experience

School	Fully Licensed Teachers	Teachers with Advanced Degrees	National Board Certified Teachers	Teachers with 0-3 Years Experience	Teachers with 4 or more Years Experience
Dorothy Merrifield	88.0%	35.1%	15.3%	28.0%	72.0%
Lakeside	93.8%	30.8%	14.0%	16.9%	83.1%
Swann	66.4%	17.3%	0.07%	51.2%	48.8%
W. Percy	79.8%	30.6%	0.07%	27.4%	72.6%

Note. Data obtained from North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

The two schools receiving A grades had more teachers with advanced degrees, significantly more teachers with National Board Certification, and more experience than the schools receiving C grades. Swann stood out for having a majority of its teachers having 3 years of experience or less.

Unsurprisingly, given their grades, the schools differed greatly in their performance on the EOC exam:

Table 4

School-wide Performance on the English II End of Course Exam, 2016-2017

School	Score				
	1	2	3	4	5
Dorothy Merrifield	0%	5.9%	6.2%	67.4%	17.6%
Lakeside	7.3%	11.7%	7.6%	59.9%	13.4%
Swann	40.5%	29.2%	10%	19.8%	0%
W. Percy	16.1%	24.4%	10.4%	43.0%	6.1%

Note. Levels are defined as the following: Level 1: Limited Command, Level 2: Partial Command, Level 3: Sufficient Command, Level 4: Solid Command, Level 5: Superior Command. Data obtained from North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

Schools that received A grades performed at a high level on the EOC with 85.0% of Dorothy Merrifield's students and 73.3% of Lakeside's students scoring at the 4 or 5 level. In comparison, only 19.8% and 49.9% of Swann and Percy's students scored at this level, respectively.

Furthermore, at Swann, 40.5% scored at the 1 level, and no students scored a 5.

These test scores also corresponded to the socioeconomic status (SES) of the students at each school. Merrifield and Lakeside had many more students at high SES levels, while the students at Swann and Percy were much more likely to come from low SES backgrounds.

Table 5

Student Socioeconomic Status, 2017-2018

School	Low SES Students	Medium SES Students	High SES Students	No Data Students	Total Students
Dorothy Merrifield HS	0.34%	4.52%	94.61%	0.53%	3,189
Lakeside HS	6.05%	22.37%	71.58%	0.00%	2,695
Swann HS	94.75%	4.81%	0.44%	0.00%	1,829
W. Percy HS	39.83%	41.29%	18.72%	0.16%	2,463

Note. Data was not available for the 2016-2017 school year. Pollock County used data from the United States Census and related American Community Survey. The factors to determine students' SES were English language ability, family composition, family income, home ownership, and parental education attainment.

Yin (2014) gives an example of a multiple case study similar to this one: “A common example is a study of school innovations...in which individual schools adopt some intervention. Each school might be the subject of an individual case study, but the study as a whole covers several schools and in this way uses a multiple-case design” (p. 56). For this study, the “innovation” was accountability measures, and the cases were schools.

Furthermore, “the case study is preferred when examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated” (Yin, 2014, p. 12). This aligns well with this study; teachers' perceptions are very much current events, and this study was completed at a time when accountability measures intensified over the past decade. Moreover, the researcher served as an interviewer, observer, and analyst, with no means of directly impacting the inter-workings of the cases studied.

Selection of Participants and School Sites

A successful case study must be bounded (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014); therefore, this study required definitions of what was to be studied as well as time lines for completion. The immediate topic of this case study was 10th Grade English teachers, and the reasons to select this

specific group of teachers was threefold. Prior to beginning my graduate studies, I taught high school English in an urban district for six years, including three years in 9th grade, which was formerly the year in which English students took the state-created End of Course (EOC) exam. Since writing the proposal for this project, I have returned as an English teacher to the same district where I teach 10th grade. This gives me some amount of experience in preparing students for a high-stakes test where students and teachers are evaluated base on how students score on the test. This gave me some credibility during interviews, as I have shared experiences being “down in the trenches.”

The second reason for the selection of 10th grade English teachers as the main focus of the case study is that I have an understanding of the curriculum and how it may be impacted by accountability measures. Finally, I believe that English classroom are in a unique position to be negatively affected by accountability measures. One of the main purposes of English education is to promote inquiry and develop critical thinking skills, which may also be negatively impacted by teachers coaching students to perform well on standardized tests. For example, the EOC in its current form contains 68 items based on 7 to 9 reading passages. The overwhelming majority of these questions are multiple choice, and only 3 to 4 questions require students to write. For these “short response” questions, students are given a formulaic response template to follow, and can receive full credit for writing only a few sentences. The lack of writing required on the exam may limit the amount of classroom time devoted to developing writing skills, a critical tool in developing inquiry and critical thinking. Quitadamo and Kurtz (2007) compared the critical thinking performance of two groups of biology students: one that received a laboratory writing treatment, and another that experienced a more traditional quiz based laboratory. The students who received the writing treatment showed significantly improved critical thinking skills while

the quiz based group did not. Furthermore, Marzano (1991) contends, “higher order thinking involves the restructuring of existing knowledge” (p. 518), and one of the ways this is accomplished is through composition.

The first step in selecting teachers was to secure permission to conduct research through the district’s IRB protocol. This was a lengthy process. After several months I was granted permission with several conditions: I was not to collect any documents as they could possibly be used to determine the identity of participants and schools. I was also forbidden to ask principals to provide email addresses of teachers, but was allowed to search for them on school websites. I was also required to obtain permission from principals to conduct interviews at their schools and to be present at teachers’ PLC meetings.

To determine which schools to include in the study, I completed a search of all high schools in the district through North Carolina’s Department of Public Instruction website. This provided a detailed profile of each school in the district, including the school report card, which indicated the A through F grade the school received. I then narrowed the list of possible schools by those that received A grades and those that received C grades or lower. I initially planned to select two schools that scored in the D or F range; however, I had to broaden this requirement as there were very few schools in the district that scored at the F level. I reached out to principals at six different schools via email with an attached formal letter from the district indicating that I had permission to conduct research. Since I had been previously employed in the district, I had professional relationships with four of the six principals I reached out to. Four schools accepted the request, one denied it, and another did not respond.

After receiving permission at each of the four schools, the principals introduced me to the administrators who oversaw 10th grade English. I then attended a PLC meeting at each school,

explained my project, and asked all teachers to volunteer for interviews. I then sent follow up emails with a spreadsheet to sign up for interview times. In all, 14 teachers volunteered to be interviewed for the study. All participants signed an informed consent form and all interviews were conducted at the school sites, with one exception at a nearby coffee shop. The following table provides the names and descriptions of the participants. Pseudonyms have been used to protect their identities.

Table 6

Participants

Name	School	Gender	Race	Years Experience
Anne Lord	D. Merrifield	Female	White	13
Beth Perry	D. Merrifield	Female	White	5
Leah Reishman	D. Merrifield	Female	White	5
Laura Strantz	D. Merrifield	Female	White	10
Kelly Wilson	D. Merrifield	Female	White	16
Jaqueline Henry	Lakeside	Female	African American	19
Loretta Jann	Lakeside	Female	African American	9
Dennis Smith	Lakeside	Male	African American	12
Barbara Jenkins	Swann	Female	White	0
Kathryn Layton	Swann	Female	White	16
Alice Malone	Swann	Female	White	0
Jane Munroe	Swann	Female	White	1
Avery Cox	W. Percy	Female	White	17
Claire Hutchins	W. Percy	Female	White	6

Data Collection Procedures

Since this study sought to understand teachers' perceptions, the primary method of data collection was interviews with teachers. According to Patton (2015), "Direct quotations are a basic source of raw data in qualitative inquiry, revealing respondents' depth of emotion, the ways they have organized their world, their thought about what is happening, their experiences, and

their basic perceptions” (p. 26). The research interview also “...provides an opportunity for creating and capturing insights of a depth and level of focus rarely achieved through surveys, observational studies, or the majority of causal conversations held with fellow human beings” (Forsey, 2012, p. 364). While interviews are the best method to elicit this information, it is the job of the researcher to conduct interviews in such a way that allows interviewees to accurately respond about their perceptions (Patton, 2015).

To ensure as much as possible that interviews will give the participant an opportunity to accurately communicate their perceptions, this study employed in-depth interviews, which are “guided conversation[s] or narrative[s] designed to elicit depth on a topic of interest (Namey & Trotter, 2014, p. 453). According to Patton (2015), “...the quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer” (p. 427). Furthermore, the researcher should seek to establish relationships with participants, and to be nonjudgmental, authentic, and trustworthy (Patton, 2015). Having experience as a teacher gave me credibility in this respect. Once I explained to potential subjects that I previously taught a course with an EOC exam, and was interested in their thoughts about the experience, many became visibly more relaxed. The questions (see Appendix A) asked were open-ended and clear, and follow-up questions were asked where appropriate. The interviews often took a conversational tone, and most subjects spoke openly about their perceptions.

While interviews made up the bulk of the data collected, this study also included field notes from teacher meetings and interviews. Relevant documents from teachers and meetings were initially to be collected; however, the district did not allow this to protect the identity of the teachers and schools.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis began in the early stages of research, which allowed me to examine early data to determine if there were ways to collect new, better data, expose errors that could be corrected later, and made analysis an ongoing part of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Early data analysis included contact summary sheets (Miles & Huberman, 1994) that noted important findings and brief summaries from interviews. These contact summary sheets were written soon after the interviews, and field notes were used to fill in details.

The largest part of data analysis was the transcription and coding of interviews. I audio recorded all interviews and then transcribed them. Transcription is an important step of analysis (Barbour, 2014), which is why I personally transcribed each interview. I had a generic “start list” of codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994), but these changed as the research progressed. Transcriptions were coded using NVivo 12 Pro. In the early stages of coding, the data was organized into 12 codes with numerous subcodes. There was a significant amount of overlap amongst the data in these codes, so the number of codes was narrowed to 10, with some subcodes.

Ethical Issues

A good case study researcher must maintain the highest level of ethical standards while conducting research (Yin, 2014). Informed consent was obtained for all participants in the research. Pseudonyms were used for all participants, and no students were identified in the study. Teachers without tenure were identified as an “especially vulnerable group” (Yin, 2014, p. 78), because they can be dismissed from their jobs in North Carolina without cause or justification. Therefore, I took extra precaution to make sure these teachers cannot be identified by any published material about this study. I was also careful to fully explain the informed consent form, emphasizing to the teachers that while I could not guarantee that everything they said

would remain confidential, I assured them that their real names would not be used in the study and that I would do everything I could to protect their identities.

Positionality

Here I must acknowledge that I had mixed feelings about how the 9th grade EOC influenced the curriculum while I was teaching, and I have grown more critical in the years since as I went on to teach AP English, began my Ph.D. studies, and eventually returned to teaching 10th grade English, where the EOC is currently given. In my first year teaching, my students met expected growth targets, and in my second and third years they achieved high growth. I credit the department I worked with for how my students performed; they were very experienced and supported me with guidance and mentorship throughout those years. I was praised for achieving high growth status by the principal and other teachers, as was the department, and I felt some pride for what we had accomplished. Since my return to teaching, I was told by my principal that she had found a “gold mine” when she saw my students’ test results at the end of my first semester back.

However, the tests also concern me for several reasons. When I taught 9th grade, there was no writing on the exam. This meant students went through nearly an entire year of English with no formal writing instruction, because it was not tested. The current iteration of the EOC has 3 to 4 short response questions, but at no point are students required to formulate the types of thoughts and arguments necessary to writing a meaningful essay. This concerns me as a student and teacher of English, but the message is clear: you will be judged by how your students perform on the EOC at the end of the year. As I transitioned to teaching AP Literature, I began to see how slighted my 9th grade students were for not receiving in-depth writing instruction, and I became critically aware of how these tests influence curriculum as Ph.D. student. This path has

led me to witness and understand the many negative effects of accountability policies. While I took this point of view with me as I conducted research, I did not let it prevent me from wrestling with counter opinions and suggestions to fully examine this phenomenon.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand how teachers perceive accountability measures impact their profession and their students. The following questions framed the study:

- How do teachers experience the neoliberal policies in the context of recent state legislation in North Carolina?
- How do teachers at schools labeled high performing (A) compared with teachers at schools labeled lower performing (C), within an urban county in North Carolina, perceive the effects of accountability measures on their profession?
- How do teachers at schools labeled high performing (A) compared with teachers at schools labeled lower performing (C), within an urban county in North Carolina, perceive the effects of accountability measures on their students?

The following information was primarily collected through fourteen face-to-face interviews. These interviews were conducted at the respective high schools with the exception of one interview that was conducted at a nearby coffee shop. In addition, memos were created for each interview and school visit. To get a full profile of each school, the North Carolina School Report Cards for the 2016-2017 school year were consulted. This information is published through The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

Teachers' Perceptions of Neoliberal Policies and Their Impact on Curriculum

For the purposes of this study, neoliberal policies that affect teachers are those that reflect free market values, high stakes testing, and accountability measures. The most prevalent neoliberal policy that impacts tenth grade English teachers and students in North Carolina is the

state-created End of Course Exam (EOC), which all tenth grade students must take. This exam is given at the end of the course, either in January for first semester students or June for second semester students. In all of the cases researched, schools targeted low performing students and placed them in “Foundations” courses, which meant that these students would receive an additional semester of English instruction to better prepare for the EOC. These courses used the same Common Core State Standards (CCSS) as the English courses, and their purpose was for students to receive support in areas of the curriculum where they struggled. This curriculum did not involve standardized testing, so students enrolled in Foundations of English courses would take approximately double the amount of standardized tests as their peers who only had one semester of English II.

While the content of the EOC changes from year to year, its format remains consistent. Students must read 7 to 9 passages of fiction, informational text, and poetry and then answer approximately 68 multiple-choice questions. There is also a small writing component, where students must answer prompts with “Constructed Responses” that are about a paragraph long. The exam can take up to 4 hours, and some students are allowed additional time beyond this to finish.

Perhaps the most significant impact the EOC has on 10th grade English teachers is in the development and delivery of curriculum. Broadly, the teachers at Merrifield and Lakeside, where the students were wealthier and there were fewer minorities, reported experiencing more autonomy in their curriculum and less pressure to align their curriculum to what would be tested on the EOC. The teachers at the higher performing schools were also more likely to report that their curriculum was driven by the literature they wanted to teach, while teachers at Swann and W. Percy reported having a curriculum dominated by test prep. Teachers across the cases

expressed that they could not teach as much writing as they thought was appropriate. What follows is a description of each case, and how the participants perceived their curriculum was impacted by neoliberal policies. Data analysis is organized by themes specific to each case, although in several cases the same themes emerged. For example, most teachers across the cases discussed having at least some pressure to align their curricula with the CCSS and EOC prep.

Case #1: Dorothy Merrifield High School. Dorothy Merrifield opened in 2006 and is one of the largest schools in the state with 2,966 students and 150 teachers. This school received the highest score on the North Carolina Report Cards measurement, and is predominantly White. Several themes emerged when analyzing and coding the data: Autonomy, Pressure, and Literature and Writing.

Autonomy. One of the major themes that emerged from the Dorothy Merrifield data was the autonomy teachers felt in determining their curriculum. This phenomenon was unique to this case; no other participants discussed the concept of autonomy in terms of their curriculum. One possible reason for the teachers at Merrifield to be afforded this autonomy was their years of teaching experience. The five teachers interviewed had an average of over nine years of experience, and three of them had 10 or more years of experience. Experienced teachers often have more autonomy over their subject material compared with their less experienced peers. However, even the teachers who acknowledged that they had some autonomy over their curriculum noted that they were still restrained from what they wanted to do because of the constraints of having a state test.

Beth Perry, who had five years teaching experience and a master's in English, stated the following:

...we create our tests first, and we make sure we have the standards aligned with that, and then it's so easy to teach to those standards because literature is so broad, so open to using skills to meet those standards, so it's actually been easier to teach in that way because we have so much flexibility, we're not married or tied to a specific text, we've been given so much leeway to be able to choose the novels we want to teach them, they also just happen to meet the standards that we want them to get by the end of the year.

According to Ms. Perry, the curriculum was based on the Common Core Standards, but her PLC was allowed to choose which novels and texts to use to actually teach the standards: "...we've been given so much leeway to be able to choose the novels we want to teach them, they also just happen to meet the standards we want them to get by the end of the year." This level of freedom and autonomy was seen nowhere else in the study.

Other teachers at Merrifield expressed similar sentiments. Anne Lord, who had been teaching at Merrifield for 10 years at the time of our interview, also described an unusual amount of autonomy when selecting texts for her curriculum. Like Ms. Perry, Ms. Lord noted that the administration at Merrifield was aware that the 10th grade PLC's approach to selecting texts was unconventional considering the district's recommendations:

[The administration has] known that we don't use a textbook...you know we're always told you need to plan your units around the skills, skills, skills, skills, don't plan it around text. We don't do that. And I'm not going to say we plan around the text only either, we sort of...have a mental list in our head of what are the skills we need to get across to our kids. And we have a mental list in our head of text that we think would be valuable to our students on a personal as well as a literary level. And we make them work together. So it's not just picking random texts. I don't ever go into a test databank and say find me a

passage that fits this Common Core Standard. Because in my content area, there aren't many texts that you can't pull and work with the skills no matter what, because they all overlap.

Ms. Lord's comments here indicate an opposite approach to the English II curriculum than that suggested by the district. In recent years, the English II curriculum has shifted from one based on traditional texts from world literature, such as *The Divine Comedy*, *Frankenstein*, *Things Fall Apart*, *Julius Caesar*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and others, to one that is organized by the Common Core State Standards. Since the CCSS has been implemented, this curriculum has been replaced by one that emphasizes standards instead of texts. The result is that many teachers plan their curriculum by standards, and then locate texts in their textbooks that emphasize these standards. This produces a fragmented curriculum where students primarily read short stories and informational texts instead of longer, more complex works such as novels and plays. In a large part, longer texts are no longer part of the English II curriculum because emphasis is placed on the standards, and longer texts are not needed to teach these standards.

Ms. Lord also communicated that she and her PLC had the support of administration to experiment with the curriculum and deviate from standards-based instruction:

[we had] an incredibly supportive administrator, [and it] was great because...if we went to her and said, ok, we want to do this film, and it is with a purpose, it's character analysis...we're tying it to a non-fiction thing, who would work with that, and say you know what, I know, yes, there's normally this no you can't do this, but yes, do it, because this has a valid purpose and we see what you're doing. And so [the administrator] would be willing to trust our judgment on what was good for our students, and you get administrators like that at [Merrifield].

This statement indicates that this teacher and PLC had the trust and support from their administrator to do what they felt was best for their students.

Laura Strantz, who had eight years of experience teaching at Merrifield, described how she was shifting her curriculum in a way she thought was appropriate for her students: “This year I’ve kind of strayed away from so much EOC prep throughout the course. And I’ve just tried to go with getting them to learn and like learning.” She also reflected that her years of experience allowed her to teach a more diverse curriculum: “And so to me, sometimes, I’m starting to change in my theories of [EOC prep] because again, I was raised with these tests, and I was raised with this fear of if I didn’t perform, and now as I’m older I’m starting to see that the lessons are more important than their scores.” While Ms. Lord felt that she had the support of the administration to deviate from the proscribed curriculum, Ms. Strantz indicated here that her years of teaching experience have shifted her beliefs about what is important for her students. Rather than place all emphasis on EOC results, her experiences have taught her that having an engaging curriculum that her students are interested in is more important than EOC results. It is important to note that the teachers at Merrifield had more experience than all other cases. This experience may have given them the confidence to stand up to administrators for what they professionally believed was best for these students. Less experienced teachers in the other cases did not address any kind of autonomy in the curriculum they taught.

Pressure. While the teachers at Merrifield discussed the autonomy they had in developing certain aspects of their curriculum, they also, somewhat contradictorily, discussed the pressure they felt to align their curriculum with the goals of the administration as well as the pressure to perform well on the EOC. Teachers at Merrifield indicated that they did not feel direct pressure to have the students hit certain levels on the EOC, and often reported feeling less

pressure than teachers at the lower performing schools. However, the Merrifield teachers did express that they felt direct pressure on decisions regarding curriculum. Ms. Reishman discussed confusion between what the administration's expectations were for her curriculum as compared with what she thought it should be:

So I don't always know, am I reaching the goals that [the administration] want me to reach? With my kids, I'm really not sure, so that like, that sort of impacts the way that I teach, because it's kind of like this fear of not doing the right thing, whereas like, how can you go wrong teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird*? It's an American classic. There's really great symbolism and character development, and so many cool topics to discuss with students, and we lost the opportunities for those discussions because we're so tight on time to get through the unit to common assess to move on to the new unit to common assess for EOC prep.

Contrary to the other teachers at Merrifield, Ms. Reishman expressed limitations in what she felt she could teach. She preferred to spend more time on *To Kill a Mockingbird* than to rush into common assessments that are meant to prepare for the EOC. She indicated that there was pressure to move through curriculum quickly and not to dwell too long on literary works.

Ms. Reishman was a unique participant because of her previous teaching experience. A former member of Teach for America, Ms. Reishman spent three years teaching at a Title 1 school elsewhere in the Pollock school system. She described this experience as quite different from Merrifield:

[we had] smaller text[s], and it was much more EOC driven, and nearly every single day doing different reading passages with different questions, that would be more EOC style, and in my three years [there] I taught one novel...we never had time to sit and enjoy

Shakespeare. I mean, I might show them small clips of a Shakespeare play, or clips of novels, our time was just so spent on foundational skills.

This statement describes two distinct school environments. At Merrifield, the wealthy suburban school, teachers felt they had a certain level of autonomy over the texts they chose to teach the Common Core State Standards. In contrast, Ms. Reishman noted that the students at her previous Title 1 school only read one novel in three years. Instead, the Title 1 school's students spent most of their class time on "foundational skills," which normally refer to skill and drill worksheets and EOC test prep. Ms. Reishman also expressed that being at a school like Merrifield afforded her the opportunity to study literature more in-depth, but that accountability policies were still impacting her new school environment:

...coming to a more of a suburban affluent school I do have the opportunity to really dig into literature which I think is really cool, but I notice that a lot of the same issues in education that happen in a Title 1 school are still happening at Merrifield, and it's really hard on teachers.

This statement indicates that while Ms. Reishman did experience more freedoms while teaching at Merrifield, the accountability policies that negatively impacted her experiences at her previous school had followed her to Merrifield. For example, she noted that while she was able to spend more time teaching literature at Merrifield, it was more focused on the standards than the literature itself.

When asked if she felt pressured about how her students would perform on the EOC, Ms. Reishman stated: "I think it's just the idea that you feel, I feel the pressure of the test because I want to make sure I'm doing everything I'm supposed to be doing. I'm very much a rule follower, so I want to make sure that if I'm supposed to be teaching these standards to prepare

for this test, if I don't reach that goal, then I would feel like I was letting them down." This statement indicates Ms. Reishman felt pressure at the individual level, that it was her responsibility to have her students prepared to take the EOC. She did not indicate that the administration was directly putting pressure on her to increase her scores.

Ms. Wilson also discussed pressure in our interview. She taught in another county in North Carolina for 15 years before transferring to PCS. She spent one year teaching in a Title 1 school and then transferred to Merrifield, where she was in the middle of her first year at the time of our interview. Like Ms. Reishman, Ms. Wilson expressed that there was pressure on her to teach specific Common Core Standards: "...the only two standards that you really teach are the reading, reading informational and reading literature, because that's what they're measured on." Furthermore, she lamented that because of pressure to teach only what was tested, writing was often overlooked: "[writing] is a fundamental skill...that they've got to be able to have when they go on to college. But they don't. It's the hardest thing to teach, but it's so important. But we don't teach it because we don't test it." Likewise with grammar: "...grammar's not on [the EOC] so why would you teach it? You can't." Ms. Wilson also indicated that her class would look much different without the pressure of the EOC

If I had to create my own exam, my exam would be more geared around what I knew that the skills that they need to have when they enter college. And it would be on the concepts, and the writing skills, the ability to read and the ability to discern meaning from the text. [My exam] would be on what I know they need, you know what else would be on the exposure to the great works that these kids need to be exposed to that we don't really have time you know, we had to fly through *Dante's Inferno* and *The Iliad*.

Ms. Wilson also expressed frustration that all unit tests had to be “generic assessments” that did not cover the literature read in class: “Everything we test them on is a generic assessment. To prepare them for the EOC, we read *The Kite Runner*, we don’t give them a test on *The Kite Runner*. We read *To Kill a Mockingbird*; we don’t give them a test on that. Why are we even doing this?” Ms. Wilson did not mention the freedom of choices in curriculum that the other members of this PLC detailed. She perceived the administration had strong control over what was being taught and that they had few choices about how their students were tested. However, she did mention that her students were reading complex texts, including *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Dante’s *Inferno*, and *The Iliad*.

Like Ms. Reishman, when asked about whether she was pressured by administration to increase EOC scores, Ms. Wilson stated that she felt more internal pressure than external:

Nobody has said [I need to attain certain scores] per se. I have two inclusion classes, and I have an honors class, so my scores are probably not going to be [great]. They have not put that pressure on me. I’m sure it’s there...I don’t really feel it...I mean, I put that pressure on myself, but I also know that [my students are] going to do the best they can do the best they can do...And so if I’m evaluated and deemed to be unworthy because my kids aren’t getting 4s and 5s, well, that’s the way it is.

Her statement here indicated that she wanted her students to do well, but she saw this as somewhat out of her control. She felt individually responsible for her students, but ultimately concluded that her students would do the best they could and the rest was out of her hands. Ms. Lord also expressed that she felt pressure, but tried to downplay it, especially for her students:

I mean it’s really not that big of a deal; I’m not stressing over it. Follow the rules, do your best, and don’t worry about it. And I will tell my kids that all the time. And I don’t know

if they believe that, but I think they need to hear...you do what you can do and don't stress, this is not the only thing that you're going to do in your life, this is not the only thing you're going to do this year, so it is what it is.

Her attitude towards the EOC was similar to Ms. Wilson's in that she felt she did the best she could to prepare her students for the test, that her students would do their best, and the rest was out of her hands.

While Ms. Wilson described her experience at Merrifield as having more constraints than freedoms, Ms. Strantz discussed the freedoms she experienced as mentioned above, as well as the pressures that she felt teaching an EOC course. After teaching an EOC course for six years, Ms. Strantz observed that pressure was increasing over time:

Six years later and having the test again, I'm kind of seeing some differences in my opinion of a standardized test. I've watched our curriculum evolve, we had some really great things, the kids were really learning, but it's evolved in six years to meet the needs of what they're going to see on the EOC and we're losing out on some great literature and some in-depth material because it's not what they're going to be seeing on [the EOC].

This statement indicates that Ms. Strantz's opinion of standardized tests has changed over time. As pressure to perform well on the EOC increased, she noticed negative impacts on her curriculum; in particular she indicated that she cannot teach literature as in-depth as she used to because the skills obtained from such lessons are not tested on the EOC.

Ms. Strantz also expressed frustration that pressure to perform well on the EOC was limiting her ability to teach the texts she thought appropriate:

...people don't grasp [*The Odyssey*] anymore because it's not taught, because it's not tested. And so I think because we're not teaching it, there is a lack of understanding in these texts that they're missing. They can answer who the main character is, or why they chose to do something, but they're not getting the depth of why the author is choosing to make certain choices in their writing. That's made me so sad...And those are the great lessons the kids are missing. They're missing so much. And I think because we're doing this drill and kill, the love of literature is gone.

Furthermore, she stated that while her PLC did have the autonomy to choose some texts, they were feeling pressure to drop others:

...well we teach the texts that we feel need to be taught. So we have tried to do the Shakespeare and the Dante and *The Iliad*, that's kind of being pushed out now. Because it's more of looking at just one text and really trying to look at the close reading and the literacy strategies and stuff. But we're still trying to teach texts that have even been challenged here.

Ms. Strantz's statement here reveals a shift in curriculum. Previously, English curriculum revolved around specific works that were deemed to have significant cultural value. Instead, she describes a phenomenon where the text used is unimportant, only the ability to analyze it. This is significant because it allows administrators and curriculum developers to suggest that reading longer works of literature is not important. All that matters is that students have the ability to analyze text.

Literature and Writing. Teachers within all cases spoke often about the types of literature they taught, and how this was and was not impacted by having the EOC. The majority of teachers at Merrifield described a robust program of literature they taught that was largely

disconnected from any preparation for the EOC. Ms. Perry described how this looked in her classroom:

...but we've made our curriculum very literature based, so at the beginning of my tenure here it was not EOC prep specific, but we did have that in the backs of our minds, but no we really, as a team we've done so well score wise that we...just want to teach the kids good literature. And you know, throw in a couple of test taking strategies that also happen to help them on that kind of test. So [focus on the EOC] has been decreased in our minds over the past few years.

The personnel making up Ms. Perry's PLC had remained stable over the past several years, allowing them to focus on complex literature rather than EOC prep work:

...we've evolved to where we don't really talk about [the EOC] that much. We acknowledge that it's our end goal for this particular course, but because we've, it's taken us a while to get here, but we are actually at a place where the literature matters...we can do literature that we want to do with them, things they enjoy.

The PLC at Merrifield had worked together for several years, enabling them to evolve and adapt the curriculum as they saw necessary. No other PLC in the other cases had this level of continuity, or expressed that their curriculum was evolving in a positive way. All teachers in this PLC spoke about the literature they taught in their classrooms, which included Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, Homer's *The Iliad*, and Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

Similar to Ms. Perry, Ms. Reishman expressed that the focus in her classroom was on teaching literature, not preparing for an EOC, although it could not be completely ignored: "...we start off the year talking about constructed response writing and test taking techniques,

and we utilize that throughout the year, but it's secondary to the literature we're teaching." She further elaborated on this theme:

...in the curriculum we're doing now, we can say that students walk away reading a Shakespeare play...*To Kill a Mockingbird*...*The Kite Runner*, and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. So as a teacher I feel like that matters, that our students leave our class reading really good literature, and that's what we teach is literature, not EOC prep.

The teachers at Merrifield were very clear that the focus of their classes was literature, not EOC prep, although that could not be ignored. No other teachers in any other case expressed the importance of literature this strongly. In contrast, teachers at Swann and W. Percy communicated the opposite: that EOC prep work was deemed more important than literature.

However, several teachers at Merrifield stated that while literature was heavily emphasized, writing was sometimes neglected. Ms. Wilson expressed frustration about this point: "writing is fundamental, it's a fundamental skill that they've got to have when they go to college, but they don't. It's the hardest thing to teach, but it's so important. But we don't teach it because we don't test it." Ms. Wilson was incorrect about this; writing is a component of the EOC. However, the type of writing tested is limited; students typically have four Constructed Response questions that require a response of roughly a paragraph. Ms. Wilson likely meant that she was unable to spend time on longer writing projects like literary analysis papers.

Case #2: Lakeside High School. Like Merrifield, Lakeside was a majority White, affluent, suburban school that scored an A on the North Carolina School Report Card. Lakeside is a relatively new building, having opened its doors in 2010. The school is a single building, but massive, including 99 classrooms for its 2,200 students. At the time interviews were conducted, overcrowding was an issue, and 10 trailers had been added to the back of the campus to handle

the overflow. The school still felt new; hallways and classrooms were clean, and the surrounding neighborhood was inundated with newly built houses and new construction.

Autonomy. Teachers at Lakeside had more limited autonomy when compared to Merrifield, but expressed that they maintained some freedoms in their curriculum. Dennis Smith had 12 years teaching experience at the time of our interview, but much of this experience was at the elementary and middle school levels; this was only his second year teaching at the high school level. Rather than describing his curriculum as primarily focused on literature like the teachers at Merrifield, Mr. Smith described a hybrid focus on the CCSS and literature:

...ideally what I do is take the standards, the literature, and see where I can mesh the two. I guess you would try to plan backwards with your assessment, and then see what skills are going to be assessed and then use that to plan in your literature and match that with the standards, but it doesn't always work that way.

Mr. Smith's statement here indicated that his planning began with the test the students would take at the end of the unit. The standards on the test would then dictate what skills were taught in class, and those skills would be taught using literature chosen by Mr. Smith. This still allowed for autonomy, but the curriculum Mr. Smith and his colleagues taught at Lakeside was more dictated by the CCSS than the teachers at Merrifield. This process was echoed by Ms. Jann. She stated: "...we just finished doing poetry. So we did a poetry [common assessment] which meant we had to do a poetry unit, which for me I'm still in the middle of [a research project] and I was at the time attempting to introduce them to this novel." Ms. Jann expressed here that because of a common assessment, which was aligned with the CCSS and designed to prepare students for taking the EOC, she had to alter her curriculum.

While Mr. Smith and Ms. Jann discussed limited autonomy, their colleague, Jacqueline Henry, spoke the most about the autonomy she felt in choosing her curriculum. She had 19 years of experience teaching 10th Grade English at the time of this interview, which may have contributed to her perceptions of autonomy. Ms. Henry's teaching experience allowed her to focus on what she perceived was best for her students rather than focusing on the EOC:

I don't even know if it's experience or it's I'm going to do what I need to do...this is what my kids need, this is what I'm going to do, and when you have newer teachers they have not gotten to that point yet. They are more I need to make sure I'm doing what they're asking me to do. And I do what they're asking me to do, [but] in addition to that I say ok, this is what my kids need, this is what I'm going to do.

Ms. Henry also stated that she avoided teaching test prep, and rather focused on the skills she perceived her students needed to learn:

...I never did focus on the test...I just taught the skills...I didn't have to focus on [the test], here's the kind of questions that we're asking on the test...we talked about conflict in a way that they would be able to discuss it in any situation without me having to say, these are the types of question stems that you look for conflict. And I think that's what [the administration is] trying to move us towards, where we actually teach the kids for conflict, these are the question stems you will see, and this is how you answer that question, and I'm like, I will never do that.

Ms. Henry expressed confidence that her teaching ability would give her students all they needed to perform well on the EOC, and that she did not need to teach test prep. She mentioned that she refused to teach question stems, which is the practice of teaching students how questions are

structured on the test in order to boost their scores. Instead, she communicated that students who received her instruction would have the necessary skills to answer any questions.

Pressure. Like the teachers at Merrifield, the teachers I interviewed at Lakeside discussed the pressure they felt as a result of having the EOC and how it impacted their curriculum. Mr. Smith indicated that the CCSS was something that had to be somewhat forced into his curriculum:

For example, we're reading *Things Fall Apart*, and there's symbolism, and inferences, and conflict throughout. But maybe that day on the chapter we're focusing on, maybe it's more irony, or maybe there's some more figurative language that's being discussed in the chapter, but I feel pressured to go back to [a specific standard], because I know that on Friday we have to do this common formal assessment [on that standard].

Because of the Common Core State Standards and the increased pressure to test students, Mr. Smith felt it was necessary to teach aspects of the novel that did not necessarily match up with his professional opinion. Instead, pressure to teach the CCSS led Mr. Smith to teach literary terms that may not have been a good match for that particular chapter.

Mr. Smith also communicated that his curriculum would look different without the pressure of having the EOC:

We'd have a lot more projects, things where students get to display their creativity...and they can be so creative. Yet I don't think we can do that, we don't have the time, we have to go through this multiple choice test, we have to prepare for the EOC, and so I think my classroom would have a lot more projects and Socratic seminars and debates and things.

Again, the pressure created by the EOC limited what Mr. Smith felt he was able to do in his own classroom, removing his professional autonomy.

Ms. Jann echoed Mr. Smith's perceptions that the CCSS could be limiting in the classroom:

I think there's a disconnect, so let's say we're doing a unit and it's *Things Fall Apart*.

We're talking about the different [literary] skills, we might be talking about characterization, symbolism, and things of that nature, but because of the way we prepare for the EOC, we have these skills, these little multi-tiers of mini assessments that we take, and that might not be exclusive to what we're working on in that moment.

Like Mr. Smith, Ms. Jann indicated here that the common assessments her PLC administered forced her to teach literary skills that may not have been appropriate for the literature she was teaching at the time. She also stressed that there was pressure to include so many different parts of curriculum that she was forced to make choices and spread her coverage of material thin:

"...at one point I have to be focused on research, at another point I have to be focused on poetry, and at another point I have to focus on a novel. So I have to kind of push one to the back burner, and since we're [teaching poetry as a PLC], let's focus on poetry."

Ms. Jann further perceived that she had to make difficult choices given the pressure she felt from administration, even while being respectful of their intentions, and that these choices often prevented students from receiving the traditional world literature curriculum. Moreover, due to lack of resources, sometimes entire tests were without any world literature:

...we've not gone into novels as much as I would have liked, so for me, feeling like [this is world literature], one of the reasons that I love teaching this curriculum is because this is the only time these students will have any exposure to cultures outside of their own or what they see in their community...so I believe it's my job to give them that, but then the

text and the test don't always lend themselves with the resources we have. There've been so many times where we've tested and not a single text is world [literature].

Ms. Jann also communicated that the pressure of the EOC created limitations for her as a classroom teacher:

[I want] to teach differentiated instruction, multiple intelligences, but if my focus has to be on the EOC, I don't hit the multiple intelligences nearly as much as I would, so I end up cutting things that I think would be so valuable and so authentic, and...maybe even make them love the class a bit more.

This pressure prevented Ms. Jann from using teaching techniques she thought were appropriate as a professional.

One of the arguments put forward when accountability policies are enacted is that they will prepare students for the 21st century skills they will need when they enter the workforce. Ironically, when asked how she would like her classroom to be different, Ms. Jann indicated that if she did not have the pressure of the EOC, she would be able to teach more of these skills:

I would connect them and so some things with actual 21st century skill building, like how does this look when you're using this skill in the work world? But then also, I would spend more time on...going deeper in the text and trying to get all the kids to go there, but even those kids who are weaker in that area, they could still feel empowered.

In the case of Ms. Jann, the very policies designed to implement 21st century skills were having the opposite effect.

Literature and Writing. The teachers at Lakeside HS described a less robust literature program than that of Merrifield. However, it still included several major works of world literature and was more in depth than the literature taught at Swann and W. Percy. Teachers at

Lakeside also described a heavier impact from the EOC that limited the literature they could teach. At this school, all English teachers taught the following texts: Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, Rand's *Anthem*, and Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. However, Ms. Henry noted that the goals of her curriculum had shifted over the recent years: "I think it's more focused, I think now it's more focused on teaching to the test." She also lamented that the test had become the most important part of her class: "...we quiz like almost weekly, and then there's like a test every two weeks. And to me it makes me feel like we're focused on the test, and I just don't think that's the most important thing."

Mr. Smith explained that while he was able to plan creative lessons based on literature, he often felt that he was doing something wrong because it was not focused enough on the EOC:

I like to be able to sit down and read the literature and then really just have a pen and pad and brainstorm...obviously it has to align with the standards, but what can I do...to keep [my students] engaged? And so I want to do some things like for example...there's a folk tale section in *Things Fall Apart* where [the main character] tells a folktale to kind of reiterate his point, and with African culture, folktales are huge...so we did a folktale skit where the students...did a reenactment of a popular folktale. And we had a lot of fun with it, but I felt the pressure to kind of get done with it pretty quickly, so that we could go back...to doing things that were directly aligned with the assessments that we take...I feel like they understand more about African culture, which in world literature that's a big point...they had a good time creating it, they applied it to the text, and yet I felt...maybe I'm doing something wrong here because I need to be focusing on [common] assessments.

Here Mr. Smith described a fun, engaging lesson that required his students to compare their own cultures to the world literature they were reading in class. However, although Mr. Smith said that the lesson was aligned with the standards, he was concerned about spending too much time on an engaging lesson because it was not directly connected to the formal common assessments created by his PLC.

Case #3: Swann High School. Compared to Merrifield and Lakeside, Swann High School was much older, having been built in the 1960s. Its architecture was more like that of a college campus, with multiple separate buildings connected by covered walkways. The school looked dated, but the building where I conducted interviews was well maintained and had several interior courtyards, although they appeared to be little used. The major themes that emerged from interviews in this case were Pressure, and Literature and Writing. The teachers at Swann did not discuss autonomy; in fact, these teachers expressed that planning was often completed by a coach and then handed down to them. Like Merrifield and Lakeside, the teachers here expressed that they felt pressure to align their curriculum to the EOC. However, the pressure described by the teachers here was more intense, and the teachers with less experience often suggested that they appreciated the structure that having the EOC gave them.

Pressure. Compared to Merrifield and Lakeside, teachers at Swann reported that the pressure they felt from the EOC directly led them to incorporate test preparation as a major component of their curriculum. While teachers at Merrifield and Lakeside stated that they often resisted incorporating test prep, teachers at Swann embraced it. My first interview at this school was with Kathryn Layton, who was by far more experienced than her colleagues; at the time of our interview she had taught 9th and 10th grade English for over 15 years. Her role at Swann was unique; she functioned both as a teacher and as a coach to her less experienced peers. Her role as

a coach was an official one, specifically designed to improve testing outcomes. One of the stated objectives for this role was “setting high goals for instruction, including expectations for interim assessments, targeted student progress during the year, and higher-order thinking goals.” Ms. Layton stated that her curriculum was tightly intertwined with the EOC, but unlike teachers at Merrifield and Lakeside, saw this in a positive light: “I guess everything we do is connected to the EOC, which is connected to the standards...I think that’s a good thing. There’s not time to, you know, make a lot of posters.” This statement reflects that Ms. Layton felt that having the EOC and planning her classes based on the CCSS lent her role legitimacy. She saw projects related to work outside the EOC as superfluous; however, she also made statements that demonstrated she felt some conflict over the EOC:

[The EOC] impacts the classroom in every way, and I don’t know if that’s good or bad. Like everything we do, we always ask, will it help them on the EOC? And the EOC is really hard, and all of our students, 90% of them, read multiple years below grade level. So when some people say I don’t want to teach to the tests...you can’t really do that in 10th grade English, but what our goal is to make [the students] better readers, which I feel like that’s a great goal.

Ms. Layton’s description of the impact of the EOC was much greater than the teachers at Merrifield and Lakeside. Instead of being in the background, she explained that the EOC was pervasive in her classroom. She further explained the pressure she felt and the competitive instincts it brought out:

...the impact [of the EOC] mostly is the pressure, and the students must feel that at some point. Sometimes I feel that’s kind of good, you don’t want it to be a lot of pressure, but for the teacher, it’s a lot of pressure...Now to me the pressure is magnified by a gazillion

percent. As a regular classroom teacher I always felt pressure, just individual pressure, like you don't ever want to be the one who has the lowest growth, or the kids aren't passing, and so it's kind of a pride thing and maybe that's part of the competitive, or you know, you just want to be a good employee, right? You want to do well for your students...it's more of a pressure kind of like well am I going to be able to keep my job kind of pressure. [The principal] is very supportive, but I feel like there's always a but. Like if I can't make the numbers go up, why would she spend all that extra money just to keep me around? So that's a lot of pressure.

Ms. Layton here expressed concern that her position could be eliminated if she did not raise her students' test scores. This was because her position at Swann was uniquely funded; the principal had discretion to eliminate her position and allocate those resources elsewhere if she did not improve her students' test scores. Her primary goal as a teacher and coach were explicit: raise students' test scores. She also described how she felt more pressure than teachers who did not have a state test:

...it doesn't seem fair that the school is judged solely on those [3 EOC tests]...And then I feel like other teachers don't have that pressure, and I feel like they, one, don't even know what the [Common Core] standards are, and just teach whatever they want and I think the growth shows that they're not doing a very good job of it...I feel like every teacher should have that accountability, and maybe if we all had the accountability it would kind of be evened out pressure.

This teacher felt that while she was under pressure to prepare her students for the state test, other teachers were not accountable in the same way because their students were not tested. The pressure was causing her to resent her colleagues for not having a high stakes test.

Ms. Layton's younger colleagues also stated that pressure to raise students' test scores had a direct impact on the curriculum they taught. Alice Malone, a first year teacher in the Teach for America program, explained that preparing for the EOC was the dominant aspect of the curriculum she taught. EOC prep was deeply ingrained in her PLC's planning process:

When we have PLC [meetings] we talk about which aspect of test taking strategies we want to focus on, way back in the beginning of the year we talked about how to annotate in a way that's going to help you answer the questions correctly, so I think [the EOC] is usually at the forefront...Even when we're talking about [literature], today we did a quiz, and the quiz we created was 4 questions, all EOC question stems...I think [having the EOC] helps us sometimes think about the standards, and think about how we can...scaffold the material so kids are still reaching the standards, and still able to complete those EOC based questions. So yeah, we definitely, the EOC is kind of in the foreground when we're planning.

This is nearly opposite the approach taken by the teachers at Merrifield, where they emphasized that curriculum was driven by the literature they wanted to teach. Instead, Ms. Malone describes a planning process that is fully driven by test preparation. As an English major, this was not how Ms. Malone thought her class should be structured:

When I envision English class it's like all reading and writing, and as we're reading we're not answering multiple choice questions, we're writing. And it's still based on the standards, but instead of choosing from A-D, we're putting it in our own words. And I think writing goes a long way towards developing your critical thinking skills...I think being able to express yourself in writing is so key. And that's something we never focus on.

Her ideal vision of her English classes was far from her reality. Ms. Malone wanted her classroom to look like the description above, but was being pressured to adopt a curriculum driven by test prep. She not only found test prep to be problematic, but also the EOC itself: “I wouldn’t have multiple choice tests for English. I just don’t think it’s the most effective, especially because I studied English in college, I didn’t study education.” Additionally, she communicated that without the EOC she would be “...focused more on critical thinking [and] writing skills, because I have a background in media, I would like to talk about media bias a lot, and the ways that we perceive propaganda, and what’s fact.”

However, Ms. Malone was also conflicted about the role the EOC had on her planning process. She stated that she found having the EOC was beneficial in some ways: “I think sometimes [having the EOC] is useful, especially for backwards planning, like if our goal is to have students understand how figurative language impacts tone...so backwards planning....So I think some of it is helpful in figuring out how the students need to be thinking about the text.” She then described the EOC’s impact in negative terms: “...but then sometimes [the EOC] is an obstacle...I want to engage them in discussion, or do some kinds of activities, but we have to focus on these test taking strategies...so it also kind of stifles the momentum.”

Barbara Jenkins, another first year teacher at Swann, echoed Ms. Malone’s thoughts that there were some positives associated with the EOC. She perceived that having curriculum tied to a standardized test kept her class focused. However, she also mentioned that she would like to try different types of assessments. After her class read *The House on Mango Street*, she said she “would have liked” to do a *House on Mango Street* test, but that her limited time did not allow for it. Pressure to prepare her students for the EOC led her and the other members of her PLC to

use software systems to track the data and progress of her students, and she attempted to use that data to make engaging lesson plans:

So we use [a software system] to go through and look at all our data [on common assessments]...what were the most missed questions, and the following weeks...re-loop in class...and let [the students] see the data too. Here's what a lot of us are missing, so we have this in common, we're all kind of struggling, so what can we do to attack that skill? And then we try to...build that into engaging lessons as well.

Unlike the teachers at Merrifield and Lakeside, who tried to emphasize the importance of literature over test prep, Ms. Jenkins described a different curriculum where she attempted to use test data to create engaging lessons.

However, Ms. Jenkins did explain that she used supplemental reading to make preparing for the EOC more palatable for her students:

In our lesson planning we really do look at the EOC question stems, but I think we do a good job of tying it into engaging material. So we read *The House on Mango Street* first quarter, and that really lent itself to constructed responses....I mean that was good because it was an engaging text, and it's a low [grade] level, so we can incorporate those things that will hook them first, and then really condition them to attain those skills over time.

While Ms. Jenkins described incorporating literature in her classroom, it was done in a way that was linked with test prep. Literature was not read for its own sake, but for the sake of preparing students to write short response answers like they would see on the EOC.

Like Ms. Malone, Ms. Jenkins also explained that she saw having the EOC and CCSS was a point of focus for her teaching; when asked if the EOC impacted the quality of her teaching in any way, she said the following:

I think that it does. It really forces me to dive into that material and review it, and you know, make my annotations to complete it as if I was the student to try to see where they're coming from...So I think it forces me to be reflective in ways that I might not be if I was just designing my own materials for literature, because I think I get caught up in the really fun side of that...literary discussions, and author's craft, and that's all really great, but I think the structure of it, I think it helps me.

Having the EOC provided her with structure she felt she needed in the classroom to not get caught up in the fun side of teaching literature. This was perhaps due to the pressure the administration pushed to raise test scores. She described an incident at a full staff meeting at the beginning of the year where the principal asked the PLC lead and coach, Ms. Johnson, "why didn't y'all reach your goals?" in front of the entire staff. Ms. Jenkins noted that this put a lot of pressure on her team to increase their scores.

Jane Munroe, a first year teacher who began her career as a journalist, shared similar thoughts on the pressure the EOC created and the resulting test prep curriculum. She described how much of her planning was done for her based on CCSS and EOC prep:

I have a supervisor [Ms. Layton], and her job is to map out what standards first, which ones we're going to prioritize, and then what it looks like to teach those standards effectively in the classroom, and we also take a look at assessments...what passages, what questions, what question stems, and making sure that we're teaching them not only

the concept and the standard but how to apply question stems to the knowledge that they know.

Ms. Munroe explicitly explained that her curriculum was planned for her by Ms. Layton, and that curriculum was based on the CCSS most likely to appear on the EOC, and then applying the standards to question stems. This refers to teaching students what EOC questions look like and then overtly preparing them to answer questions phrased in specific ways. There is no mention of literature. Ms. Munroe also stated that her planning began with the standards, and then the members of her PLC searched for texts that would match up with those standards. This was the opposite of the approach at Merrifield and Lakeside, where literature played a more central role in planning.

Unlike Ms. Malone and Ms. Jenkins, Ms. Munroe found the structure placed on her classroom as a result of having the EOC to be “more crippling than useful,” because it made the curriculum less based in critical thinking. She also expressed concern that it narrowed her curriculum to only teaching certain standards that her team thought would be tested. Moreover, she found that selecting passages from the textbook based on what standards they were teaching produced “boring” classroom material that her students did not care about.

Literature and Writing. The teachers at Swann described a curriculum that involved much less literature and writing than Merrifield and Lakeside. Teachers in this case reported reading the following texts: Alexie’s *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian*, Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*, and *Things Fall Apart*. The first novel listed is intended for fifth grade readers. Ms. Munroe was the most critical of how literature was represented in her classroom and noted that they did not read a single novel: “I get the question a lot, what are y’all reading in class? What novels are you reading in class? Well, we don’t get to read novels in

class, so.” She also indicated that most of the literature covered in her class was EOC prep based: “...yesterday we were doing the assessment practice, and one of the sections was about ‘Spiders Up Close.’ And it’s about the different kind of spiders, and why they’re weird and creepy. And the other one is ‘How to Write a Letter.’ And it’s like, these kids don’t care.”

In contrast to Ms. Munroe’s assessment, Ms. Layton described teaching some literature in her classroom as she taught *The House on Mango Street*:

It’s only like 100 pages, and it’s little vignettes. I divided it into like five groups, based on the theme of the vignette. So our focus for teaching it was on theme...there’s short little pieces, [and] the students relate to it so well, because it’s you know, a girl growing up in poverty, and she wants to make her life better, and the [grade level] is really low, but what we had them do with it I feel like was a lot higher, and harder than what they’re used to.

However, all teachers at Swann described using literature in terms of preparing for the EOC. Teachers often described teaching “passages” rather than novels, poetry, or plays. When novels did come in up interviews, it was again tied to test prep, as Ms. Layton noted that the culminating assignment for *The House on Mango Street* was a constructed response test, designed to look like the short answer questions on the EOC. Ms. Jenkins stated that she also taught her students a short novel, and that “...for each part we have maybe...three to six EOC question stems that we look at as our end goal, like what do we want students to be able to answer by the end of this part, or the end of this test?” These teachers mentioned literature, but only in terms related to how they used it for EOC prep. There was no mention of class discussion or any in-depth writing.

Ms. Malone expressed that she would like to spend more time teaching literature in-depth, but that she was often derailed by EOC prep. In her classes, she was teaching *Things Fall Apart*, a standard of world literature, and *The Absolute True Diary of a Part Time Indian*. However, after teaching the introduction, she was interrupted by a mandatory test that took several days of class time. She stated that it was frustrating that "...we've been reading this book for three weeks and we're still on page 30." Furthermore, she said, "...I think that [mandatory tests] make the reading feel just kind of slow and burdensome, because of the pacing of how we have to keep pausing to take a test and talk about something else, and so I think it makes the reading kind of boring, when we finally get back to it." When Ms. Malone attempted to teach literature at a more in-depth level, she was stymied by mandatory assessments she had to give as a form of EOC prep.

Case #4: W. Percy High School. Similar to Swann, Percy was built in the 1960s and had multiple classroom buildings connected by covered walkways. The school had a long tradition of academic and athletic successes, but had been in decline for several years when I visited. Percy's demographics had shifted after the district changed where its boundary lines were drawn, and two new high schools opened up in that part of the district in response to large population growth. In the 2006-2007 school year, the school was 57.7% White and 42.3% minority, with 3,140 students. In the 2016-2017 school year, the school was 16.4% White and 83.6% minority, and the total population was down by almost 1,000 students. Like the other cases, teachers at Percy stated that they felt pressure to align their curriculum with the EOC. However, like Swann, teachers at Percy described pressure that was more significant than teachers at Merrifield and Lakeside. Teachers at Percy also discussed autonomy less than their peers at the higher performing schools.

Pressure. Both teachers I interviewed at Percy described intense pressure for their students to perform well on the EOC. Avery Cox, a teacher with 17 years of experience, explained that being a veteran in the classroom afforded her some freedom in her curriculum: “[The administration] sort of leaves me alone, I’ve proven I have growth, the kids have growth, I’ve proven my worth...I’m pretty consistent.” However, she also explained that test data played a large part in her curriculum planning “We meet in our PLC two, sometimes three times a week, [and] one of those meetings is nothing but data.” This data was then used to determine what curriculum would be taught. Students’ test data was also displayed in the classroom anonymously, so students could track their progress on testing and compare their performance with their peers. This practice was unique to this case, as was having up to three mandatory meetings per week; no other teachers mentioned meeting this much to discuss testing data and curriculum planning. While the stated goal of posting students’ test scores was to promote competition and reward hard work, it also had the negative impact of reminding low performers about their failures daily.

Ms. Cox also noted that the pressure to align her curriculum with the EOC and the CCSS conflicted with what she thought her classroom should look like. Focusing on the EOC and the CCSS led Ms. Cox’s PLC to break down the Common Core Standards into curriculum units. She saw this as problematic, and stated that teaching English skills in isolation, or removed from literature, was ineffective: “...it’s so out of context, what I keep sort of trying to wrap my head around is can I really test a kid on just theme and tone? I don’t focus like that in the classroom.” She also found the EOC to be a limiting factor on her teaching: “I just really feel like the EOC stifles...I wish that I knew at the end [of the school year] I was going to give my own test based on what I had taught the kids, instead of having to guess what might be on the test.” However,

Ms. Cox was not entirely dismissive of the EOC: “I think that in theory the EOC now for English II has merit, but I don’t think that the ways it’s handled and the way it’s implemented is right. I would like to see less focus on reading literature and answering questions, and more on reading literature and writing about it.” She also compared the emphasis on testing to a business model that was not in her students’ best interests:

I’m going to call it a business model, where it’s all about the data and the sales and it’s less about the individual student. And I don’t like what it’s doing to the kids, and I especially don’t like what it’s doing to my colleagues. The pressure is immense, and it’s just changed, [there’s] no more thinking and creating, it’s about doing, just doing doing doing, and proving, which makes me sad.

Here Ms. Cox verbalized the dominant trend in education over the last several decades. She perceived that the neoliberal model of schooling, one that holds free market and corporate values above all others, had infiltrated her classroom, and it went against her instincts as an experienced professional.

Claire Hutchins, a teacher at Percy with seven years of experience, similarly noted that pressure to produce test scores had a negative impact on her curriculum:

So it seems like we end up teaching to the test...Because you may want to teach them this really great story, and be able to sit down and discuss it, but yet you have to give them all these CFAs leading up to the end of the year, and [you] have a certain number of practice sessions, so they’re ready to take this EOC that lasts for four hours...And so it just seems like everything in the classroom is geared towards that EOC...the tests that we give them are very much like the EOC.

Ms. Hutchins also indicated that policies driving standards, testing, and accountability, steeped in the neoliberal model of education, were actually reducing choice and freedom in her profession:

“...it seems like it’s so streamlined...it feels like a robot, everybody has to do the same things.”

This is ironic given that neoliberal policies are often promoted using the language of individual choice and freedom. She described this lack of autonomy in detail:

So what happens is in the PLC we have a calendar, right? So on this day everyone is going to give the CFA. We give them a CFA at certain increments during the quarter, and so we literally sit down and come up with the question and the answer choices. What are they going to read? What questions are going to be asked? And it has to be like the EOC, you know what I mean? So, and everyone gives the same test to the students.

Ms. Hutchins was critical about this lack of freedom and wanted the ability to create her own assessments for her students. In her opinion, the students needed opportunities to have creative outlets like writing stories, or assessments that were based on presentations. She stated that this pressure to constantly focus on preparing students for the EOC “literally sucks the fun out of teaching.”

Like the teachers at Swann, Ms. Hutchins described how pressure to increase students’ test scores created a classroom environment dominated by test prep and test taking. When I asked her if test prep was part of her daily curriculum, she replied that it was “in some way, shape, or form, usually.” She then outlined what a typical week looked like when her class took a mandatory common assessment:

...let’s say the CFA was on a Wednesday. That week, it’s nothing but...so it’s just too much a lot of times, because like Monday, prepping them, Tuesday we’re reviewing to get ready for, Wednesday they take it, Thursday we talk about the questions that were

asked and what we should have said, and then Friday they try to do corrections, or retakes or whatever. So it's literally all week.

When asked directly about how she felt about the EOC, Ms. Hutchins had this to say:

I hate the EOC...my kids freak out over it. Because it's so long, and it's, there's so many words, and my students, even the simplest thing they struggle with, and so it typically takes them longer to take a test, especially in English II. And so when they sit down to take that EOC, I mean, what takes everybody else four hours could easily take them six. And it just blows my mind that they expect students to sit there for six hours and take a test.

This was in response to frustration that her English as a Second Language students were forced to take the same exam as all other students and were held to the same standards.

Similar to Swann, teachers at Percy were more likely to talk about pressure coming from external forces like the administration. Ms. Hutchins explained: "...a lot of the pressure comes from, it doesn't come from the kids, it doesn't come from the parents, it comes from administration and the district. Because our school grade, that the public sees, is based on that test, or those tests I should say." Ms. Cox noted that the administration was fearful of low test scores because of prior performance: "I think it's just administration is nervous. You know, we were on the bottom of the trash heap [three years ago]...we hit rock bottom, the whole school our scores were terrible." She also described how she thought the pressure from administration led to teacher turnover: "...we've got a lot of pressure, we can't keep teachers here because of all the pressure, so we have a constant turnover in the last, I've been here seven years...and in the last four we've probably lost half our teachers every year. It's been a huge turnover every year."

Literature and Writing. Compared with teachers in other cases, teachers at Percy were not as specific as to the literature they taught. However, Ms. Hutchins noted the limitations the EOC placed on her classroom in regards to literature:

So it seems like we end up teaching to the test, is a lot of times what happens. Because you may want to teach this really great story, and be able to sit down and discuss it, but yet you have to give them all these CFAs leading up to the end of the year, and have a certain amount of practice sessions, so they're ready to take this EOC that lasts for four hours.

Similar to Mr. Smith at Lakeside, Ms. Cox worried about getting in trouble for teaching advanced skills:

...we do so many seminars, and we do all kinds of discussion, and they're digging in to, in fact they have a passage tonight that they are digging in to just really look at the diction...I can't do that with my [lower level students], I mean I do it to a point...But if I were to give that to my [lower level students] and then admin would walk in, I would have to prove immediately how that's going to apply directly to the EOC. How is this getting them ready?

Ms. Cox described a reluctance to teach advanced skills with her lower level classes, because it did not align with what her students would be expected to do on the EOC.

Overview. Teachers in each of these schools described different methods of the planning and delivering of curriculum. At Merrifield especially, teachers were devoted to making sure that literature was at the center of their curriculum, and test prep was seen as something necessary, although less important than teaching literature. While this was less so for the teachers at

Lakeside, they maintained some autonomy over what they taught and were free to use different novels, plays, and informational fiction to teach the standards.

However, Swann and Percy, the importance of literature was replaced by the importance of test prep. All teachers in these cases mentioned that test prep was a central aspect of their planning and delivery of curriculum. When teachers in these cases mentioned literature, it was often directly tied to test prep. These teachers also expressed having less autonomy; at Percy, teachers sometimes met three days out of the week to discuss test data, while teachers at Swann were given mandatory lesson plans focused on test prep.

Teachers at Merrifield and Lakeside also reported the pressure they felt from the EOC in different ways than the teachers at Swann and Percy. All teachers across the cases described feeling pressure to perform well on the EOC, but the teachers at the higher performing schools often said that it did not impact their curriculum or the way that they taught, aside from some activities they did towards the end of the semester. Teachers at the lower performing schools expressed the opposite, that they felt direct pressure to increase their students' test scores, and that their instruction reflected that. How these teachers described the effects of accountability measures on the way they taught revealed a two-tier English curriculum. Higher performing schools had a curriculum rich in world literature, while lower performing schools had a curriculum rich in test prep.

How Teachers Perceive the Effects of Accountability Measures on their Students

This next section will examine how teachers perceived the EOC impacted their students. Unfortunately, this question yielded the least amount of discussion from the participants. Several teachers expressed that accountability measures had impacted the classroom in such a way that was fundamentally different from their own classroom experience. Also, several teachers in the

study were in their first year, and so had no experience actually administering the EOC to students. However, two themes emerged to describe how teachers perceived their students were impacted by accountability policies: ambivalence and frustration.

Ambivalence

Teachers at Merrifield and Lakeside high schools reported that their students were somewhat ambivalent about taking the EOC, that it did not make a large impact on their educational lives. Mr. Smith explained, “I mean I think they want to do well on [the EOC]. But I don’t think it’s a constant focus, it’s a focal point of theirs, leading up to, they think about it on that day, or maybe a couple of days before...outside of that I don’t think they think about it much.” Ms. Reishman echoed this sentiment: “I don’t think they necessarily care how they do on that test. They just want to do well enough that they don’t fail it, or an A student wants to do a good job so they can keep their A. Whereas if they’re a C student they just want to do OK, because the curve will probably bring them up to an A, B, or C.

Despite, or perhaps because of the emphasis placed on the EOC at Percy HS, Ms. Hutchins explained that many of her students became overwhelmed and at times did not take testing seriously:

...the only thing [the administration] see really mattering or being important I guess you could say is the test, is what it seems like. And it’s almost like [the students] roll their eyes when I say we’re going to be taking a CFA, they’re like, again? You put it all together and the kids get tested to death, and so when you throw in the EOCs and all of that, it’s a lot. And especially for my kids, because it takes them longer.

She also witnessed kids simply bubbling in answers and going to sleep: “...because when the kid is done in 30 minutes, you know they didn’t read anything. And so it gets frustrating, because

then it makes the teachers look like we haven't done our job when we have. But there's so much weight on that one test, and when the kids don't take it seriously, then, what can you do?"

Frustration

Several teachers explained that their students felt frustrated by having to take the EOC.

Ms. Perry at Merrifield described why her students found the experience to be frustrating:

Because they're just sitting in one isolated moment, and they're answering questions about a text they've never seen before...there's no context at all, and I think in order to be a successful English student you have to know how to support what you're talking about, you need to be able to pull a text apart, not just fiction, but non-fiction. Not every student is going to go to college, not every student is if they do go to college is going to be an English major, so...it just needs to be more relevant, there needs to be more context for them.

She also stated that her students had an extreme dislike of the test, and all standardized testing:

"They hate it. They have actually said that. They think it's ridiculous, they will have something comparable in every class that they have here, either an NC Final or EOC." Ms. Perry

communicated that her students were especially frustrated by the multiple choice style questions:

The multiple choice, really, it's frustrating because they feel in their reflections to me they say that they feel that the people who give the test or who write the test just want to trip them up. They want it to be difficult, and insurmountable, as a test. And that makes me feel really upset for them. I feel really bad for them.

The theme of frustration was not limited to high-performing schools. Ms. Cox at Percy HS

communicated her students' frustration:

...so we're then expected to take these kids that come in...reading at the 3rd or 4th grade level. And we have to get them to an 1100 reading level? In two years? And teach them all the other things that go with that, and they can't write, they have no grammar skills, it's really hard. And it's frustrating for the children. It makes them feel inadequate, you get a lot of behavioral problems because of that, their self-esteem, when they walk into a classroom, can plummet.

Summary

The data collected to answer the central research questions of this study were collected through 14 interviews with 10th grade English teachers, field notes, and memos. As the data was analyzed, themes emerged from each case to describe how teachers perceived the effects of accountabilities. Broadly, teachers at Swann and W. Percy, the lower performing schools, perceived greater effects from accountability policies than the teachers at Merrifield and Lakeside. Teachers at the lower performing schools reported feeling more pressure for their students to perform well on the EOC. While teachers at Merrifield and Lakeside also reported feeling pressure for their students to perform well, this pressure was described as much less intense, and administrators at these schools did not emphasize the importance of test scores.

The difference in pressure felt had an impact on curriculum. At Merrifield and Lakeside, the perception of less pressure on test performance allowed teachers to plan their curriculum based on world literature they felt was important. The opposite was observed at Swann and W. Percy, where teachers used the CCSS to plan their lessons and then often randomly selected short pieces of literature and informational text to teach the standards. Students at these schools therefore received a two-tiered curriculum, with the whiter, more affluent students at Merrifield

and Lakeside receiving a curriculum based on complex world literature, while students at Swann and W. Percy received a curriculum based on test prep.

The next section will discuss these findings, present recommendations for educational practice and research, and conclude the study.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter will provide a summary of the research project as well as a discussion of its findings. Then, connections to previous research will be discussed, followed by recommendations for future educational practice and research.

Summary of the Study

This study sought to understand teachers' perceptions of accountability policies in a large, urban district in North Carolina. Tenth grade English teachers from four different schools were asked to volunteer for interviews. This study was designed to answer three specific research questions:

- How do teachers experience the neoliberal policies in the context of recent state legislation in North Carolina?
- How do teachers at schools labeled high performing (A) versus teachers at schools labeled low performing (C), within an urban district in North Carolina, perceive the effects of accountability measures on their profession?
- How do teachers at schools labeled high performing (A) versus teachers at schools labeled low performing (C), within an urban district in North Carolina, perceive the effects of accountability measures on their students?

To answer these questions, data was collected primarily through interviews, but also through field notes and memos.

Four schools were selected as cases in this study, two that scored an A on North Carolina's School Report Card system, and two that scored a C. The principal at each school

granted access to their tenth grade English teachers, who were then told about the project and asked to volunteer. Fourteen teachers agreed to participate in the study and signed consent forms. Each teacher was interviewed for forty-five minutes, which was the maximum the district would allow. To analyze the data, the interviews were transcribed and coded using NVivo 12. From this data, major themes emerged from each case that were presented in Chapter 4.

Discussion of Findings

Pressure. In regards to research question one, teachers across all cases reported that they experienced feeling pressure as a result of accountability measures. All teachers reported that this pressure had an impact on their curriculum, coercing them to include EOC test prep as part of what they taught in 10th grade English. However, while all teachers communicated feeling pressure, how much pressure they felt and the impact of that pressure varied by school, for example, teachers at Merrifield and Lakeside reported that they felt individual pressure for their students to perform well on the EOC, while at Swann and Lakeside this pressure was directly communicated via the administration. Teachers at Merrifield and Lakeside, A level schools, reported feeling less pressure than the C level schools. The level of pressure felt by teachers appeared to have a relative impact on the curriculum they taught. More specifically, the increased pressure felt at Swann and W. Percy had a greater impact on their curriculum, driving the teachers to focus more on test prep at the expense of teaching world literature.

Curriculum. The curriculum taught in 10th grade English varied across the cases. Teachers at Merrifield and Lakeside (A level schools) described a curriculum steeped in traditional world literature, while teachers at Swann and W. Percy (C level schools) described a curriculum dominated by EOC test prep. All teachers communicated that they devoted class time to taking tests that imitated the EOC in order to prepare their students for the final exam.

However, at Swann and W. Percy, this testing was described as more intense and took up a much greater portion of their class time. For example, several teachers at the A level cases indicated that they spent some time at the end of the semester practicing mock EOC tests, while teachers at the C level cases reported using mock EOC tests throughout the semester, sometimes devoting an entire week of class time on one test. This was frustrating to these teachers; professionally they did not want to devote this much time to testing, but they felt compelled to do so to raise their students' scores.

These findings suggest that students at these schools received a two-tiered curriculum, with the wealthier, less diverse schools imparting a literature-based curriculum, while the poorer, majority minority schools delivered a curriculum rooted in test prep. The result was that students at the A level schools spent more time on critical thinking skills, while those at C schools spent more time on how to perform well on standardized tests. Students at A level schools read works by Shakespeare and Dante, while students at C level schools primarily read short bursts of informational texts that had little or no connection to each other.

This phenomenon is representative of the shift in curriculum brought on by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) discussed in Chapter 4. Before the implementation of CCSS, the 10th grade English curriculum was organized around genres in world literature. The current Standard Course of Study presented on North Carolina's Department of Public Instruction's website makes no mention of any specific literature to be taught in 10th grade, or any other grade. Teachers are then left to choose texts themselves, but are instructed to do so based on the CCSS. On the one hand, this provides teachers freedom to select the texts they want to use, given that they have access to them. On the other hand, the lack of even a basic outline of what literature should be taught can be overwhelming, especially to new teachers. As a result, teachers

interviewed at the C level schools reported organizing the literature they taught by standard, and then somewhat randomly selecting texts that applied to the standards, often without consideration of such concepts of cultural relevance, student interest, or even teacher interest.

While schools at the A level schools experienced this curriculum shift as well, they also employed teachers with more experience and higher education levels who were able to navigate their classes away from this shift. They maintained a more traditional curriculum, where students read complex texts from across the globe. The traditional English canon is not without its problems; it has been criticized for decades for being too representative of White, western culture, for example. But at the very least it does provide a road map to introduce students to literature that has been considered important for centuries.

The Effects of Accountability Policies on Students. Teachers across the cases indicated that some of their students felt ambivalent about the EOC. At the A level schools, teachers reported that their students cared about the test because of its possible impact on their final grade, but were ambivalent about the test itself. At the C level schools, teachers noted that students expressed ambivalence as a result of being overwhelmed. Some students merely bubbled in answers on the test and then went to sleep for the remainder of the testing session, which was frustrating to teachers.

Teachers also expressed that their students felt frustrated by the EOC, but for different reasons. A level teachers noted that their students were frustrated by the high stakes nature of the test, that one test could have such a high impact on their final grade. Teachers at the C level schools noted that the test frustrated their students by making them feel inadequate, which led to behavioral issues and self-esteem problems.

Connections to Previous Research

Narrowed Curriculum. The existing research on the effects of accountability measures indicated that they can narrow curriculum (Koretz, 2008; Landry, 2006), and this effect was observed in the data collected from interviews across the cases. While the EOC had a lesser impact at the A level schools, teachers at the C level schools communicated that their curriculum was greatly impacted by the EOC. The implementation of the CCSS and the high-stakes EOC narrowed the curriculum at these schools from one based on genres of world literature to one heavily based on test prep. Teachers at Merrifield and Lakeside indicated that while the EOC forced them to teach less literature and writing than they would like, they were still able to teach their students a wide variety of world literature. This was not the case at Swann or W. Percy, where teachers reported basing their curriculum on the standards, and then finding short stories and informational readings in their textbooks to facilitate the teaching of those standards. There was no attempt to connect literature to broader themes or genres.

This narrowed curriculum resulted in classes that teachers described as very regimented, and teachers were not able to teach their students the literature they loved. Reading for pleasure seemed non-existent in the C level schools; in fact, reading for any other purpose than test prep was seen as superfluous.

Inequality. Previous research also indicated that accountability policies exacerbated issues related to inequality in public schooling (Achinstein et. al., 2004; Booher-Jennings, 2005; Braithwaite, 2016; Jennings & Sohn, 2014). Jennings and Sohn (2014) describe the concepts of educational and instructional triage as they relate to accountability measures. Educational triage occurs when educators, faced with accountability measures, focus on the students closest to

proficiency, while instructional triage is the practice of emphasizing test-specific skills with students who are near proficiency on a high-stakes test.

These concepts were not observed at the case level, but when the cases are compared these concepts are observable. For example, no teachers across the cases indicated that they used data to identify students close to proficiency and then focused their resources on this group. However, most students at Merrifield and Lakeside were predicted to already be proficient in the skills necessary to pass the EOC, so these triage interventions were not necessary. In contrast, in the school year prior to this study, 69.7% and 40.5% of students at Swann and W. Percy, respectively, did not pass the EOC. It appears that these scores influenced teachers at these schools to engage in instructional triage, focusing their time and resources on teaching test-specific skills at the expense of literature. Given this information, we can observe that accountability policies negatively impact lower performing schools, because they shift teachers' priorities away from a literature-based curriculum to one based on skill and drill.

Race. Previous research indicated that accountability policies may have more negative impacts on students of color (Au, 2016; Braithwaite, 2016; Leonardo, 2009; Orfield, 2013). The C level schools, Swann and W. Percy, indeed contained far more students of color than Merrifield or Lakeside. This is a result of the district changing its school attendance policy from one that bused students for the purpose of creating diverse schools to one that created neighborhood school attendance zones in the early 2000s. This has, in effect, resegregated the schools in the district.

Au (2016) argues that while accountability policies are often touted as tools to achieve racial equity in schools, they actually have the opposite effect. As Au (2016) notes,

...children of color have experienced a sharper curricular and pedagogic squeeze, resulting in a qualitatively different education than that experienced by their White, affluent counterparts (Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Nichols et al., 2005; von Zastrow, 2004). An outcome of this process is that low-income students of color (as well as their teachers and their schools) are rendered visible as failures through high-stakes, standardized testing. This kind of visibility allows disciplinary power to be enacted on low-income, children of color by arranging them as racialized objects of failure (Melamed, 2011) (Au, 2016, p. 52)

The cases in this study demonstrate that students of color are indeed receiving a qualitatively different curriculum than their whiter and more affluent peers. While teachers at Swann and W. Percy did not discuss issues of discipline within their classrooms in detail, schools such as these typically have higher suspension rates than higher performing schools. These students' failures, however, are quite visible on the district's webpage, where interested parties can obtain a wide range of data on test scores.

In a case study of five schools, Anyon (1981) found qualitative differences between curricula in working class schools as compared with middle class and more affluent schools. She noted that in the working class schools, there was an emphasis on "...mechanical behaviors, as opposed to sustained conception" (p. 32). This was reflected in this study, as teachers at Swann and W. Percy emphasized the "mechanical behaviors" of test prep and test taking. It was also observed that teachers at the C level cases taught a more fragmented curriculum, including random passages for test prep and various short stories with no clear curricular links. Anyon reflected in the conclusion of her study that the knowledge taught in working class schools

...contribute[s] to the reproduction of a group in society who may be without marketable knowledge; a reserve group of workers whose very existence, whose availability for hire, for example, when employed workers strike, serves to keep wages down and the work force disciplined. A reserve group is, of course, essential to capitalism because lower wages permit profit accumulation, which is necessary to the viability of firms, banks, state budgets, and bank-financed of, one could argue, the entire system. (p. 32)

Anyon's study took place before the push for national standards and high-stakes testing in the 1980s, and these policies were often defended by those implementing them that they would alleviate issues regarding inequality and race (Au, 2016; Hursh, 2007). However, this study demonstrates that accountability policies, at the very least, have done little to alleviate these issues, and may in fact contribute to the replication of a poor, working class.

The current state of segregation in the Pollock School District reflects a central tenet of Critical Race Theory: that racism in the United States is permanent and systemic. The Pollock School system was a model, albeit an imperfect one, of school desegregation from the 1970s to the 1990s. However, at present PCS has been effectively resegregated, although not to the extent that it was before 1970. Indeed, in the early 2000s, PSD was declared unitary, and race was no longer used as a criterion for busing students. This decision enabled what Leonardo (2009) and others (i.e. Bonilla-Silva, 2002) have described as color-blind racism, which suggests that race should not be used as a consideration in public policy. Once the school system was declared unitary, local control was restored, and the district chose to assign students to neighborhood schools. This reflects Leonardo's (2009) assertion of what colorblind racism looks like in public discourse: "Not only should race no longer matter, it should not be a consideration to either social policy, like affirmative action, or interpersonal interactions" (p. 131). Since the

neighborhoods in this region are highly segregated, this resulted in de facto segregation under the race-neutral term of Neighborhood Schools. The cases in this study reflected these results, as Merrifield and Lakeside were primarily White and affluent, while Swann and W. Percy were primarily less affluent students of color. Each school reflected the makeup of its surrounding neighborhood. This allows the district to avoid accusations of racially segregating schools by suggesting (falsely) that parents can live in whatever district they choose. Therefore, the historic discrimination of students of color continues in PCS under another name.

Positive Impacts. Several quantitative studies have demonstrated that accountability policies have had a positive impact on student achievement (Braun, 2004; Hanushek & Raymond, 2005). A small snapshot comparing the schools in this study indicates few changes in performance from the 2015-2016 school year to the 2016-2017 school year. Merrifield received grades of 94 and exceeded growth expectations both years, while Lakeside declined from 89 to 86 and exceeded growth expectations. Swann displayed the most significant growth, increasing from 54 to 57 and improving its letter grade from D to C. It also exceeded growth expectations both years. W. Percy increased its score from 61 to 63, but did not meet growth expectations. While this is by no means a full analysis of growth, it does indicate that teachers at Swann and W. Percy increased their students' performance on the EOC exams. However, these changes may have been due to an increased focus on testing and test preparation as opposed to increased quality of education. In other words, these scores may have risen due to spending more time on skill and drill activities and test taking strategies, rather than improving students' critical thinking skills through the analysis of complex texts.

Teacher Turnover. Prior research indicates that accountability policies have been responsible for an increase in teacher turnover (Crocco & Costigan, 2006; Ingersoll, Merrill, &

May, 2016). The teachers at Merrifield and Lakeside had far more experience and had spent more time in their current schools than those at Swann and W. Percy. Two of the Swann teachers were in their first year of teaching, which suggests they had replaced teachers who left the previous year, while another had one year of experience and then left at the end of the 2016-2017 school year. The exception in the case of Swann was Kathryn Layton, who had taught for 16 years and had been in her current position for several years. The participants at W. Percy were more experienced; one teacher had 17 years of experience while the other had 6. Both had taught at W. Percy for several years. Therefore, the case of Swann affirms this research, while W. Percy does not. The increased pressure of having the EOC may have contributed to the increased turnover at Swann.

New Public Management. Fusarelli and Johnson (2004) noted that public schools adopted the culture of the New Public Management (NPM) throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The goal of this movement was to streamline and improve public services that had come to be seen by the public as inefficient. Proponents of this management system contend that the “alignment of standards, curriculum, and assessment is essential to creating high performing learning systems in schools (Fusarelli, 2002, p. 572). Through the interviews conducted it was clear that these schools had implemented the NPM. All participants described how they met at least weekly in their Professional Learning Communities (PLC) to discuss standards, curriculum, and assessment. However, teachers at Swann and W. Percy described their PLC meetings as being driven almost exclusively by testing data and teaching the CCSS. Teachers at Merrifield and Lakeside also communicated that they discussed standards and assessments in their meetings, but they also discussed how to incorporate world literature into their lesson plans.

A significant impact of New Public Management seen across the cases was the level of organization present. All teachers were knowledgeable about the CCSS and used the standards in their planning. In PLC meetings, a product of NPM, teachers shared best practices and planned their weekly lessons. This is particularly helpful for new teachers not yet familiar with their curriculum, and this level of collaboration would not have occurred prior to the arrival of NPM. Teachers also discussed their students' weaknesses and how to best address them.

However, while some aspects of NPM had a positive impact on these teachers, it was harmful in other ways. Anderson and Cohen (2015) note that in the past forty years,

...there has been a shift from a rule-governed, administrative, bureaucratic management to an outcomes-based, entrepreneurial, corporate model of management....This shift suggests a decrease in professional autonomy and in control over one's profession through the exercise of professional judgment and through professional associations, and an increase in control by managers in work organizations. (p. 3-4)

This lack of autonomy and increase in control by managers was observed across the cases, and more so in the C schools than the A schools. As noted earlier, teachers at Merrifield and Lakeside had a greater level of autonomy over what they taught, even though they were still constrained by the EOC. In contrast, teachers at Swann reported that they were often given lesson plans and told to follow them by their lead teacher, lessons that were most often centered in test prep.

Ingersoll and Collins (2017) argue that top down accountability reforms "...draw attention to an important set of needs – accountability on the part of those doing the work. But these kinds of reforms sometimes overlook another equally important set of needs – the autonomy and engagement of those doing the work" (p. 90). Teachers across the cases certainly

felt accountable for the performance of their students and worked to improve their achievement. But the lack of autonomy, particularly at the C level schools, had detrimental effects on these teachers. Jane Munroe (at Swann) had become particularly disengaged with her work because of the pressure she felt from the administration and her perceived lack of autonomy.

Implications for Educational Practice

Based on the literature review and this study of teachers' perceptions of accountability policies, I have several recommendations for educational practice moving forward. The first would be the removal of standardized testing in English. While I cannot speak for the efficacy of standardized testing in other subjects, its negative impacts in the English classroom far outweigh any benefits, and these negative impacts appear to weigh heavier on racially and economically marginalized students. Teachers should be held accountable for the success of their students. They have a large responsibility to their students, their parents, and the public at large, and teachers who are unfit for the classroom should not remain there.

However, the neoliberal accountability policies currently in place have negative effects on curriculum. They reduce the purpose of the English classroom to success on a standardized test, which is problematic. Instead of using standardized testing, teachers should be given more autonomy to evaluate their students as they see fit. It is likely that given the current politics of education, accountability policies will remain in place for the foreseeable future. To hold teachers and students accountable, a writing test would be a much better indicator of student growth and achievement. A writing test would measure comprehension, like the EOC does, and it would also measure students' abilities to form logical thoughts and arguments, which the EOC does not.

Coupled with the removal of standardized testing should be a renewed focus on literature. This would not need to be a return to the traditional English canon that has been taught in public high schools for decades. Instead, teachers could select their own texts, based on their own interest and knowledge, and their students' interest and knowledge. This would in effect make teachers and students more engaged as they would have a vested interest in what they were reading. This would also reflect what Ladson-Billings (1995) described as culturally relevant pedagogy. Passages used to measure comprehension on the English EOC are notoriously dull; they are often picked because they are in the public domain and are cost-free to include on a state test. This leads teachers to purposely teach dull texts in their classrooms to prepare their students for a four hour exam that will be full of them, which is absurd. Allowing teachers and students to collaborate to pick their own texts would enliven the classroom.

English teachers should have a strong grasp of their content and be excellent writers so they can be an example to their students. One of the best ways for English teachers to improve these skills is to further their education. However, North Carolina has recently eliminated its policy that increased pay for teachers with a master's degree. This removes a strong incentive for teachers to continue their education, while also delivering the message that continuing education is not important. This fits into the neoliberal ideology that teachers' primary purpose should be to increase students' scores on standardized tests. It also suggests that teachers do not need further education to achieve this goal, which therefore makes further education unnecessary. Graduate-level education can provide teachers the critical lens they need to resist neoliberal policies. Teachers who began their graduate education by the summer of 2013 were grandfathered in for this increase, but teachers who began their degree programs after this have been excluded from

an increase in pay. North Carolina should reinstate this policy to encourage its teachers to improve their practice and develop as professionals.

Teachers should also be encouraged to improve their practice through meaningful professional development. Too often, professional development for English teachers in this district does not align with what teachers need. For example, in the Pollock district, most teachers are required to attend professional development sessions at the beginning of the school year. These sessions tend to be generic across grade levels or technology-based. Professional development that dives deep into curriculum is rare, and this is a problem. A possible solution is an organization North Carolina has created and funded called the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching (NCCAT). It maintains two campuses, one in the western part of the state and one in the coastal region. NCCAT offers programs to all disciplines, and many of its seminars encourage teachers to improve their students' achievement while providing meaningful instruction. For example, one course offering in the fall of 2017 was titled: Teaching English II: Enrich the Minds and the Scores Will Follow. Teachers in North Carolina would greatly benefit if this program was expanded. Currently NCCAT serves only a small portion of North Carolina teachers given its size and geographic locations. Teachers should have more access to professional development programs like the ones offered by NCCAT.

Implications for Research

This study was successful in answering its primary research question, how do teachers perceive the effects of accountability policies; however, there is a considerable need for more research to be completed in this area. Pollock County Schools are but one school system in a state with 114 other districts. While it would not be necessary to conduct a study such as this one in all of them, it would be of interest to know if findings in other urban and rural districts would

be similar. The sample size of this study was small, including only 14 teachers, and therefore conclusions from it cannot be generalized to apply to public education in the U.S. broadly, or even across the state of North Carolina. Therefore, replicating this study in several districts across the state would provide a more robust picture.

More broadly, more research is needed to explore teachers' perceptions of neoliberal education policies. What teachers think about the policies they will be entrusted to enact is rarely considered by policy makers. Teachers responsible for enacting education policy should have a seat at the table, and their opinions and perceptions should be heard and understood. Teachers are in a critical space to resist the commonsense hegemony that suggests that our schools should be subjected to neoliberal reforms that expand accountability policies. More research demonstrating teachers' perceptions could help the public to understand the neoliberal shift in education and what it means for our students.

This study approached its research questions through the qualitative method to allow teachers to express their perceptions and tell their own stories. However, a quantitative study could produce different types of data that could be useful. For example, hard data that showed how much time teachers were spending in their classroom on test prep as compared to literature would provide critical information for teachers, parents, and administrators. Qualitative narratives are important, but quantitative data could serve the purpose of either reinforcing teachers' perceptions or demonstrating that they are inaccurate.

A final area for further research would be an analysis of administrators' perceptions of neoliberal education policies. Since they are the primary enforcers of policy, it would be interesting to know what they thought about matters such as testing. This could help make

administrators more aware of the effects of neoliberal policies in schools, and possibly determine if teachers and administrators agree or disagree about the purpose of schooling itself.

Summary

This study examined teachers' perceptions of neoliberal accountability policies. These policies, which were enacted after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, have become ubiquitous in U.S. public schools. This particular study examined how 14 teachers in a large, urban district in North Carolina perceived the effects of having a standardized test at the end of their course. Two different types of schools were selected for the study, two that received As on North Carolina's school grading system, and two that received Cs, with the hypothesis that accountability policies would have more harmful effects on teachers in the lower performing schools. This hypothesis was proved correct as teachers in the lower performing schools reported more intense pressure for their students to perform well on the EOC. The curriculum they taught was also more negatively impacted by these policies, as they spent less time teaching literature and more time teaching test prep.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that the students at lower performing schools in this district, which typically have more students of color students who are less affluent, are receiving a different English curriculum in 10th grade than their Whiter, more affluent peers at higher performing schools. Given the United States' history of racial discrimination and the "education debt" (Ladson-Billings, 2006) it has created, this is a problem that should not be overlooked if we want all of our students to achieve.

REFERENCES

- Abrams, L. M., Pedulla, J. J., & Madaus, G. F. (2003). Views from the classroom: Teachers' opinions of statewide testing programs. *Theory into Practice, 42*(1), 18-29.
- Achinstein, B., & Ogawa, R. T. (2006). (In)fidelity: What the resistance of new teachers reveals about professional principles and prescriptive education policies. *Harvard Education Review, 76*(1), 30-63.
- Achinstein, B., Ogawa, R. T., & Speigman, A. (2004). Are we creating separate and unequal tracks of teachers? The effects of state policy, local conditions, and teacher characteristics on new teacher socialization. *American Educational Research Journal, 41*(3), 557-603.
- Adamson, P. (2012). *Measuring child poverty: New league tables of child poverty in the world's rich countries*. (Report Card 10). Florence: Innocenti Research Centre.
Retrieved from: http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/rc10_eng.pdf
- Anderson, G., & Cohen, M. I. (2015). Redesigning the identities of teachers and leaders: A framework for studying new professionalism and educator resistance. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 23*(85), 1-29.
- Anyon, J. (1981). Social class and school knowledge. *Curriculum Inquiry, 11*(1), 3-42.
- Anyon, J. (2014). *Radical possibilities: Public policy, urban education, and a new social movement* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Apple, M. W. (2006). *Educating the "right" way: Markets, standards, God, and inequality* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Associated Press. (2015, October 2). Teacher turnover in NC reaches 5-year high. *Blue Ridge Now*. Retrieved from

<http://www.blueridgenow.com/article/20151002/ARTICLES/151009958?Title=Teacher-turnover-in-NC-reaches-5-year-high->

- Au, W. (2016). Meritocracy 2.0: High-stakes, standardized testing as a racial project of neoliberal multiculturalism. *Educational Policy*, 30(1), 39-62.
- Barbour, R. S. (2014). Analysing focus groups. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 313-327). London, GBR: SAGE Publications.
- Bastian, A. (1992). Which choice? Whose choice? *The Clearing House*, 66(2), 96-99.
- Bell, D. A. (1979). *Brown v. Board of Education* and the interest-convergence dilemma. *Harvard Law Review*, 93, 518-533.
- Berliner, D. C. (2013). Effects of inequality and poverty vs. Teachers and schooling on America's youth. *Teachers College Record*, 115, 1-26.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2002). "The linguistics of color blind racism: How to talk nasty about blacks without sounding racist." *Critical Sociology*, 21(1-2), 41-64.
- Booher-Jennings, J. (2005). Below the bubble: "Educational triage" and the Texas accountability system. *American Educational Research Journal*, 42(2), 231-268.
- Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (2011). *Schooling in capitalist America: Educational reform and the contradictions of economic life* (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.
- Brathwaite, J. (2016). Neoliberal education reform and the perpetuation of inequality. *Critical Sociology*, 43(3), 1-20.
- Braun, H. (2004). Reconsidering the impact of high-stakes testing. *Education Policy Analysis*, 12(1), 1-43.
- Crocco, M. S., & Costigan, A. T. (2006). High-stakes teaching: What's at stake for teachers (and students) in the age of accountability. *The New Educator*, 2(1), 1-13.

- Darling-Hammond, L. (2007). Race, inequality and educational accountability: The irony of 'No Child Left Behind'. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 10(3), 245-260.
- Davidson, P. (1991). *Controversies in post Keynesian economics*. Brookfield, VT: Edward Elgar Publishing Company.
- de Saxe, J. G., Bucknovitz, S., & Mahoney-Mosedale, F. (2018). The deprofessionalization of educators: An intersectional analysis of neoliberalism and education "reform." *Education and Urban Society*, 0(0), 1-19.
- Dee, T. S., & Jacob, B. (2011). The impact of No Child Left Behind on student achievement. *The Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 30(3), 418-446.
- Diamond, J. B., & Spillane, J. P. (2004). High-stakes accountability in urban elementary schools: Challenging or reproducing inequality? *Teachers College Record*, 106(6), 1145-1176.
- Doran, W. (2018, May 28). Republican release legislative budget with pay raise for teachers, principals. *The News and Observer*. Retrieved from www.newsobserver.com
- Duncan, G. J., & Murnane, R. J. (2011). Introduction: The American dream, then and now. In G. J. Duncan, & R. J. Murnane (Eds.), *Whither opportunity? Rising inequality, schools, and children's life chances* (pp. 3-26). New York, NY: Sage Foundation.
- Enck-Wanzer, D. (2011). "Barack Obama, the Tea Party, and the threat of race: On racial neoliberalism and born again racism." *Communication, Culture, & Critique*, 4(1), p. 23-30.
- Feeny, S., & Freeman, N. K. (2014). Standardized testing in kindergarten. *YC Young Children*, 69(1), 84-88.
- Femia, J. V. (1981). *Gramsci's political thought: Hegemony, consciousness, and the*

revolutionary process. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

- Finnigan, K. S., & Gross, B. (2007). Do accountability policy sanctions influence teacher motivation? Lessons from Chicago's low-performing schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 44(3), 594-629.
- Forsey, M. (2012). Interviewing individuals. In S. Delamont (ed.), *Handbook of qualitative research in education* (pp. 364-376). Cheltenham, GBR: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Fusarelli, L. D. (2002). Tightly coupled policy in loosely coupled systems: Institutional capacity and organizational change. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 40(6), 561-575.
- Fusarelli, L. D. (2011). School reform in a vacuum: Demographic change, social policy, and the future of children. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 86(3), 215-235.
- Fusarelli, L. D., & Fusarelli, B. C. (2003). Systemic reform and organizational change. *Planning and Changing*, 34(3&4), 169-177.
- Fusarelli, L. D., & Johnson, B. (2004). Educational governance and the new public management. *Public Administration and Management: An Interactive Journal*, 9(2), 118-127.
- Giroux, H. A. (2010). Spectacles of race and pedagogies of denial: Anti-Black racist pedagogy under the reign of neoliberalism. *Communication Education*, 52(3-4), 191-211.
- Goldberg, D. T. (2009). *The threat of race: Reflections on race and neoliberalism*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Groves, P. (2002). "Doesn't it feel morbid here?": High-stakes testing and the widening of the equity gap. *The Journal of Educational Foundations*, 16(2), 15-31

- Hanushek, E. A., & Raymond, M. E. (2005). Does school accountability lead to improved student performance? *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 24(2), 297-327.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, D. (2006). Neo-liberalism as creative destruction. *Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography*, 88(2), 145-158.
- Hui, K. T. (2018, April 23). See where NC ranks in the US on average teacher pay and how far it has to go. *The News and Observer*. Retrieved from www.newsobserver.com
- Hursh, D. (2005). Neo-liberalism, markets, and accountability: Transforming education and undermining democracy in the United States and England. *Policy Futures in Education*, 3(1), 3.
- Hursh, D. (2008). *High-stakes testing and the decline of teaching and learning: The real crisis in education*. New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Ingersoll, R. M. & Collins, J. (2017). Accountability and control in American schools. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 49(1), 75-95.
- Ingersoll, R., Merrill, L., & May, H. Do accountability measures push teachers out? *Educational Leadership*, 73(8), 44-49.
- Jennings, J., & Sohn, H. (2014). Measure for measure: How proficiency-based accountability systems affect inequality in academic achievement. *Sociology of Education*, 87(2), 125-141.
- Jennings, J. L., & Bearak, J. M. (2014). "Teaching to the test" in the NCLB era: How test predictability affects our understanding of student performance. *Educational Researcher*, 43(8), 381-389.
- Jiang, Y., Ekono, M., & Skinner, C. (2015). *Basic facts about low-income children: Children*

- under 18 years, 2013*. New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty.
Retrieved from http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_1100.pdf
- Jones, B. D., & Egley, R. J. (2007). Learning to take tests or learning for understanding? Teachers' beliefs about test-based accountability. *The Educational Forum*, 71(3), 232-248.
- Jones, D. S. (2012). Lessons of neoliberalism. *Renewal*, 20(1), 9-19.
- Jones, G. M., Jones, B. D., & Hargrove, T. Y. (2003). *The unintended consequences of high-stakes testing*. New York, NY: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Katsuno, M. (2012). Teachers' professional identities in an era of testing accountability in Japan: The case of teachers in low-performing schools. *Education Research International*, 2012, 1-8.
- Kearns, L. L. (2011). High-stakes standardized testing and marginalized youth: An examination of the impact on those who fail. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 34(2), 112-130.
- Koretz, D. (2008). *Measuring up: What educational testing really tells us*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kosher, R. (2013, May 7). 'Pay cuts hurt': North Carolina teacher shares her story. *Education Votes*. Retrieved from <http://educationvotes.nea.org/2013/05/07/pay-cuts-hurt-north-carolina-educator-shares-her-story/>
- Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities: Children in America's schools*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Towards a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465-491.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools. *Educational Researcher*, 35(7), 3-12.

Landry, D. (2006). Teachers' (K-5) perceptions of student behaviors during standardized testing. *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue*, 8(1/2), 29-40.

Leonardo, Z. (2009). *Race, whiteness, and education*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Lipman, P. (2011). *The new political economy of urban education: Neoliberalism, race, and the right to the city*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Louis, K. S., Febey, K., & Schroeder, R. (2005). State-mandated accountability in high schools: Teachers' interpretations of a new era. *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 27(2), 177-204.

Madaus, G., & Russell, M. (2010). Paradoxes of high-stakes testing. *Journal of Education*, 190(1/2), 21-30.

Marzano, R. (1991). Fostering thinking across the curriculum through knowledge restructuring. *Journal of Reading*, 34(7), 518-525. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/prox.lib.ncsu.edu/stable/40014576>

McGuinn, P. (2013). The federal role in educational equity: The two narratives of school reform and the debate over accountability. In R. Reich and D. Allen (Eds.), *Education, justice, and democracy* (pp. 221-242). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

McNeil, L. M. (1986). *Contradictions of control: School structure and school knowledge*. New York, NY: Routledge & Keegan Paul.

McNeil, L. M. (2000). *The contradictions of school reform: Educational costs of standardized testing*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Means, A. J. (2005). *Schooling in the age of austerity: Urban education and the struggle for*

- democratic life*. New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Militello, M., & Militello, L. (2013). Fear and loathing in elementary school: Lessons from a third grader about better assessments. *The Educational Forum*, 77(2), 140-150.
- Namey, E. E., & Trotter, R. T. (2014). Qualitative research methods. In G. S. Guest & E. E. Namey (Eds.), *Public health research methods* (pp. 443-482). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Nichols, S. L., & Berliner, D. C. (2005). The inevitable corruption of indicators and educators through high-stakes testing. Education Policy Studies Laboratory, Arizona State University.
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. (2015). *2013-2014 school performance grades (A-F) for North Carolina public schools*. Retrieved from <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/docs/accountability/reporting/spgexecsumm15.pdf>
- Orfield, G., & Frankenberg, E. (2013). *Educational delusions? Why choice can deepen inequality and how to make schools fair*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Phelps, C. (2014, February 24). Travon's legacy: How diversity hides racism. *The Tyee*. Retrieved from www.thetyee.ca
- Picower, B., & Mayorga, E. (2015). *What's race go to do with it? How current school reform policy maintains racial and economic inequality*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

- Plank, S. B., & Condliffe, B. F. (2013). Pressure of the season: An examination of classroom quality and high-stakes accountability. *American Educational Research Journal*, 50(5), 1152-1182.
- Press Release. (2015). Union members summary. United States Department of Labor. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm>
- Quitadamo, I. J., & Kurtz, M. J. (2007). Learning to improve: using writing to increase critical thinking performance in general education biology. *CBE Life Sciences Education*, 6(2), 140-154.
- Ravitch, D. (2013). *Reign of error: The hoax of the privatization movement and the danger to America's public schools*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Reardon, S. F. (2011). The widening academic achievement gap between the rich and the poor: New evidence and possible explanations. In G. J. Duncan, & R. J. Murnane (Eds.), *Whither opportunity? Rising inequality, schools, and children's life chances*, (pp. 91-116). New York, NY: Sage Foundation.
- Reback, R., Rockoff, J., & Schwartz, H. L. (2014). Under pressure: Job security, resource allocation, and productivity in schools under No Child Left Behind. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 6(3), 207-241.
- Roberts, D. J., & Mahtani, M. (2010). Neoliberalizing race, racing neoliberalism: Placing 'race' in neoliberal discourses. *Antipode*, 42(2), 248-257.
- Rothstein, R. (2004). *Class and schools: Using social, economic, and educational reform to close the black-white achievement gap*. Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute.
- Saltman, K. J. (2011). From Carnegie to Gates: The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and

- the venture philanthropy agenda for public education. In P. E. Novacs (ed.), *The Gates Foundation and the future of U.S. "public" schools* (pp. 1-21). Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Saltman, K. J. (2014). Neoliberalism and corporate school reform: "Failure" and "creative" destruction. *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 36(4), 249-259.
- Saul, J. R. (2005). *The collapse of globalism and the reinvention of the world*. New York, NY: The Overlook Press.
- Schoen, L., & Fusarelli, L. D. (2008). Innovation, NCLB, and the fear factor. *Educational Policy*, 22(1), 181-203.
- Sleeter, C. E. (2007). Introduction: Democracy, equity, and accountability. In C. E. Sleeter (ed.), *Facing accountability in education* (pp. 1-12). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Sondel, B. (2013). *Raising citizens or raising test scores? Teach for America and "No Excuses" charter schools in post-Katrina New Orleans*. (Doctoral dissertation). UMI Number: 3602464.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. London, GBR: SAGE Publications.
- Stake, R. E. (2006). *Multiple case study analysis*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Valli, L., & Buese, D. (2007). The changing roles of teachers in an era of high-stakes accountability. *American Education Research Journal*, 44(3), 519-558.
- Vogell, H. (2011). Investigation into APS cheating finds unethical behavior across every level. Atlanta, GA: *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Retrieved from http://people.uncw.edu/imperialm/uncw/PLS_505/Cheating_Atlanta-Teachers_7_5_11.pdf

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

APPENDIX

Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me about how you got involved with teaching?
2. Does the End of Course English (EOC) exam impact your classroom throughout the year? If so, how?
3. Does the EOC exam influence how you plan for your classes? If so, how?
4. Are EOC scores used to evaluate you and your students? If so, how?
5. Are there expectations about how your students will perform on the EOC?
6. Would you teach differently if you did not have an EOC? If so, how?
7. Do you feel that having an EOC impacts the quality of your teaching in any way?
8. How does previous performance on EOCs impact your current teaching practices?
9. Do you feel that the EOC is an accurate measure of student achievement?
10. What improvements could be made to the EOC?
11. Is there anything else that I haven't asked you about that you would like to share your perceptions on regarding the EOC or other accountability policies?