“There’s Nothing Standardized About Being Human”: The Impact of Education Policy Reform on Experienced English Teachers in a Rural High School

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Dedication

This is for everyone who is brokenhearted over what has happened to the teaching profession and our students.

I am, too.

Let’s do something about it.

Acknowledgements

I always thought that writing a dissertation would be a solitary experience, but the reality is that I never could have done it without the supportive people in my life.

First, my family deserves a medal. I'll never be able to thank you enough for all the love you've shown me. You believed in me first—especially you, Mom and Dad! If I'm ever half the teachers you were, I will consider that quite the accomplishment.

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Abstract

Education reforms have transformed the teaching profession into a business model that uses standardized test scores as capital. Failure to deliver projected scores results in punishments for teachers and schools under increased accountability measures. In this climate, job satisfaction is low, and teachers across the nation are leaving their classrooms. However, one rural high school presents as an anomaly because there has been no turnover within the English department, where each staff member has been teaching a minimum of five years. The purpose of this study was to learn how experienced secondary English teachers are impacted by education policy reform, and to find out why they stay in the profession in the context of neoliberal education.

Through dialogic interviews with five English teachers and data analysis using the constant comparative method, it was determined that educational reforms have had a negative effect on teachers, and that teachers remain in their positions because their administrator mediates reforms and shields them from oppressive dehumanization. Additional research is needed to explore the effective practices of a principal who can mediate policy to prevent the mass exodus of teachers.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When I started teaching special education in 2005, the state required an English exam for sophomores. Over time, new reforms were passed into law, ushering in an onslaught of testing and a surge in expectations. Administrations changed. Supervisors rotated. Because I held a B.S. in English and dual certification in English and special education, I was assigned to co-teach increasing numbers of classes with regular education English teachers. I began the fall of 2012 co-teaching two-thirds of my classes, which later changed to one-third to better meet students' needs. However, I did not co-teach English II, the only English course by which our school's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) was measured. I did teach a small group combination of English IV and English II during one block for students with diverse scheduling needs. However, a special education teacher who did not hold an English endorsement taught the majority of students taking English II within my department. Additionally, a new English teacher taught several English II classes containing large amounts of students receiving special education services. Our school's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) scores for students receiving special education services were dismal that semester.

The next semester, my principal called me to his office and asked me to sit down. He asked if I had ever heard of an Individual Learning Cycle (ILC). I said I had not, and asked if it was punitive. He assured me that it was not punitive, and said that different departments would participate in ILCs each year. He then gave an example of another department and the progress they had made through ILCs. Unfortunately, it was common knowledge that the department was receiving coaching as a result of low test scores. The situation became even more suspect when he informed me that I would be working with our new literacy coach.

My first meeting with the literacy coach confirmed that the ILC was, in fact, a punitive measure. She was dismayed when I relayed my principal's statement. According to her, he had promised her that he would be honest with me, but in the end, she was forced to confirm that the true nature of an ILC was remediation. Our school's scores for students with disabilities in AYP-tested subjects were some of the lowest in the district. Instead of limiting ILC assignment to the staff members whose scores had tanked, my principal decided to place my entire department on remediation.

The reality was that due to my focus on high-interest novels and reading engagement instead of test preparation, the majority of my students' scores had increased, with some doubling between the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years. My overall evaluation score was high. I was actively pursuing career advancement after completing a master's degree in the fall. I taught the district's English content classes to prepare special education teachers for the corresponding Praxis. Looking ahead, I planned to apply to the doctoral program at UT. But on paper, I was on remediation for the test scores of students I had not taught.

My remediation included monthly meetings with the literacy coach. My homework was to examine English II rosters from the current year to identify the students receiving special education services. Then, for my "action plan," I had to observe the classrooms of the teachers whose English II scores had tanked and provide ongoing feedback to help them differentiate instruction. To be clear, my remediation was not applied toward improving my test scores; it was repurposed to improve other teachers' scores. Those teachers were resentful and embarrassed, but even so, they were not the ones on a remediation plan. As often happens in a school environment, news traveled quickly, and before long, everyone knew that I was on remediation. I wanted to crawl under a rock. It was one of the most humiliating and degrading experiences of

my entire career. After eight years in the classroom, I did not know where I would go, but I knew I could not stay.

When I was accepted to the doctoral program, I did not hesitate. I seized the opportunity to leave an environment where I did not feel valued. Within a year, the turnover of my former school's faculty began. At three years, my entire department was new with the exception of one teacher. Now at four years since my exit, there are more new faces than familiar ones in the school faculty. I heard reasons for leaving that ranged from retirement to career changes, from spouse relocations to nearby moves outside the district for higher salaries. I wondered if, like me, they had been impacted by education policy reform to the point that they could not continue in their positions.

It is only now, years later when so many have gone, that I see that I spent my entire career silenced by fear. I knew that addressing any iniquities, including my unwarranted ILC placement, would result in disciplinary measures for insubordination and subsequent blackballing throughout the district. I believed administrative retaliatory measures would commence via low classroom observation scores, as had occurred in the past when other teachers had voiced complaints. I feared for my job. So, I said and did nothing. I realize now that my silence unwittingly endorsed the perpetuation of a harmful system.

These realizations did not happen overnight. While working as a graduate assistant for my university, I began supervising English interns in various secondary schools throughout the region. I did not know it at the time, but the experience of moving from classroom teacher to intern supervisor gave me different perspectives on education, and ultimately brought me to this study. During my first year, I saw stories similar to mine mirrored in teachers' faces, which pushed my research interests toward teacher morale. Many of my interns were hired by their

school placements at the end of their internship year when at least one or more English teachers vacated their positions. I questioned whether teacher morale had plummeted to the point that teachers could not stay in their positions.

In the second year of my assistantship, I began working with the English faculty at Laurel Bluff High School (all names and places in this paper are pseudonyms), where something was decidedly different. The faculty seemed happy, and my interns seemed happier than those from the previous year. I will never forget the first meeting that I had with one of my interns that year. She asked, "Do all interns get gift baskets?"

I said, "You got a *gift basket*?" In all my years of teaching, and in the previous year as an intern supervisor, I had never heard of such a thing. I did not receive anything when I began my teaching career.

She smiled and said, "Actually, we each got *two*." Both the school and the English department had provided sizable gift baskets brimming with school supplies, snacks, and school t-shirts to welcome the interns. My jaw dropped when she showed me the warmly written cards that had accompanied the baskets, and I wondered—just for a moment—what it would have been like to have received such a welcome.

But there were more surprises to come. The biggest came in early spring, when I told one of the teacher mentors that my interns were dismayed because the school had zero available positions for the next school year. She said, "Yeah, we never have openings."

"Never?" I asked.

"Nope," she said. "Not in forever. When the last person quit a few years back, they just didn't replace her."

I was intrigued. In my own school, my interns' field placements the previous year, and nationally, there had been a turnover of English teachers. It did not escape me that most of the teachers who left had been teaching at least five years. And yet, at Laurel Bluff, there were zero teaching vacancies in the English department.

During my third year of the assistantship, which was my second year of supervising English interns at Laurel Bluff, double gift baskets were once again distributed in the fall. And, like the previous year, no one retired when the school year ended. My research interests flipped. Amidst the depressing national context of high teacher attrition, the English teachers at Laurel Bluff High School were staying, and I wanted to know why. Had I found Edutopia, where the teachers are happy, no one leaves, and there are gift baskets for all? Or were the teachers simply biding their time until retirement? I spent the fourth and final year of my assistantship and my third year of supervising interns at Laurel Bluff in dialogue with the English teachers to attempt to understand what made the school an anomaly in the context of neoliberal educational reforms.

Education policy reform is rife with controversy from every angle. Although some researchers and policymakers claim America's schools are broken and in need of reform (Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2001; Paige, 2006), others maintain public school failure is a myth (Berliner & Glass, 2014; Bracey, 1994; Hatch, 2015; Ravitch, 2013; Rothstein, 1993). There is evidence of increased accountability in the nineties that led to higher student achievement (Hanushek & Raymond, 2004); however, this same success did not extend to No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which failed to generate higher achievement scores in reading (Dee & Jacob, 2011). Interestingly enough, some NCLB studies (Blank, 2011) revealed an overall improvement in achievement for economically disadvantaged students, while others (Darling-Hammond,

2007; Ginicola & Saccoccio, 2008; Meier & Wood, 2004; Neal & Schanzenbach, 2010) provided evidence to support that NCLB may have hurt the children who were farthest behind.

What has been more widely accepted, however, was that the implementation of reform transformed the way teachers taught. Teachers were accountable for delivering increases in test scores, or they were "directly implicated as a primary source of school failure" (Burns, 2007, p. 123). In many states, student achievement scores have been directly linked to teacher evaluations, and therefore, impact employment decisions (Ballou & Springer, 2015). Because of such circumstances, teachers may abandon best practices in lieu of test preparation for the purposes of making achievement gains (K. Gallagher, 2015) and keeping their jobs. Today's teachers are not just required to do their best teaching; they must deliver strong test scores.

Problem Statement

In the midst of the changing face of public education, teaching is a profession with consistent turnover (Ingersoll, 2003; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Much of the conversation has been dominated by studies of teachers who exit the profession within their first five years of teaching (Bolich, 2001; Clandinin et al., 2015; Gallant & Riley, 2014; Schaefer, 2013; Schaefer, Downey, & Clandinin, 2014; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014), because attrition of novice teachers has been identified as deeply problematic for the future of students and education. However, it is also problematic that "teachers likely to leave the profession are more likely than others to have 21+ years of teaching experience (34% vs. 21%)" (Markow & Pieters, 2012, p. 15). Day and Gu (2009) say that ideally, this group of educators "should be at the peak of their expertise and teaching wisdom," "should be providing a model for their less experienced colleagues," and "should be beacons of hope and optimism" for all (p. 455). The implications of

this loss of experience are vast for districts, schools, and the students they serve. Therefore, it is important to explore the impact of education reform policy on experienced teachers.

English teachers are uniquely positioned in education reform because of the pressure imposed on them to prepare students for standardized tests and boost literacy achievement (Hancock & Scherff, 2010). Burns (2007) wrote, "As literacy achievement is a central target for testing in current accountability mandates, literacy teachers and English teachers are particular targets for scrutiny and strict oversight" (p. 123). Many experienced English teachers, particularly those in low-income schools, have witnessed the reduction of classroom writing instruction in favor of increased time for test preparation (McCarthey, 2008). As a result of their teaching experiences under education reform, they are likely to view the profession and even the reform movement through a different lens from their novice colleagues. Hancock and Scherff (2010) wrote, "Understanding issues related to retaining qualified and competent English teachers seems paramount to improving overall student achievement" (p. 328). However, a review of the literature reveals studies and articles on education reform centered on two groups of English teachers: English teachers in their first five years of teaching and English teachers at all levels of experience. There is an absence of literature specific to experienced English teachers' perspectives on education reform as a whole. Consequently, exploring the perspectives of experienced English teachers will fill a gap in the existing canon of literature on education policy reform.

The research on why teachers stay in the profession is minimal. Williams (2003) found that connectedness to peers and teacher autonomy were central to the job satisfaction of 12 exemplary teachers in North Carolina who were identified as "beyond good—the best that exist" (p. 71) and who had a minimum of 15 years of teaching experience. The participants credited

their "effective principals" (p. 74) with influencing many of the conditions needed for them to stay, stating that their principals "value [them] as individuals, take seriously and support their ideas for innovations, and trust them to do their jobs conscientiously without a great deal of oversight" (p. 74). However, the teachers who participated in this study were hand-selected by administrators and central office staff, which delimited the participants to those who held favor with their supervisors. This sampling was problematic because it excluded exemplary educators who may or may not have held favor with their administration, and therefore, the findings regarding administrative support could have been different. It would be worthwhile to conduct additional research, without administrator involvement in participant selection, to learn why teachers stay.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative interview study is to learn how experienced secondary English teachers are impacted by education policy reform, and to find out why they stay in their positions in the context of neoliberal reform. I refer to the school as "rural" both in the title of this work and my research questions to reflect my participants' view of their world; however, the school's official classification is suburban. This study is limited to one of two suburban high schools in a small southeastern county due to their relatively high number of experienced English teachers. I am defining *experienced teachers* as those who have been teaching for five years or more. All ten English faculty members were invited via email to participate in this study because they fit my criteria as experienced teachers. I conducted one to two 30-45 minute interviews with five teachers who responded to my invitation and consented to participate. Drawing on Freire's (1970/2000) dialogical method to influence the dialogic interviews I conducted, I then analyzed the interview transcripts using the constant comparative method.

Research Question

My research questions are as follows:

1. What is the impact of education policy reform on experienced high school English teachers in one rural high school?
2. Why do high school English teachers stay in the profession in the context of neoliberal education?

I interviewed experienced secondary English teachers in one rural school in order to answer these questions.

Theoretical Framework

I am approaching this study via Freirian critical theory. Freire (1970/2000) linked education to social change and acknowledged it as a political act; however, he recognized major issues in that "Education is suffering from narration sickness" (p. 71). I will explain why his work and statements are still relevant at a later point in this section. Freire presented teachers as the narrating leadership, with the power to choose whether to distribute information to students to "receive, memorize, and repeat" in a "banking" style of education (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 72). This particular style of "education for domestication divides teaching and learning, knowing and working, thinking and doing, informing and forming, re-knowing existing knowledge and creating new knowledge" (Freire, 1972, p. 177). In this version of education, the "students are not called upon to know, but to memorize the contents narrated by the teacher" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 80). Students, or as Freire (1970/2000) refers to them, "receptacles" (p. 72), represent the people as they receive and memorize information. The effect is to snuff out critical thinking and questioning, as this model emphasizes the transferal of knowledge from educator to student (Freire, 1970/2000; Freire, 1972; Freire, 1985). Freire (1972) writes of banking

education, “This way of acting is both alienating and “domesticating”, no matter whether the educators are or are not conscious of this” (p. 177).

To pursue liberation, the banking style of education must be rejected in favor of problem-posing education. Using this style, teachers instead facilitate consciousness and creativity with students through dialogue. This transforms education from a “practice of domination” to a “practice of freedom” (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 81).

Our current education system is a business model with required minimum outputs as measured by standardized testing, which mirrors Freire’s (1970/2000) description of the banking style of education. Present day education is an “act of depositing” (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 72) required by federal law. In this sense, teachers are no longer the leadership; they join students as the oppressed. The “narration sickness” (Freire, 1970/2000, p.71) from which present-day education suffers stems from policymakers directing the narrative, not teachers. With each new accountability measure, teacher autonomy diminishes (Hancock & Scherff, 2010). Freire (1970/2000) writes, “to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects” (p. 85). If teachers join students as the oppressed under education reform, the oppressors must be policymakers and those who profit from reform laws. Freire (1970/2000) wrote

> In their unrestrained eagerness to possess, the oppressors develop the conviction that it is possible for them to transform everything into objects of their purchasing power; hence their strictly materialistic concept of existence. Money is the measure of all things, and profit the primary goal. (p. 58).

According to Freire (1970/2000), the end result of prescriptive, banking style education was "a system which achieves neither true knowledge nor true culture" (p. 80). His description defined the same problems we have today.

Cultural Invasion

From Freire's perspective, banking education is a tool used to further the cultural invasion of the oppressed (Mayo, 1995). Specifically, oppressors "impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 152). Present-day educational reforms such as NCLB and RTT use high-stakes testing to culturally invade schools through anti-dialogical action. By requiring teachers to replace creativity and autonomy with the prescriptive teaching model of banking education, they disrupt the teaching profession and learning itself. As Freire (1970/2000) noted, cultural invasion is "always an act of violence" (p. 152) because the originality of the oppressed is at risk or lost.

But policymakers are not content to limit their pursuit of control to teachers and students; they are taking additional measures to indoctrinate society to the necessity of testing and accountability by securing advertisements on television, radio, and other media. Such actions are their attempt to "obscure the real world by a conditioned and specious reasoning about people and the world in general" (Freire, 1985, p. 115-116). When the public views the advertisements, testing gains a presence in their lives, and the notion that testing is important is embedded in their consciousness. Freire (1985) wrote that "...it makes the critical application of their thinking difficult by affording people the illusion that they think correctly" (p. 116). This propaganda may convince the viewers of the goodness of the oppressors' motives and serve as "an efficient instrument for legitimizing this illusion" (Freire, 1985, p. 116). Through manipulation, the means

by which "the dominant elites try to conform the masses to their objectives" (Freire, 1985, p. 147), they invade and shape the culture of society to fit their reform agendas.

Dehumanization

The result of violence inflicted by cultural invasion is dehumanization. According to Freire (1985), "Dehumanization is a concrete expression of alienation and domination" (p. 113). The myth that education is failing is a salacious news topic that is easily and often repeated, thus furthering the reach of cultural invasion. When this myth is perpetuated, policymakers gain further control because teachers lose public support. A public that believes schools are failing will endorse frequent testing to hold underperforming educators accountable. Teachers are then alienated by society and dominated by policymakers, which produces dehumanization. Furthermore, if today's teachers are restricted from creating their world and reduced to being "totally dependent, insecure, and permanently threatened" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 145), they will lack fulfillment. This experience, too, becomes an "effective means of dehumanization" (Freire, 1970/2000, pp. 145). The prescriptive teaching style of banking education is used to invade the teaching profession. The anti-dialogical action prohibits teachers from creating their world, as well as threatens teachers with consequences for failing to deliver high test scores, thus fueling dehumanization.

Duality

The prescriptive system described in Freire's (1970/2000) work centers on the theme of power, which I am defining within the context of this study as the means to oppress or liberate. Contradictions, which are described in a translator's note in Freire's (1970/2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as the "dialectical conflict between opposing social forces" (p. 46), are central to this power. They create a duality within the oppressed, where their consciousness competes

against the consciousness of the oppressor that they have unknowingly internalized (Freire, 1970/2000). In present-day education, however, the initial duality is forced. By making high test scores both a job component and a standard of good teaching, policymakers seamlessly embed their ideals in the teachers' consciousness. Teachers have an internalized desire for their students to score well because of education's unsubstantiated assumption that student performance correlates to teaching performance. They want to be perceived as good teachers, and they want to *be* good teachers. Thus, they want their students to score well even if they fundamentally disagree with testing culture and neoliberal reforms. The oppressed teachers' desire for freedom and autonomy conflicts with their internalization of policymakers' education reform ideologies, resulting in a "crisis of self" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 61). How they respond to their oppression, whether it is with acceptance of the exploitation or through "forms of rebellious action" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 64) that lead to revolution, will guide the future of public education.

Limitations

I have no control over the gender, age, or other demographic information of participants. I have a preexisting relationship with the participants due to my work as an intern supervisor in this school. These relationships could affect what participants choose to share, as well as how I interpret it.

Definitions of Terms

- *Experienced teacher*: For the purpose of this study, an experienced teacher is an educator who has taught five years or more.
- *Power*: The means to oppress or liberate (Freire, 1970/2000).
- *Oppression*: "Overwhelming control" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 77).

- *Myths*: "Beliefs in things that may or may not be true but that fill the void left by ignorance" (Berliner & Glass, 2014, p. 1).
- *Critical Praxis*: The power developed by the people to critically perceive their oppressive reality in order to transform it and gain power (Freire, 1970/2000).
- *Dialogue*: "The encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world" that allows people to "achieve significance as human beings" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 88).
- *Instructional day*: For the purpose of this study, an instructional day is a regular school day that does not include test preparation or testing.

Organization of Study

In this chapter, I explained my interest in why secondary English teachers stay in their classrooms in the midst of neoliberal school reform. In chapter two, I will review the history of education reform, from Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty that launched the ESEA of 1965, to H.R. 610, the congressional bill seeking to repeal the ESEA of 1965. In chapter three, I will present my research methodology, including selection of site, participants, data collection methods, and data analysis methods. I will also share demographic school and participant information. In chapter four, I will share my findings and discuss them. Finally, in chapter five, I will share implications for future study.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

The last fifty-two years (1965-2017) have produced many changes in education through the phenomenon of school reform. Legislative actions have transferred state control of public education to the jurisdiction of the federal government (Allington, 2010). Specifically, this legislation has emerged as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), its reauthorization as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), Race to the Top (RTT), a grant funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the most recent reauthorization of ESEA. The history of educational reform spins a trajectory that must be explored in order to understand increased federal involvement in America's schools.

National Policy Context

President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty began in 1964 through the creation of Head Start (Ravitch, 2013). This preschool program served needy children in the first federal effort to provide equity through education (Spring, 2014). In 1965, Johnson signed the ESEA into law, adding another education component to his War on Poverty. Title I of the ESEA provided additional monies to schools in order to grant "educationally deprived" (Spring, 2014, p. 5)" children access to "smaller classes, textbooks, and the additional teachers and resources they needed" (Ravitch, 2013, p. 280). At this time, the role of the federal government in education was to "subsidize the education of the neediest students, enforce civil rights, conduct research, gather information, and subsidize college costs" (Ravitch, 2011a, p. 246). States still retained autonomy, albeit with increased funding to attempt to level the playing field between children of the rich and the poor.

According to Ravitch (2011a), education reform took a wrong turn in 1983 with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (*ANAR*), the "all-time blockbuster of education reports," (p. 23). Written by the National Commission of Excellence in Education, it warns of America's future decline in global competitiveness due to systemic institutional complacency and curriculum content erosion. *ANAR* (1983) begins by saying that our nation's schools and colleges are:

> routinely called on to provide solutions to personal, social, and political problems that the home and other institutions either will not or cannot resolve. We must understand that these demands on our schools and colleges often exact an educational cost as well as a financial one (para. 4).

Whereas ESEA acknowledged societal issues of poverty by providing funding to increase equity for needy students (Ravitch, 2013), *ANAR* blamed educators and institutions for economic woes (Berliner & Glass, 2014). The effect was that the public believed schools were responsible for dealing with societal problems in addition to education and failing miserably at both. In fact, the only area in the entire document that concedes there are influences on a child outside the school experience is the end section addressed to parents and students (Rothstein, 2008). At the conclusion of the recommendations under the subheadings "A Word to Parents and Students" and "To Parents," *ANAR* (1983) urges parents to follow these instructions:

> As surely as you are your child's first and most influential teacher, your child's ideas about education and its significance begin with you. You must be a *living* example of what you expect your children to honor and to emulate. Moreover, you bear a responsibility to participate actively in your child's education (para. 3).

Parents are also advised to "discourage satisfaction with mediocrity" (para. 3). Responsibility is imparted upon students with the warning, "You forfeit your chance for life at its fullest when you

withhold your best effort in learning…Have high expectations for yourself and convert every challenge into an opportunity" (para. 4). Even though these parting words prove that it will take more than the actions of schools to improve education (Rothstein, 2008), they do not cancel *ANAR*'s demand for the dramatic overhaul of education or alleviate the blame imposed on educators. Schools employing the bottom fourth of all high school and college graduates were then supposed to cure society's ills, thus propelling America to the top of global competition through education (*ANAR*, 1983). Rothstein (2008) notes, "*A Nation at Risk*…changed the national conversation about education…to an assumption that schools alone could raise and equalize student achievement" (para. 53). Thus, federal reform shifted from addressing the impact of financial inequity on education to America's supposed inability to compete globally due to the education system's alleged complacency and failings.

President Reagan unsuccessfully sought to use *ANAR* as leverage to eradicate the U.S. Department of Education (Berliner & Glass, 2014). The outcome, however, resulted in the beginning of the short-lived national standards movement, which sputtered to an end in the mid-1990s. It also garnered the justification of a myriad of reforms needed to pluck American schools out of alleged mediocrity (Ravitch, 2011a). Rothstein (2008) noted, "Policymakers who believed they could do no harm because American schools were already in a state of collapse have imposed radical reforms without careful consideration of possible unintended adverse consequences" (para. 9). Even though little was noted about testing, accountability, and choice in *ANAR* (Ravitch, 2013), the prospect of a dire American future spurred many states to make changes. Over half of the nation began to require students to pass more challenging high school exit exams as a graduation requirement (Berliner & Glass, 2014). As a result of a belief in

decline, *ANAR*'s call to increase standardized testing drove the high-stakes testing movement toward the talking points of NCLB (Rothstein, 2008).

During his tenure as governor of Texas, George W. Bush guided the state through sweeping reforms that included increased standardized testing and accountability. Unlike previous reforms, this method boasted proof of positive results and was later heralded by Bush as the "Texas miracle" on his campaign trail for the presidency (Ravitch, 2013, p. 11). The idea was appealing to members of Congress, activists, and media. If those reforms had narrowed the achievement gap and lowered the high school dropout rate in Texas, they would surely produce the same results on a national level if the legislation were passed as NCLB. But as time revealed, these reforms had not, in fact, created a miraculous narrowing of the achievement gap. At best, the results were a mirage of an education utopia; at worst, they were an outright fallacy.

Haney (2000) argues that certain provisions were in place to guarantee the illusion of higher scores on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). For instance, special education identification numbers doubled at the time of prime test eligibility, which rendered those students' scores weightless in terms of school accountability (Haney, 2000). Schools also avoided accountability measures when other groups of students dropped out (Haney, 2000) or were absent on test days. Arbitrary passing scores on the TAAS, combined with the immediate achievement of secondary school students in Texas, directly contradicted the state's NAEP scores (Haney, 2000). Furthermore, when surveyed, Texas educators felt that increased TAAS emphasis had adverse effects on at-risk students, contributed to retention and dropout rates, and stole real learning from classroom time due to test preparation (Haney, 2000). Among Haney's (2000) findings, educators reported, "Emphasis on TAAS is hurting more than helping teaching and learning in Texas schools" (p. 122). The narrowed curriculum detracted from public

education. As reported by Ravitch (2011a), scholars in 2000 argued about an inverse ratio of rising test scores and graduation rates to a skyrocketing dropout rate: “As low-performing students gave up on education, the statistics got better and better” (p. 96). Still, national praise was heaped on a movement that appeared to be saving education. The tactics schools used to evade detection of failure allowed the public to believe in the miracle of 1990s Texas reform.

In addition to allegedly saving the children from a subpar education and low expectations, the Texas miracle allowed the business community to profit. One of the most notable profiteers was Randy Best, whose Voyager Expanded Learning grew out of consultations with Texas Reading Initiative advisors. With the support of then-Gov. George Bush, it was mandated through a 2003 bill that the Texas Education Agency must “select Voyager as the single statewide provider of a reading program for at-risk students” (Lewis, 2006, p. 259). This was a $12 million coup for Best, whose success followed Bush to the White House and expanded to national proportions (Lewis, 2006).

When President George W. Bush signed NCLB, the reauthorization of the ESEA, into law in January 2002, it radically altered the role of the federal government in education. The law mandated that students in grades three through eight be tested annually in reading and mathematics, with the end goal of 100 percent proficiency by 2014 (Metcalf, 2002; Ravitch, 2013). The idealized policy glowed on paper, but had both impractical and impossible real-life applications. Furthermore, Kantor and Lowe (2006) state that NCLB:

> Rejects the idea that there is a connection between class and racial inequality and school achievement at all, or, to put it more broadly, the ‘problem of schooling’ is somehow unconnected to the larger issues of inequality in which schools exist. (as cited in Allington, 2010)

Former Assistant Secretary of Education Diane Ravitch also recognized the discrepancy. In an open letter to Lamar Alexander on her blog, she recounted this incident from a 2002 panel:

> I was in the audience, and I stood up and asked you whether you truly believed that 100% of all children in grades 3-8 would be "proficient" by 2014. You answered, "No, Diane, but we think it is good to have goals." (Ravitch, 2015d)

However, it was not merely a goal; it was a mandate. If schools failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as measured by test scores, they were deemed to be failing. Schools with consistent failing scores were subject to extreme interventions and closure by the federal government. Ravitch (2011a) said, "For the first time in American history, a *federal* law required local public schools to close their doors, convert to private management, or fire the staff" (p. 246). Unfortunately, students with disabilities typically comprised the group that was not making adequate progress, and "schools that were likeliest to be labeled as failing enrolled high proportions of poor and minority students" (Ravitch, 2013, p. 11). Thus, the very students the Title I monies were intended to serve were penalized for low test scores under the terms of NCLB. Berliner (2013) surmised, "In the current policy environment we often end up alienating the youth and families we most want to help, while simultaneously burdening teachers with demands for success that are beyond their capabilities" (p. 3).

With the passing of NCLB, every child would have access to an equitable education regardless of income level as evidenced by the phrasing of the law. This would appear to be in agreement with principles behind Johnson's initial War on Poverty. However, where the ESEA stated a focus on "meeting the special educational needs of educationally deprived children" (P.L. 89-10), NCLB (P.L. 107-110) opened with, "Title I—Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged" (as cited in Spring, 2014, p. 4). This phrasing denotes two

significant changes. One is the evolution from the word “deprived” to “disadvantaged” (Spring, 2014). The other is the shift in focus from meeting students’ educational needs to improving their achievement. No longer would the federal government assist by providing access to educational programs to needy children; it would now demand achievement results. And as evidenced by the Texas miracle, standardized test scores and increased accountability would all but guarantee success (Ravitch, 2013).

In order to generate positive perceptions, powerful players assumed supporting roles. Metcalf (2002) notes that guests at the White House on Bush’s first day included “education leaders” (p. 18) who were also Fortune 500 CEOs. The inclusion of key business players revolutionized education in several ways. One, it introduced additional people into public education who were unqualified to make and influence education policy decisions. Two, it provided them the opportunity and platform to vocalize how achievement should be measured, and make immense profits from the implementation of those assessments. Three, it gave the impression that education required a firm, corporate hand to be successful since it had supposedly floundered when left to its own devices. If the behemoths of big business measured success by their output, or profits, and held their employees accountable, surely their influence and business model would produce the same output, or test scores, in education.

In return for their careful intervention, big business would in turn gain a monumental stake in the multi-billion dollar education industry. It was no coincidence that NCLB forced districts on a national scale to purchase tests and accountability measures to stay in compliance with the law. Lewis (2006) stated, “The potential for 20% of Title I monies to go to providers of supplemental educational services under the No Child Left Behind Act must seem like manna

from heaven to the private sector" (p. 260). Profits surged exponentially for existing and created businesses that provided training, consultants, and program materials for review and assessment.

Bush filled the top reform player roles with his Texas supporters. For his secretary of education, he appointed Rod Paige, a former superintendent of Houston schools and an ardent supporter of Voyager (Harkinson, 2008). He then selected G. Reid Lyon, a consultant on the Texas Reading Initiative, as a reading advisor and co-writer on the section of NCLB that designated the conditions upon which states would receive funding for reading programming (Harkinson, 2008). Lyon's portion was essential to schools' abilities to comply with NCLB, which had drastically changed the landscape of achievement.

Although NCLB mandated yearly testing in reading and mathematics for students in grades 3-8, it also focused attention on students' literacy in earlier grades. A key component of the law was the provision for Reading First, a "$900-million-a-year project that offers states grants to improve reading instruction for children in kindergarten through third grade" (Glenn, 2007, p. A8). Certain conditions were required before grants would be awarded. To be considered, states had to select programs utilizing "scientifically based reading research" (Harkinson, 2008). Additionally, programs had to align with the National Reading Panel's five elements of effective instruction (Glenn, 2007). Reading First sounded like a reasonable step toward increasing literacy for children in kindergarten through third grade. However, its implementation soon brought accusations of malfeasance (Glenn, 2007).

A federal committee comprised of eight scholars, four of whom were from the University of Oregon, selected qualifying programs for Reading First (Glenn, 2007). Four of the eight scholars, including Roland H. Good, had also worked for Randy Best's Voyager Learning (Harkinson, 2008). The committee quickly became immersed in controversy when member

Roland H. Good's program, Dynamic Indicators of Early Literary Skills (DIBELS), unofficially became the official assessment of Reading First (Brownstein & Hicks, 2005). The committee at Oregon State linked their website of recommendations, including DIBELS, to the federal website, giving the appearance that their personal recommendations were federal (Allington, 2009). The Reading First training manual exclusively featured DIBELS, which cemented their national endorsement of Good's program (Harkinson, 2008). Combined pressure from USDE officials and the listing on the website itself resulted in 37 states selecting DIBELS as their reading assessment (Allington, 2009; Brownstein & Hicks, 2005). A few years later, Harkinson (2008) reported that a total of 45 states adopted DIBELS to assess Reading First students. States and scholars whose proposals did not include Good's program questioned the rejections they received, as well as the validity of the committee's assertion that DIBELS was the best reading program (Manzo, 2005). Indeed, DIBELS was criticized for measuring students' reading speed of nonsense words, and failing to gauge students' comprehension levels (Manzo, 2005). Critics were quick to question the appropriateness of the Oregon committee's endorsement of Good's program amid allegations of cronyism (Paley, 2007).

Good claimed that he recused himself from the selection of his program, and that DIBELS was selected on its own merit (Glenn, 2007). However, there are many problematic aspects of this scenario. The exclusion of proven, research-based programs such as Robert E. Slavin's Success for All from the committee's list of suggested programs fueled accusations that the committee's deliberations were rife with favoritism (Harkinson, 2008). Good noted that DIBELS was available as a free download to deny wrongdoing (Glenn, 2007). However, Sopris West sold supplementary DIBELS materials for profit (Manzo, 2005), earning royalties for Good that he donated to his employer, the University of Oregon (Paley, 2007). Despite the donations,

Good also admitted earning a substantial personal income from district and state instructional seminars (Glenn, 2007). Investigations were launched, but Good continued to generate money from his program's inclusion in Reading First.

Critics noted that DIBELS bore a similarity to "a test that Voyager had hired [Good] to build into its reading program" (Harkinson, 2008, p. 61). This commonality and the fact that Voyager "clearly taught to the test" (Harkinson, 2008, p. 61) meant that Randy Best's program was poised to work in tandem with DIBELS to exponential profit margins—or, in Best's words, it became "a selling juggernaut" (p. 60) and grossed around $25 million per year from Reading First alone. Prior to this success, Best made contributions to members of Congress, school district leaders, and Bush in his gubernatorial and presidential campaigns (Lewis, 2006). Once Reading First was in motion, Best's program then benefitted from Congressional allotment of grant money for school districts to purchase Voyager (Lewis, 2006). Harkinson (2008) surmised that the influential friendship between Best and top officials resulted in Voyager's dramatic overnight rise from obscurity to "one of the nation's most sought after reading-curriculum companies" (p. 59). Best made over $350 million when he sold the company in 2005 (Paley, 2007).

Meanwhile, schools continued to purchase tests and programs as components of NCLB's mandated standardized testing. To avoid using operational funds to purchase expensive tests, Reading First grants were necessary to offset costs. However, schools, districts, and critics claimed that they had to follow the recommendation of the Oregon committee via website and handbook (Glenn, 2007), and commit to using DIBELS if they wanted to acquire a Reading First grant (Manzo, 2005). Despite the colossal investment in reading programs and the burgeoning opportunities for those with entrepreneurial leanings, Gamse, et al. (2008) noted that a federal

evaluation of Reading First's effects on reading achievement had revealed no positive effects (as cited in Allington, 2010). Time and money spent teaching to the test had narrowed the curriculum from the comprehensive education American children had enjoyed for decades into one bent on high-stakes test preparation and "minimum competency" (Rothstein, 2008, para. 13).

As NCLB's 2014 deadline crept closer without miraculous gains in math and reading achievement, panic set in at the district and state levels, leading to disastrous consequences. States thwarted the inevitable fallout by taking advantage of NCLB's lack of official achievement criteria; raw proficiency scores were at their discretion. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (2011) lamented states' decreased academic standards as a casualty of NCLB's influence. In states' pursuit to meet NCLB, they lowered content difficulty and minimum proficiency requirements, which skewed test results (Strauss, 2009). Additionally, without a national baseline to define proficiency, it was impossible to determine whether students in one state were in actuality achieving at higher levels than those in neighboring states. Berliner warned that the potential for testing corruption requires us to discern whether increased scores are "a real indicator of greater learning or some form of deception" (Strauss, 2009). Regardless of final raw score calculations and the computation of percentages, increased numbers of students began to score proficient on standardized tests.

Unfortunately, districts sought further impunity from the law through testing impropriety. Multiple accounts of test administrators cheating on standardized tests began to trickle into mainstream media from Atlanta and Washington, D.C. (Ravitch, 2013). In the Atlanta Public Schools (APS), investigators called teachers' working conditions a "culture of fear" (Vogell, 2011, p. 1) that influenced their decision to remain silent during staff test erasure parties led by principals. Educators who reported wrongdoing to principals and the superintendent were

penalized and threatened with loss of employment (Vogell, 2011). Similarly, after Michelle Rhee's reign as superintendent in Washington, an investigation by *USA Today* revealed widespread cheating at over half the district's schools, and one in particular showed doubled test scores in reading proficiency in just two years (Ravitch, 2013). However, unlike in Atlanta, the inspector general of the U.S. Department of Education did not see cause to launch a wider investigation in D.C., and no one shouldered the responsibility for the abrupt rise and fall of test scores (Ravitch, 2013). Despite their efforts to appear to be superior districts, the achievement gap still existed. Their students had not achieved 100% proficiency in reading and math, and like every district in America, their schools still risked being closed if they did not meet the criteria set forth by NCLB.

The government needed to act in order to avert the catastrophe of every school in America closing due to failing scores. Under the Obama administration, Race to the Top (RTT) was enacted through the ARRA grant (Spring, 2014). In 2011, Arne Duncan sent a letter to chief state school officers with an application for ESEA flexibility, calling it a "voluntary opportunity" for each state (para. 3). After a rigorous application process, states receiving the grant were issued waivers for failing to meet the government's projected 2014 goal. In exchange, states developed comprehensive plans to address a myriad of educational concerns ranging from the achievement gap to teacher evaluations (Ravitch, 2013). No longer would the government focus on the standardized test scores of NCLB; RTT specifically pointed to teachers as the cause of student outcomes (Ravitch, 2013). RTT required states to make legislative changes to tie teacher evaluations to student achievement, adopt the widespread use of value-added measurement (VAMs), and agree to adopt and implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) before they were field-tested for appropriateness (Ravitch, 2011a). Under the umbrella of RTT, the

government could continue the path to improved achievement, albeit with increased focus on big business principles such as output and accountability. The move was a complete reversal from the impetus of helping needy students in the early days of school reform. Instead, RTT demanded competition between states for a finite amount of grant money (Ravitch, 2013). Specific, numerical scores on a definitive scale allegedly guided the selection process (Peterson & Rothstein, 2010). However, much like the Oregon Reading First committee's actions under NCLB, the assessment of states' plans to complete RTT criteria was completely subjective (Peterson & Rothstein, 2010).

The steps needed to earn a RTT grant were simply stated. Each concession toward business reform, as evidenced by a business plan for its execution, earned a specified amount of points toward "winning" the RTT grant. Tennessee and Delaware had the distinction of being the first states to win the grant, and subsequently, making the first legislative changes (U.S. Department of Eduction, 2010). In Tennessee, teacher frustrations compounded when the new evaluation system, the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM), was quickly implemented. Among the complaints, many teachers were appalled to learn that they would be evaluated using test scores from students in other teachers' classes, some in subjects they did not teach. Winerip (2011) reported in *The New York Times*, "If ever proof were needed for the notion that it's a good idea to look before you leap, it's the implementation of Race to the Top in Tennessee" (para. 10).

Value-Added Measures (VAMs) require high stakes tests to measure and predict student growth and achievement. As Berliner and Glass (2014) note, these tests are "known to narrow the curriculum in many schools and to foster what has come to be known as drill-and-kill test preparation" (p. 59). Scripted curricula and intensive testing regimes are byproducts of a narrow

curriculum that lowers standards—the very thing *ANAR* condemned (Rothstein, 2008). In spite of this, Wilcox and Finn (1999) support rewarding teachers "whose students show the most improvement on the test," and refer to pupil achievement gains as "the holy grail of educational reform" (as cited in Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001, p. 9). Finn is the distinguished senior fellow and president emeritus of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, which is funded by some of the most influential names in big business: The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, The Eli and Edith Broad Foundation, and The Walton Family Foundation (Thomas Fordham Institute, 2011). Just two years ago, its mission page claimed it promoted education reform by "producing rigorous policy research and incisive analysis," "building coalitions with policymakers," and "advocating bold solutions and comprehensive responses (Thomas Fordham Institute, 2011)." The institute also claimed to advance a "more productive, equitable, and efficient education system (Thomas Fordham Institute, 2011)." However, the page has recently been updated, and most noticeably, the advancement of a "more productive, equitable, and efficient education system" is no longer listed. The page now lists the following as the ways it promotes education reform:

> Producing relevant, rigorous policy research and analysis; providing "thought leadership" to policy makers, philanthropists, advocacy groups, and others through timely and persuasive commentary; advocating sound education policies in Ohio related to standards, assessments, school choice, and other promising reforms; serving as a model charter school authorizer and sharing our lessons throughout and beyond Ohio; and incubating new ideas, innovations, organizations, school models, and visionary leaders to advance education excellence. (Thomas Fordham Institute, 2011)

The organization intends to incubate visionary leaders to give birth to educational excellence; however, their definition of "excellence" is very much in question when it excludes

equity and is determined by testing data. For instance, the VAM scores currently used to gauge teacher effectiveness may not be a clear indicator of teacher skill and performance. The American Statistical Association [ASA] (2014) reports:

> Most VAM studies find that teachers account for about 1% to 14% of the variability in test scores, and that the majority of opportunities for quality improvement are found in the system-level conditions. Ranking teachers by their VAM scores can have unintended consequences that reduce quality. (p. 2)

Furthermore, ASA states, "The majority of the variation in test scores is attributable to factors outside of the teacher's control such as student and family background, poverty, curriculum, and unmeasured influences" (p. 7). Similarly, Berliner (2013) claims that out-of-school variables such as family income, violence rate, medical and dental care, and availability of food account for around 60% of the variance in school achievement scores; school itself only accounts for about 20% in achievement test scores, with teachers comprising only a small variable of that figure. Nevertheless, these unstable VAM rankings forged from large standard errors are used to determine teacher efficacy, make tenure decisions, and in some cases, begin corrective action or termination (ASA, 2014).

As a mandatory part of RTT, VAMs have enjoyed forced credibility and acceptance in determining teacher effect rankings, but the ruling in a seminal court case in New York's Great Neck school district may have directly impacted the future use of VAM scores across the nation. Fourth grade teacher Sheri G. Lederman filed a case against New York education officials that "challenges the rationality of the VAM model" and alleges that its use "punishes excellence in education through a statistical black box which no rational educator or fact finder could see as fair, accurate, or reliable" (Strauss, 2015a). Lederman, an experienced teacher described by her

superintendent as having a "flawless record," was labeled ineffective by the state when scores from her 2013-2014 students were similar to those of her 2012-2013 students (Strauss, 2015a). Lederman's case appeared before New York Supreme Court Justice Roger McDonough accompanied by affidavits of support from education experts including Linda Darling-Hammond. According to Carol Burris (Strauss, 2015a), Justice McDonough pointed out the subjectivity and "imprecise measure" of the VAM model's bell curve to Assistant Attorney General Galligan, acknowledging that failures would be required—specifically, seven percent of all educators would automatically be labeled ineffective (para. 8). Burris recounted the arguments of Lederman's attorney and husband, Bruce Lederman:

> He explained that a bell curve with its forced failures violates that law that requires that every teacher must be able to get all scores. Not only did he want the court to set aside his wife's score, he wanted the court to "declare the measure an abuse of discretion" because "the State Education Department does not get a pass on unreasonable and irrational actions." (para. 26)

In what is believed to be the first such decision in a teacher evaluation case, Justice McDonough ruled in favor of Lederman, calling her evaluation by VAMs "arbitrary" and "capricious" (Strauss, 2016a, para. 14). However, because New York's evaluation regulations have changed, Justice McDonough's ruling could not extend beyond Lederman's case (Strauss, 2016a). Still, the ruling could spark a litany of teacher lawsuits against their respective states across the nation. For now, educators will continue to strive to make gains against each other as mandated by the terms of RTT and their respective state laws.

RTT's competition effect was twofold: states were required to compete for the grant money, and teachers were pitted against their peers in RTT states by nature of VAM scores. As

the ASA warns, "Overreliance on VAM scores may foster a competitive environment, discouraging collaboration and efforts to improve the educational system as a whole" (p. 6). Merit pay has further threatened the collaborative spirit of education through teacher competition. Despite the lack of a single current study where merit pay actually worked, it has become the means of choice for districts hoping to spur teachers toward the finish line of increased student achievement. Murnane and Cohen (1986) noted that teachers working for merit pay have an increased chance of narrowing the curriculum to the tested subjects, devoting more time to the students who will show the most growth and neglecting others, and losing their collaborative environment with other educators (as cited by Ravitch, 2013). Reformers believe that if they extend the right motivational carrot or consequence, such as job loss, to educators, the achievement gap will close (Ravitch, 2013). However, Berliner and Glass (2014) state that "accountability measures built on this premise are a hoax because it is assumed that teachers have more control over student achievement than they actually do" (p. 52). Additionally, Murnane and Cohen's (1986) research showed that teachers who received poor ratings were not motivated to improve; their reaction was to work "less hard" due to perceived unfairness and demoralization (as cited by Ravitch, 2013, p. 118). It has not been proven that current merit pay practices enacted through RTT encourage higher performance levels from teachers or students, and yet, believers in the strategy continue to tweak it with repeated attempts for success and yield continued failures (Ravitch, 2013).

Within a few short years, various media outlets have openly shifted toward the reformers' agenda. For instance, in a 2011 *Time Magazine* article, Warner calls for the reform of "this business modeled-mindset" of education reform (para. 11). As the favorite "feel-good hobby" of the one percent, school reform ignores the impact of poverty on test scores (para. 1). Warner

insists that public response to education must change to reflect the impact of poverty, not teachers, on test scores. By 2014, *Time Magazine's* cover boasted the sensational title, "Rotten Apples: It's Nearly Impossible to Fire a Bad Teacher." The article by Hayley Sweetland Edwards (2014) showcases how David Welch, a Silicon Valley tycoon with no background in education, plans to devote his time and funds to fixing a system that "doesn't want to acknowledge it's failing, much less do anything about it" (p. 36). Convinced that teacher tenure harms children, Welch wielded his considerable power and influence to win *Vergara v. California*, which declared teacher tenure laws unconstitutional. Interestingly, Edwards (2014) defines tenure as "permanent employment status designed to protect them from unfair dismissal" (p. 37). Although tenure does protect from unfair dismissal, Edwards' use of the phrase "permanent employment status" is misleading to the general public and conveys that teaching jobs are permanent once tenure is attained. According to Ravitch (2010), "tenure means due process," meaning a tenured teacher has the right to a hearing "before an impartial arbitrator, where the teacher has the right to see the evidence and the grounds for the charges against him or her and to offer a defense" (p. 127). Teachers with tenure are still subject to termination. Edwards' (2014) inaccurate definition in a national publication read by millions of subscribers further taints the public perception of teachers and perpetuates the ignorance of tenure benefits.

As school reforms have multiplied over time, charter schools have increased in number. NCLB merely listed charter school conversion as a recommendation for failing schools (Ravitch, 2013). By the time RTT emerged in 2009, the U.S. Department of Education required competing states to lift their limits on charter schools (Ravitch, 2013; Spring, 2014). Spring (2014) connects the Obama administration's belief that charter schools will successfully serve disadvantaged children to a "new War on Poverty" (p. 12). However, this revitalization of a decades-old war

through charter schools has many issues. Among the most problematic, researchers cite the hijacking of public education funding for private gain, the rejection of students with disabilities who may cause test scores to plummet, and the quiet ejection of those who do not meet performance expectations. Charter schools enjoy selectivity due to their status as "private entities," and yet, they operate on tax dollars that have traditionally been earmarked for public education (Ravitch, 2013).

Lakoff (2009) defines privateering as:

> A special case of privatization in which the capacity of government to carry out critical moral missions is systematically destroyed from within the government itself, while public funds are used to provide capital for private corporations to take over those critical functions of government and charge the public a great deal for doing so, while avoiding all accountability. (p. 133)

This definition adequately describes charter schools due to several points. One, policymakers within government have attributed higher status to charter schools over public schools. Two, for-profit charters are, in fact, run by private corporations and funded with public monies. Three, charter schools face none of the accountability demanded of public schools, their teachers, and their students.

The Democrats for Education Reform contend that charter schools should be supported because they are successfully closing the achievement gap (Spring, 2014); however, Ravitch (2011) notes the consensus of most research studies that charter schools do not outperform public schools. This has recently come to light in Tennessee, where public outcry is growing over the allocation of public dollars to the Achievement School District (ASD), a growing charter school network that takes over schools with the lowest five percent of test scores in Memphis and

Nashville (Boucher, 2015). Communities are rallying to save their schools, listing abrupt school takeovers and loss of teacher jobs among their reasons for resistance to the ASD (Boucher, 2015; Spears, 2014). A longitudinal analysis of ASD performance revealed that the ASD takeover had not resulted in significant growth; there were many occasions where schools' growth scores were higher prior to ASD takeover (Howard, 2014). This scenario is not exclusive to Tennessee; in Indiana, Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Washington, D.C., the findings are the same: public schools are outperforming charter schools (Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, 2015). In fact, Berliner and Glass (2014) note that states such as Arizona, Florida, Ohio, and Texas, where charter schools enjoy the benefits of charter school laws, "rank highest among the states where traditional public school students outperform charter school students" (p. 23).

Parent complaints, use of public funds for private gain, and lackluster student achievement results have muddied the unchecked path RTT paved for charter school expansion. In Washington State, the Supreme Court recently ruled that charter schools are unconstitutional. (Higgins, 2015). Chief Justice Barbara Madson determined that charter schools were not common, and therefore, it is unconstitutional to fund them with monies intended for "common schools" (para. 9). A coalition of several groups including the Washington Education Association and the Washington Association of School Administrators filed the lawsuit in July 2013. Their complaint stemmed from the lack of accountability charter schools' appointed boards faced for their spending of public dollars. This case could have significant implications for the legalities of charter school operations in other states.

According to Ravitch (2011b), "None of the Obama administration's reforms—remarkably similar to those of the Bush administration—is supported by experience or evidence" (para. 8). NCLB forced public education to deliver results through standardized testing, or face

closure (Ravitch, 2011a). RTT saved schools from NCLB's sanctions, but not without imposing its own unproven reforms that have allowed the privatization of education to flourish and directed all accountability and blame to educators (Ravitch, 2013). Both have led away from the initial intent of ESEA, which was to provide equity to needy children through education, and steered education toward the private sector.

In December of 2015, the ESEA was reauthorized under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which effectively rewrote many of the provisions of NCLB (Klein, 2016). The U.S. Department of Education (2015) explains on its website that "over time, NCLB's prescriptive requirements became increasingly unworkable for schools and educators" (para. 4), which prompted the Obama administration to pursue a better law for America's students. Under the ESSA, which will be fully implemented in the 2017-2018 school year, states are still required to submit accountability plans to the Department of Education (Klein, 2016). Even though states may develop their own goals, they must address test proficiency, graduation rates, and English-language proficiency, as well as an expectation that underperforming groups will close gaps in graduation rates and achievement (Klein, 2016). States will be permitted to rate their schools through their own created accountability systems, identify the bottom 5 percent of schools, and choose how to help them meet their objectives (Klein, 2016).

Under this new bill, the Secretary of Education may not mandate "any aspect of the accountability system including teacher evaluation systems or defining teacher effectiveness" (National Education Association [NEA], 2015b, p. 1). Teacher evaluations under ESSA are no longer required to be weighted substantially by student test scores. States are free to make their own choices, including adopting the use of student achievement, student growth, and scores from classroom observation rubrics in the design and implementation of evaluation systems (NEA,

2015b). These evaluation results may be used "to inform decision-making about…personnel decisions" (NEA, 2015b, p. 1).

Testing measures are also affected by the ESSA. First, the ESSA eliminates Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as an accountability measure (NEA, 2015b). Second, it permits states to set a cap for state testing, but continues the requirement for students in grades 3-8 to be tested annually in reading and math (NEA, 2015a). At the high school level, districts may seek permission to use alternative tests such as the SAT, ACT, or Advanced Placement exams in lieu of the high school requirement (NEA, 2015a). Finally, districts will now be required to provide parents with standardized testing opt-out information, as well as allow parents to opt their children out of taking the test if permitted by local and state policies (NEA, 2015a).

The ESSA dramatically reduces many problematic federal requirements, and returns choice in accountability to the states. Therefore, states may continue to evaluate teachers with their preexisting accountability measures, or choose to revise or undo laws that were written in response to NCLB mandates and attaining RTT eligibility. However, these allowances could soon be null. In February of 2017, congressional bill H.R. 899 was introduced in just one sentence: "This bill terminates the Department of Education on December 31, 2018" (H.R. 899, 2017). It is not clear what will happen to existing legislation, such as ESSA, if H.R. 899 becomes law. However, billionaire Betsy DeVos, the newly appointed Education Secretary of the Trump administration, said in an interview with Swan (2017), "It would be fine with me to have myself worked out of a job, but I'm not sure there will be a champion movement in Congress to do that" (as cited in Strauss, 2017).

Another recently introduced bill, H.R. 610, seeks to do the following: "To distribute federal funds for elementary and secondary education in the form of vouchers for eligible

students and to repeal a certain rule relating to nutrition standards in schools" (2017). According to the Congressional Research Service (CRS), this bill repeals the ESEA of 1965, limits the Department of Education's authority to awarding block grants to qualified states, establishes a voucher program, and removes the requirement that children be served school meals meeting certain nutritional standards, such as increased fruits and vegetables. Whereas the ESEA of 1965 sought to provide equity for all children, H.R. 610 would revoke it, starting with the removal of nutritional standards for students' meals. If passed into law, it would bring education reform policy full circle back to 1965. That is, if H.R. 899 does not become law and eliminate all educational policies.

Through the passing of the ESSA, the driving force in education policy reform has not been the result of a single political party pushing an agenda; it has been a bipartisan effort geared toward changing education with a system of punishment and rewards for teachers, and providing a boon for testing companies at the expense of real learning. The one consistent factor across all reforms since 1965 still holds true today: divisive poverty still exists alongside the achievement gap, or as Gorski (2013) refers to it, the "opportunity gap" (p. 83). Education can provide extra resources, but it cannot level the playing field of access and opportunity. Rothstein (2008) warns, "The biggest threats to the next generation's success come from social and economic policy failures, not schools" (para. 30). This is evident from the class-bias within mandated standardized tests that increases the inequities experienced by the poor (Gorski, 2013). And yet, as stated by Metcalf (2002), "liberal faddishness, not chronic underfunding of poorer schools or child poverty itself, is blamed for underachievement" (para. 7).

Impact of Race to the Top on ELA Teachers

Literacy was thrust into the national spotlight in 2001 with the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The law required students in grades three through eight to be tested annually in the areas of reading and math (Ravitch, 2011a). Schools were expected to show improvement each year, culminating in 100% proficiency in tested areas by 2014. Failure to reach these goals would result in sanctions, including closure and charter school conversion (Ravitch, 2015a). As a result of schools' narrowed focus on reading achievement, ELA instruction changed (K. Gallagher, 2015). Assessment-driven instruction directed the course of curriculum, neglecting writing and critical thinking in favor of multiple-choice test preparation. Reading instruction based on surface-level understandings led ELA instruction away from best practices. Despite evidence that NCLB was a "public policy disaster of epic proportions" (Ravitch, 2011b, para. 7), Congress allowed it to continue without modifications.

When Race to the Top (RTT) was offered to states as a "voluntary opportunity" (Duncan, 2011) resulting from the Obama administration's 2009 ARRA grant (Spring, 2014), 40 states and the District of Columbia entered the competition for grant money (Peterson & Rothstein, 2010). The grant meant fiscal relief for states in the midst of a recession and provided a waiver for failing to meet the conditions of NCLB. To earn the grant, states had to submit rigorous plans to address specific educational areas, many of which required legislative changes (Ravitch, 2013). These included tying student achievement scores to teacher evaluations and implementing the unvetted Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which focused heavily on ELA standards. The new legislation passed in the majority of states despite no evidence of the effectiveness of the Obama administration's reforms (Ravitch, 2011b).

The implementation of RTT transferred the blame for lackluster student achievement from schools directly to educators (Ravitch, 2013). Teachers were now responsible for improving achievement via value-added measurement (VAM) scores, or facing punitive actions ranging from low teacher effect scores to loss of employment. To date, a total of 46 states and the District of Columbia have made changes to their teacher evaluation procedures (Gabriel & Allington, 2015). As Ravitch (2014) noted, "the reputation and career of every teacher and principal hinge on student test scores" (p. 7). For ELA teachers, RTT's implementation of the CCSS with high-stakes evaluation consequences has "again diverted…focus from the best practices of literacy instruction" (K. Gallagher, 2015, p. 3).

There are few researchers who have examined the impact of these policy shifts on teachers. Matlock et al. (2015) conducted a study to determine teachers' perceptions of the CCSS and its effects. They found that teachers' views of the CCSS were generally positive; however, some participants' additional interviews painted a "dark picture" (p. 13) of their perceptions. Teachers reported feeling excluded from the school or district-wide implementation of the CCSS, a lack of autonomy over materials and methods used, and pressure from increased accountability measures. Matlock et al. (2015) warned that if school and district leadership made teachers "feel attacked on a macro or micro level, the results will not likely be good for students, schools, states, or teachers" (p. 13). Similarly, Leonardatos and Zahedi (2014) reported that the "culture of distrust and suspicion" (p. 18) created by NCLB and RTT has contributed to the decline in U.S. education. Finally, McCarthey (2008) conducted a study on the impact of NCLB on teachers' writing instruction and found that the focus on testing had affected both the writing curriculum and teacher morale. There was evidence to support that teachers in low-income schools were more restricted by NCLB and faced higher levels of scrutiny, pressure to conform

to prescriptive teaching, and packaged programs (McCarthey, 2008). Some teachers in low-income schools reported that recess and art had been eliminated in favor of increased test preparation time (McCarthey, 2008). In contrast, teachers in high-income schools had greater autonomy in teaching their writing curriculum and received more material resources. McCarthey (2008) stated that "the data tend to demonstrate that many teachers are experiencing NCLB as a repressive means of regulating curriculum through the technology of testing" (p. 499), but identified "pockets of resistance" (p. 499) to policy within the study. The standardized testing craze begun by NCLB continues to drive the accountability culture of RTT that is prevalent in schools across the nation.

Despite the known and developing outcomes of RTT and its emphasis on literacy through implementation of CCSS, little is known about RTT's overall impact on ELA teachers. This is partly because RTT is "NCLB on steroids" (Lonardatos & Zahedi, 2014, p. 18) and its scope includes everything from the CCSS to VAMs as it pertains to each state. It is not a federal mandate, and, as a result, much of researchers' focus has centered on individual branches of RTT instead of the cohesive whole. Some reports of research address the effectiveness of specific RTT reforms as measured by teacher effects on student achievement (Good, 2014; Konstantopoulos, 2014) but they do not explore their impact on educators. The research that does consider the effects of RTT components on general populations of educators is not subject-specific (J. Gallagher, 2015; Lavigne, 2014; Leonardatos & Zahedi, 2014). It does, however, indicate that RTT reforms are not without consequences for the professionals, including ELA teachers, assigned to implement them.

One consequence of high-stakes teacher evaluations that incorporate VAMs is the possibility of thwarting student achievement (Lavigne, 2014). Low morale and firings could

provoke a mass exodus of educators, adding to existing problems of teacher attrition in schools with large numbers of low-income and minority students. In order for teacher evaluations to be effective, they must use reliable and valid measures. However, there are questions as to whether using VAMs to determine half of a teacher's evaluation score is reliable, valid, and fair.

According to Berliner (2014), the use of VAM scores in teacher evaluations may be "fatally flawed" (p. 4) due to the inability to identify and measure classroom variables. Classroom composition effects and the inability to control for them contribute to the instability of VAM scores. When teachers adapt to the dynamics of each group of students, it lowers the "reliability of the instruments we use to measure teaching behavior" (Berliner, 2014, p. 10). As Berliner (2013) notes in an earlier report, "low reliability in assessment instruments always limits validity" (p. 241).

Likewise, Hatch (2015) stated that teacher accountability should be reframed "so assessment is seen as intimately connected to the teaching we do every day" (p. 26). Berliner (2014) found that there is a low correlation between teacher observations and student gain scores, as well as the potential for the misclassification of teacher effect scores. He argued, "You simply cannot ethically and legally use these data for high-stakes decisions about teacher competence" (p. 11). If VAM scores used to determine teacher effectiveness are unreliable and invalid, then teacher evaluations that incorporate them also will be invalid.

Teachers' frustrations with RTT reforms have manifested in lawsuits challenging the use of VAMs to determine teacher effect scores (Strauss, 2015a; Strauss, 2015b) and the constitutionality of using public dollars to fund charter schools for private gain (Higgins, 2015). In New Mexico, teachers' unions are suing the state to invalidate the teacher evaluation system, which, as in many states that vied for RTT funds, bases half of teacher evaluation scores on

student test scores (Ravitch, 2015b). In addition, New Mexico's teachers are currently prohibited from expressing opinions about standardized testing under penalty of being fired, prompting scholars such as Diane Ravitch and Audrey Beardsley to question whether the policy is constitutional (Ravitch, 2015c). Lawsuits from educators continue to accumulate across the nation in response to RTT reforms.

Amidst the "no excuses" educational reforms (Ravitch, 2013, p. 17), teacher departures from schools serving large populations of minority and low-income students continue to attract attention from researchers. The consensus of multiple studies is that teachers leave schools as a result of poor working conditions (Boyd et al., 2011; Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012; Ladd, 2011; Simon & Johnson, 2015). However, it is not apparent whether school reform and, more specifically, RTT were factors in teachers' perceptions of poor working conditions.

According to Sawchuck (2014), enrollment data for teacher preparation programs in each state reveal an accelerated decline of teacher enrollment candidates since 2010. Possible reasons for the decline include teacher layoffs during the recession and perceptions of teaching resulting from "lots of press around changes to teachers' evaluations, more rigorous academic-content standards, and the perception…that teachers are being blamed for schools' problems" (Sawchuck, 2014, p. 10). These factors align with the conditions accepted by states in order to win the RTT grant. Although Sawchuck (2014) does not list the effects of RTT as a factor, the timeline of the decline of teacher candidates syncs with states' implementations of RTT legislative changes. Lavigne (2014) warned that the negative consequences associated with high-stakes teacher evaluation may adversely affect the teacher job market; existing teachers may permanently leave teaching, and fewer people will choose teaching as a career.

Ideas about professionalism have changed along with these reforms. Buchanan (2015) examined how teacher identity is shaped by education reforms. Although eight of nine of her participants were critical of standardized tests, they also measured and validated their success by their students' achievement on standardized tests. Buchanan (2015) explained that these opposing actions are "imprints of how the structure of accountability had shaped teachers' understanding of their work" (p. 712). In fact, accountability discourses have reshaped public education to the point that experienced teachers accept the new norms, fight them, or leave the profession. According to Buchanan (2015), new teachers will develop their professional identities within the accountability discourse due to lack of exposure to other ideas of professionalism.

Although studies have illustrated some of the effects of RTT reforms on general samples of educators, there is a gap in the literature as the reforms pertain to ELA teachers. Additional research is needed to explore and understand the impacts of recent changes in educational policy on educators (Matlock et al., 2015).

Policy Context at Laurel Bluff High School

The history of Laurel Bluff High School. Laurel Bluff High School (LBHS) began its rich and notable history in 1903 at the site of what is now a current day elementary school. By 1927, a new high school was built to accommodate rising student numbers after several area schools combined. The community faced landmark challenges in 1956 when LBHS became the first integrated public school in the south following the Supreme Court's 1954 ruling on *Brown v. Board of Education*. This distinction is often accredited to the 1957 integration of Little Rock Central High School in Arkansas, but Laurel Bluff High's integration occurred one year prior to this. When the inaugural group of 12 African-American students joined the LBHS student body,

the initial community response was positive. However, outside activists and white supremacists descended upon the school and the community of Laurel Bluff, creating pandemonium with protests and propaganda that divided the town and quickly escalated to violence. In 1958, three massive explosions blew the school into pieces as a result of these tensions. While the school was rebuilt, students were bused to a school outside the district to continue their education. Plans for a new school were created in 1963, and by 1968-1969, the new high school was completed. By 1977, vocational programs were added to course offerings. In 1989, LBHS opened a new addition to the school that included a cafeteria, library, science labs, and new classrooms. By 1993, the gym and theatre were renovated, and a new 18-classroom wing was added. Laurel Bluff High School celebrated its 100-year anniversary in 2003. In 2004, for the first time, a female principal was appointed to lead LBHS. Currently, LBHS has a male principal.

Teacher evaluations and state growth measurement. As a condition of RTT, the state in which Laurel Bluff High School is located changed its legislation to tie teacher evaluations to student achievement, as well as implemented value-added measurement (VAMs) and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). A statewide student outcomes-based evaluation model, SPIRIT (pseudonym), derived from the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching's (NIET) TAP model, was implemented in 2011 for educators. All general educators must be evaluated in four domains: instruction, planning, environment, and professionalism. In the early years of its use, several components of the SPIRIT rubric were reduced and streamlined per administrator and teacher feedback. In the third year of the evaluation system, the State Board of Education approved flexibility options that were at the discretion of individual districts within the state. Included in these options was the allowance of portfolio models for teachers in non-tested subjects, as well as the inclusion of student surveys worth up to 5% of teachers' overall

effectiveness. Teachers who scored a 4 or 5 in individual growth could have the option to count it as 100% of their overall VAM score if their district approved the option. An administrator rubric was adopted during the 2014-2015 school year. In 2015, legislation was passed to modify the state's evaluation law to specify the yearly percentage increase of student test scores into teacher evaluations.

A key focus in the state's improvements to teacher evaluation is to reduce "misalignment" between classroom observations and VAM scores. The state describes a misalignment as a discrepancy of two or more levels between the two scores. Specifically, they cite multiple examples of low VAM scores and high classroom observation scores as misalignments in need of correction. In this framing, the VAM score is the constant, and the observation score is the variable to be aligned. According to the state, the alignment of observation feedback specific to a teacher's practice may increase teacher improvement. In other words, this statement establishes that the state identifies VAMs as "a teacher's practice" instead of their actual classroom performance. The reality of this call for alignment by strengthening observation practices and feedback is that the state wants teacher observation scores to match student performance as measured by a test that is constantly evolving around changing standards.

The abrupt implementation of the Common Core State Standards in 2010 before they were field-tested (Ravitch, 2011a) drew complaints from teachers, students, and parents. By 2015, state legislators pressed for the replacement of the CCSS, viewing them as excessive federal control of state education. In response, the governor authorized a review of math and English standards. A special committee was formed by legislative appointment, and then approved by the General Assembly. The standards review process began with the CCSS and allowed public, online review, legislative input, and opportunities for educators to review the

standards. At the end of the 2015-2016 school year, the state approved the state-specific standards in English and math. These new standards will not be implemented until the 2017-2018 school year. In the meantime, the state created Success (pseudonym), a new, mandatory statewide test that debuted and failed during the 2015-2016 school year. This test, which is still aligned to the CCSS and ties VAMs to teacher evaluations, was also administered during the 2016-2017 school year.

In previous years, the quantitative portion of SPIRIT has been worth a total of 50%, with student growth (VAMs) worth 35% and achievement worth 15%. During the fall evaluation pre-conference, teachers and their evaluators select an achievement measure from one of the following: graduation rate, ACT/SAT, Success scores, other state assessments, early college exams, or industry certifications. However, the usual distribution will change for the 2016-2017 school year due to the recent passage of a bill. The total weight of VAMs will range from 10% for teachers without 2014-2015 data and unavailable or damaging 2015-2016 scores; a combination of 2014-2015 and/or 2015-2016 scores totaling 25%, plus 10% from the Success test; or 2016-2017 Success scores at the full 35%. The VAM percentage, plus 15% of achievement, will comprise the quantitative portion of each teacher's evaluation for the 2016-2017 school year. In the event that VAMs are only weighted 10% for some teachers, the qualitative measures of SPIRIT will increase to make up the difference. All ELA teachers at Laurel Bluff High School have individual VAMs because English is a tested area of the Success test. The ELA teachers participating in this study have 2014-2015 data; therefore, their VAMs for the 2016-2017 school year will be weighted 25-35% depending on which data are most advantageous for their overall score. However, the state reported that 9,400 of the 600,000 tests taken during the 2016-2017 school year were scored inaccurately. Furthermore, Laurel Bluff

County's tests received incorrect scoring and had issues tied to classroom rosters. The affected tests were English I, English II, and Integrated Math II. This error could have consequences for teachers' 2016-2017 evaluation scores.

The qualitative measure of SPIRIT involves a series of evaluations that are determined by licensure status. Teachers in their early years of teaching with "practitioner" licensure status at LBHS are evaluated during one 15-minute planning observation, one announced combination of the planning and instruction domains lasting the entire class period, two unannounced environment and instruction observations during an entire class, and one professionalism evaluation. Teachers with at least 3 years of teaching experience who have obtained "professional" licensure status are evaluated according to the following: one announced, full-class combination of instruction and planning, one unannounced, full-class combination of the environment and instruction domains, and professionalism. The principals complete a portion of the classroom observations; lead teachers conduct the rest of the required observations for teachers in their content area in addition to their teaching responsibilities. They receive a small stipend for this service.

One of the school's lead teachers, Buddy, is an ELA teacher and a participant in this study. He completes roughly ¾ of the English department's evaluations, including announced and unannounced observations, each year. As the year unfolds and he evaluates a great deal of the department, it is his job to approach departmental goals in their Professional Learning Community (PLC) specific to teachers' refinement areas of the SPIRIT rubric. This allows evaluation conversations to continue within the department to spur growth and support.

Remediation plan. At Laurel Bluff High School, principals have flexibility to decide whether to place teachers on a growth plan. However, if teachers score a 1 on VAMs,

remediation is required. This begins with a teacher-administrator conference at the beginning of the year to look at data holistically and formulate a theory as to why scores were low. For instance, if a student's score were zero, the principal would question whether student apathy or teacher performance had determined the VAM score. Together, the administrator and teacher complete a growth plan. This plan outlines the target area in need of improvement, a detailed analysis of data to determine why the goal was not reached, and a plan of action to improve the target area. From there, they address how the teacher will work to close the achievement gap for students in special education services. Next, they address how the teacher will include differentiation in their lessons to meet the needs of all learners. They determine a timeline for action, and outline expectations such as weekly test prep for assessment and the scheduling of the first follow-up meeting. They indicate additional professional development requirements specific to that teacher's target area, which may include professional readings and research. Next, they specify the frequency of monitoring and when it will occur. Finally, they detail how and when the effectiveness of the growth plan will be assessed.

Coaching is another a requirement of remediation. To facilitate this, there is an educator trained to do teacher evaluations in each core department at LBHS. In the ELA department, this person is Buddy. The amount of assigned coaching varies. Some teachers may be assigned monthly check-ins with their coach to monitor their progress, while others may meet more infrequently.

In addition to coaching and addition professional development, teachers on remediation plans are required to have classroom observations in excess of the SPIRIT requirements. If the teacher on remediation has "practitioner" license status, their full-length classroom observations

increase from four to six times. If the teacher holds "professional" license status, their total full-length observations will increase from two to four.

All teachers placed on remediation have it for at least one year until new growth scores can be attained. For instance, if a teacher had a VAM score of 1 during year one year, they would be placed on remediation. But if, at the end of the next school year, their VAM score were a four, their remediation would end. If their VAM score remained a one, they would continue with remediation.

Teaching to the test. ELA instruction no longer centers on best practices due to the implementation of the CCSS paired with high-stakes evaluation consequences (K. Gallagher, 2015). The threat of remediation looms throughout the year amid mounting pressure for teachers to deliver adequate test scores. To meet this end, teachers devote increasing amounts of instructional time to test preparation, and less time to literature and writing.

Glossary of Education Policy Reform Terms

- *Achievement*: A one-year measure of a teacher's performance as determined by student test scores on the Success test. This measure is worth 15% of their total evaluation.
- *Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)*: The measure all schools had to achieve to comply with No Child Left Behind (NCLB). It highlights progress or lack thereof toward math and literacy, but also shows the growth of student subgroups such as economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, English language learners, and minority students. Repeated failure to achieve AYP results in punitive measures such as school improvement and restructuring the school.
- *Benchmark Assessments*: A series of tests given in intervals during the semester to determine student progress toward instructional and school goals.

- *Block Scheduling*: A four-by-four model of scheduling that requires students to take four 85-minute classes and their corresponding exams each semester
- *Lead Teacher*: Teacher evaluator
- *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*: The 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA).
- *Professional Learning Community (PLC)*: Usually a subgroup within a content area, such as grade level, that meets once per week for collaborative planning.
- *Race to the Top (RTT)*: A reform umbrella that provided grant money and NCLB forgiveness to states that competed for the grant. These states had to make a series of legislative changes including tying teacher evaluations to student achievement, adopting VAMs, and using the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in order to be considered.
- *Remediation Plan*: A punitive measure for teachers whose growth and achievement scores do not show adequate and sustained gains, usually requiring additional classroom evaluations, coaching, and professional development.
- *SPIRIT (pseudonym)*: Teacher evaluation model created and implemented to attain state Race to the Top funding
- *Success (pseudonym)*: The official state test that met Race to the Top's mandates for teacher and student accountability through data. Scores from this test are tied to teacher evaluations because they are used to create VAMs.
- *Value-added measurement (VAM):* A 3-year growth model that was originally used to measure and predict the growth of corn, but is now applied to measure and predict student growth and teacher effectiveness. *Success* scores provide the data used to compute VAMs, which comprise a percentage of a teacher's total yearly evaluation.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the national policy context of the history of education reform beginning with ESEA in 1965 and ending with H.R. 610, the congressional bill seeking to repeal the ESEA of 1965. I included the impact of RTT on ELA teachers. I then provided the policy context at Laurel Bluff High school, including the history of the school, teacher evaluation methods, and the procedure for remediation. Finally, I presented a glossary of education policy reform terms.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Qualitative Research

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), there are four major paradigms in qualitative research that compete or have competed for acceptance: positivism, postpositivism, constructivism, and critical theory. In the first, the positivist view, researchers work under the assumption that they and their subjects are "mutually independent" (Hatch, 2002, p. 14), believing neither is influenced by nor influences the other. They use methodologies such as experiments, correlational studies, and surveys to answer a hypothesis and capture and understand the subjects' reality (Hatch, 2002). Positivists assume "testing hypotheses" (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 7) helps them learn about an "observable, stable, and measurable" (Merriam, 2009, p. 8) reality; therefore, positivism is often referred to as "scientific" (p. 8), and typically involves using quantitative methods to produce knowledge that, once scientifically verified, becomes facts upon which to base theories, laws, and predictions (Hatch, 2002). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), some of these generalizations "take the form of cause-effect laws" (p.109).

The second paradigm, postpositivism, evolved from positivism with the inquiry aim to produce an explanation based on prediction and control (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Like positivism, postpositivists believe they are objective to the subject or object of study (Hatch, 2002). Guba and Lincoln (1994) state that postpositivism utilizes more qualitative techniques to correct positivism's imbalance of quantitative normative methodology. For instance, postpositivists see cause-effect relationships resulting from the research as a probability, not as an absolute (Creswell, 2013). However, in keeping with the "received view" of quantification (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 106), postpositivists use rigorous methodologies to increase validity

and reliability (Hatch, 2002), and they write their studies "in the form of scientific reports, with a structure resembling quantitative articles" (Cresswell, 2013, p. 24). In both the positivist and postpositivist paradigms, researchers' ethics are considered "extrinsic" and may lean toward the use of deception (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 112).

I did not incorporate the hard data of surveys, statistics, or frequencies; rather, I learned through interviews. I wanted to learn how experienced English teachers are impacted by neoliberal reform, and why they stay in their positions. To me, this was not a quantifiable task or one that could be communicated using quantitative structures; it was one born of trust, dialogue, and the hope of liberation through transformative action. Therefore, my research does not fit the positivism or postpositivism paradigms.

The constructivist paradigm assumes that one absolute reality cannot be known; therefore, multiple realities are constructed (Hatch, 2002). These realities are co-constructed together by the researcher and participant using hermeneutical and dialectical methodologies (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Naturalistic qualitative methods are employed in the pursuit of "knowledge as a human construction" (Hatch, 2002, p. 13) and often produce case studies and rich narratives. This approach of knowledge as something co-constructed and shared requires the researcher to assume dual roles of participant and researcher; however, the close personal interactions between researcher and participant may create issues with confidentiality and anonymity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Finally, the critical paradigm goes beyond the constructivism objective of "uncovering the interpretation of people's understandings of their world" (Merriam, 2009, p. 9) and, through dialogue, produces critiques that challenge and resist existing power structures (Hatch, 2002). These critiques are "value-mediated" because the "investigator and the investigated object are

assumed to be interactively linked, with the values of the investigator (and of situated "others") inevitably influencing the inquiry" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). Critical theory contends that imposed structures have been identified as real by marginalized groups of people (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), and consequently have a real impact on their life chances (Hatch, 2002). Hatch (2002) states that raising the consciousness of the oppressed leads to "providing understandings that lead to social change" (p. 17). Therefore, Merriam (2009) states that the goal of critical theory, which attributes some of its early influences to the work of Paulo Freire, is "to critique and challenge, to transform and empower" (p. 10). Similarly, Cresswell (2013) posits that critical research should include a reform agenda capable of changing participants' and researchers' lives and the institutions that house them through dialectical, collaborative, and emancipatory action.

I initially believed my research fit constructivism, but I quickly realized that my work was better suited to the transformative framework of the critical paradigm. As Merriam (2009) states, those using critical theory would likely be interested in investigating how school is structured "such that the interests of some members and classes of society are preserved and perpetuated at the expense of others" (p. 12). Indeed, I was interested in how education policy reform had impacted experienced English teachers. In accordance with critical theory's dialogic and dialogical methodologies, I conducted an interview study and drew on Freire's (1970/2000) dialogic research method to influence the kinds of interviews that I conducted. According to Denzin (2001), the dialogic interview "exposes its own means of production" (p. 33).

It is assumed and expected that in critical theory, knowledge is mediated "through the political positionings of the researcher" (Hatch, 2002, p. 17). The inclusion of researchers' values invariably shapes the outcome of critical research, which is in stark contrast to the alleged objectivity of quantitative, value-free studies (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). However, as Guba and

Lincoln (1994) state, to exclude values in critical research would be "inimicable to the interests of the powerless, whose original constructions deserve equal consideration with those of other, more powerful audiences and of the inquirer" (p. 14). Critical researchers state their biases in a reflexivity statement. By communicating their assumptions, "no one is confused concerning the epistemological and political baggage they bring with them to the research site" (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011, p. 167).

Reflexivity Statement

I am approaching this study based on eight years of experience as a classroom teacher, during which time I was personally affected by the implementation of federal and state reforms. My collective experiences were so defining that they informed my decision to leave my position to pursue a terminal degree and inadvertently guided my research interests. Therefore, I am approaching this study with biases against educational policy reform, which I define as neoliberal agenda.

I do not consider the state teacher evaluation model to be a sound instrument by which to evaluate teachers. To prescribe a rubric with bulleted points is to endorse prescriptive teaching measures. In my opinion, prescriptive teaching, much like standardized testing, leaves behind the very struggling students we are trying to educate. Furthermore, it gives administrators carte blanche; favoritism and vindication have equal footholds using this model, leaving educators without a valid means of recourse beyond the filing of a grievance. If grievances are not ruled in favor of the teacher, their evaluation scores are cemented as factual representations of their teaching performance. I believe the overarching problem with the qualitative portion of this evaluation model is that it reduces teachers to numeric scores in each observable area, and in

doing so quantifies a highly subjective process. The result is a misleading illusion of hard data, when, in fact, it is subject to the whims of human error and bias.

However, there are larger issues plaguing the state evaluation model than mere subjectivity during classroom observations. One day my former principal held a faculty meeting and drew a graph with two lines on the board. The top line represented classroom observation scores. The bottom line represented state test scores. He then explained to us that there was a discrepancy between the two data points, and that according to the state and the district, he needed to "close the gap." He went on to say that teachers could not have high observation scores when they were producing low student test scores. He said that from now on, our observation scores would be commensurate with the evidence of learning we were producing through student scores. I was dumbfounded. Teacher evaluations were structured as 50% qualitative data from observations, and 50% quantitative data from testing. As I understood it, the measures were split equally to prevent a teacher's entire performance from being determined solely by standardized tests. Yet, that was precisely what was transpiring in spite of the pre-established division of weighted categories. My principal called it "closing the gap" in evaluation score "misalignment." I called it a foul.

Consider that in Laurel Bluff's state, raw score data from these aggrandized tests have been delayed every year for the last four years. During that time, teachers prepared their students and stressed the importance of the test, and at the end of each year, testing vendors and the state failed to deliver test scores in time for student grades. By mid-October of the 2017-2018 school year, the state revealed that a portion of the tests from the 2016-2017 school year were scored incorrectly, and that there were issues tied to classroom rosters in some districts. Laurel Bluff County was one of the districts impacted on both counts. According to the state, English I and

English II were two of the three impacted tests, which means the teachers who participated in my study could be affected. About 1700 of the statewide incorrectly scored tests affected whether or not students were labeled proficient, which has direct implications for teacher evaluations. Nevertheless, teachers are still held accountable for the state's failed attempts to test students in grades 3-12 through the inclusion of VAMs and student achievement scores in their yearly evaluations. I do not believe those results correlate to teacher performance. How could they, when the test itself is constantly changing to meet changing standards? The results from the new 2016-2017 test are incompatible with previous years' data because the tests correspond to different sets of standards. This alone logically disrupts the progression of the growth model and renders the resulting VAMs invalid, but the matter is compounded with the news of scoring inaccuracies. And yet, in the state's continuing efforts to correct score misalignment, these quantitative measures of tests and VAMs are the driving factor behind a teacher's evaluation scores. I believe this is wrong on every level.

I am of the opinion that testing is fallible and flawed. To me, the idea that a multiple-choice test with an occasional essay can determine a child's proficiency in any content area is ludicrous. Standardization will not tell policymakers what students have learned. I do not believe in the reliability or validity of standardized tests, nor do I believe VAMs are an appropriate measure of growth for human beings. VAMs were created as a predictive growth measure for corn, and factored in variables such as fertilizer, weather, and pests to gauge the anticipated satisfactory rate of crop growth. The system works for agriculture because the variables are known; however, I think it is highly inappropriate to relegate teachers and students to variables equivalent to fertilizer and seeds, respectively. There are other variables such as homelessness, food deficits, poverty, drug use, family issues, and illness that cannot be known or measured.

When the American Statistical Association [ASA] (2014) reports that teachers' impact on test score variability ranges from 1-14% and that the majority of variation is "attributable to factors outside of the teacher's control" (p. 7), there is a grievous error in need of correction. "Children are not corn" (Ravitch, 2013, p. 107). Teachers are not cow dung. Therefore, I find testing and the VAMS linked to those tests to be irrelevant, inappropriate, and damaging to students and teachers.

I experienced this damage firsthand during my last year in the classroom, when I was placed in an Individual Learning Cycle (ILC) as a punitive measure when my school's AYP scores for students with disabilities were some of the lowest in the district. However, almost all of the English AYP scores fell under other teachers' rosters during the semester for which the low test scores were reported. My principal chose to place my entire department on remediation instead of helping those teachers whose scores had plummeted. To date, it remains one of the most humiliating and degrading experiences of my entire career.

These draconian accountability measures fail to recognize that students and teachers are people—not numbers, not anticipated agricultural output and its associated variables, not checkmarks on a list. They are unabashedly human. It is this context of humanity in which students progress at their own rate; some need a semester, some require a year, while others bloom years later as a result of what they learned from their teachers—although the results may be far from quantifiable. We may never know the impact we have on our students. However, through this study, I have begun to understand the impact of education policy reform on secondary English teachers.

Research Context

I chose to interview secondary English teachers (grades 9-12) in a large suburban school. I am providing contextual, demographic, and testing information about the county and school to frame the experiences of the English teachers that I interviewed.

Laurel Bluff County

The population of Laurel Bluff County is 92% white, and the remaining 8% are American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic, or a combination of two or more races. All rounded figures included were obtained from the United States Census Bureau's website. Exact numbers are not provided in order to restrict the amount of identifying information. Approximately 85% of the population holds a high school diploma or higher, while only 24% have a bachelor's degree or higher. The median household income is $43,000. The per capita income is $26,000. Around 20% of the population is identified as living in poverty, and 13% of the population does not have health insurance.

Laurel Bluff High School

Laurel Bluff High School is one of two high schools in the county serving students in grades 9-12. Enrollment is roughly 1100, with 93% white and 7% American Indian/Alaskan, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, or a combination of two or more races. All rounded figures included were obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics' website for the 2014-2015 school year. Data are not yet available for 2015-2016. Exact numbers are not provided in order to restrict the amount of identifying information. Laurel Bluff is reported as a Title I school with a Title I school-wide program; however, specific free and reduced lunch eligibility data are missing from the directory listing. The principal informed me that Laurel Bluff is not, in fact, a Title I school, and that approximately 62% of the students receive free and

reduced lunch. Laurel Bluff is categorized as large suburban. However, because most of the participants perceive Laurel Bluff as rural or a mix between rural and suburban, I have chosen to use the term "rural" in the title of this study to reflect their perceptions.

The state's report card website for the 2015-2016 school year reveals Laurel Bluff High's population consisted of 17% students with disabilities, and 5% economically disadvantaged (ED) students. According to a memo on the website, the state's definition of "economically disadvantaged" changed due to changes in state law. Effective in the 2015-2016 school year, the ED accountability subgroup is limited to directly certified or identified students who have free lunch eligibility without application. This includes students whose families participate in certain programs that provide assistance, or those who are foster certified, homeless, runaway, or migrant. This "direct certification" identification is flagged on assessments to flag the ED subgroup.

Testing at Laurel Bluff

Due to requirements by the state and the district, testing occurs throughout the year at Laurel Bluff High School through informal and formal testing. Informal benchmark testing, described by the district website as "guaranteed curriculum assessment," is required every nine weeks for all K-12 students. Each ELA grade level at Laurel Bluff created the multiple-choice benchmark assessments during PLCs at the beginning of the school year. The end result, according to Karen, resembles the actual ELA mandated state assessments and gauges students' progress toward mastering curriculum standards in areas such as reading comprehension, vocabulary, writing style, and identification of literary elements. These benchmark tests were originally paper-based, but are now administered via computer to all of the regular English classes in the computer lab; honors and advanced English students do not take benchmark

assessments because the school district's central office instructed faculty not to test them. It should be noted that ELA benchmarks were administered every 4.5 weeks during the 2015-2016 school year, and dropped to 9-week intervals in the 2016-2017 year for the creation and piloting of grade level tests. There is speculation that benchmark testing will increase to every 4.5 weeks during the 2017-2018 school year now that there are preexisting, ELA-created assessments for departmental use.

ELA teachers at Laurel Bluff may elect to use other informal measures to monitor students' progress toward mastery of grade level content. To further assist with assessing reading levels at the beginning of the school year, ninth grade ELA teachers administer a diagnostic reading test to their students. Additionally, ELA teachers may choose to use a computer program that provides students with grade level, standards-based practice via language arts content questions, but it is not required by administration as a testing measure. Most of the teachers participating in this study assigned their classes to use the program for a minimum of several instructional days each term, whereas some teachers elected to use it for multiple weeks.

Mandated state assessments referred to as the Success test are administered each term to students enrolled in English I, English II, English III, Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, U.S. History, Chemistry and Biology. In the fall, these assessments are given during a consecutive three-week testing window from late-November until mid-December. In the spring, tests are administered in another consecutive three-week window from mid-April through early May. Students are often required to test during other courses' class times, which impacts attendance during those weeks. Math and science courses such as Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, Chemistry, and Biology require one day of testing. English I, English II, English III, and U.S. History require two days of testing to assess students' writing skills and content knowledge. The

early testing window requires students to test over all course standards when multiple weeks of instruction remain each term. For instance, in the fall of 2016, ELA classes took their tests 7-15 days prior to the end of the semester. In the spring of 2017, ELA classes tested when there were still 22-29 school days remaining. This means students only had 71-76 days in the fall to prepare for 86 days' worth of content. In the spring, students had 62-69 days to prepare for 91 days of ELA content. However, when allowing for the loss of 8 instructional days due to illness and inclement weather, students taking English in the spring were actually tested on days 54-61 out of a projected 91-day term.

Mandatory, statewide Success tests for students in grades 3-12 debuted during the 2015-2016 school year, but their online failure prompted the state's education department to cancel all online spring testing. They planned to substitute a paper-based assessment, but the testing vendor did not deliver paper tests in time for students in grades 3-8. Therefore, only high school testing continued as scheduled in paper format. The 2015-2016 state test scores were not reported in time to be counted for student grades; teachers are still waiting for their growth and achievement results from spring of 2016. Students used pencil and paper to complete state testing during the 2016-2017 school year due to the previous year's failed online implementation; however, this change has not alleviated the difficulties surrounding the test. As of May 2017, teachers still have not received scored student data from fall semester. This has caused great confusion among teachers as to whether their students' results in the spring will count toward their evaluation scores.

The ELA teachers at Laurel Bluff are not aware that a new bill was signed into law in April 2017, which specifies that their student growth scores will account for a minimum of 10% of their evaluation score in the 2016-2017 school year. However, the bill also stipulates that prior

years' data may be used, as well as up to the full 35% of the 2016-2017 school year's student growth data, if either scenario would benefit the teacher. Teachers will automatically receive the highest option when their 2016-2017 evaluations are calculated. According to the state legislature website, the new bill will also impact students. State tests will be worth 10% of 3-8 grade students' final grades in the spring of 2017. The state education department website also states that the tests will be worth 10% of students' final grades, but it does not list any grade level parameters. District and school websites omit key testing information, such as the official test score percentage that will be used to compute final test scores for students in grades 9-12. Teachers are confused about the total percentage that will be used in students' final spring grades, and they speculate that these tests will be worth 10-20%. They remain skeptical that student scores will be determined in time to be used in final grade calculations.

The state education website recently uploaded a document with guidance for using test percentages in students' final grades. This document states that individual districts may exclude state test scores from students' final grades if test scores are not reported at least 5 instructional days before the school year ends. It is unknown whether the Laurel Bluff School Board has elected to include this provision for 2016-2017 teacher evaluations. The ELA teachers are unaware of this possibility from the state. It should be noted that the test previous to Success was also riddled with delivery failures, and there have been challenges with testing, including returning results to teachers and students, during the last three years. If scores are not received in time for the 2016-2017 school year, this will be the fourth consecutive year that the state has failed to deliver the measure of standards to which teachers and students are rigorously held.

Other assessments are required by the state for various grade levels. The state requires all juniors to complete the ACT; therefore, each receives a free voucher to take the test without

expense. In October, the district offered seniors who took the ACT during the 2015-2016 school year the opportunity to retake it on a Saturday at no additional cost. In the spring, the ACT was administered to all first-time junior and senior test takers in-school during the three-week testing window. This year, Laurel Bluff was chosen to administer an ELA field test outside the pre-determined testing window. Sophomores currently enrolled in English were required to complete a one-day writing assessment in March.

ELA teachers meet once a week for PLC meetings, which are predominantly used to analyze the limited testing data that are shared with the department. When they are not analyzing data, they may create or copy benchmark questions directly from student textbooks in grade level PLCs. These two-hour meetings begin during regular school hours due to an adjusted professional development schedule, and extend 40 minutes beyond the normal school day.

There were 177 instructional days at Laurel Bluff High School during the 2016-2017 school year. In the spring and fall, 30 days, including makeup days, were allotted for mandatory state testing by the district. However, 23 testing days were used this year at Laurel Bluff, with 11 days in the fall, and 12 in the spring. The additional day in the spring was used for first time ACT test takers. This reduced the total instructional days from 177 to 154. ELA teachers with regular classes lost 4 additional days to administer benchmark tests, which dropped the total to 150 days. Sophomores in English courses lost an additional day of instruction due to the ELA Writing field test during spring of 2017, bringing the total to 149. Finally, 4 instructional days were lost due to two final exam days each term, which reduced the total instructional days to 145 as a direct result of testing. A total of 32 out of 177 instructional days were used for testing, which equals 18% of the school year. However, teachers also lost eight of the remaining 145 instructional days to system-wide illness and inclement weather, which reduced the total number

of days to 137. Additional instructional time was lost to in-school activities such as prom fashion shows, pep rallies, etc., but it is excluded from this figure due to its relatively short, infrequent occurrences in comparison with scheduled testing. Teachers and students at Laurel Bluff lost a total of 40 out of 177 instructional days, which is 22.6% of the 2016-2017 school year.

These figures continue to diminish when including classroom time used for test preparation. The current administration does not require teachers to complete any testing review or preparation with their classes. However, most of the teachers chose to use the aforementioned computer program for a minimum of 2 days per term, losing 4 days to assessment practice. When added to the previous figure of 33 testing days for the year, most teachers lost a total of 37 days. Rachel reported using the program with a specific grade level for an average of three times per week in the month prior to the test, but the duration of each session was unknown. Karen reported using the computer program for 100 minutes per week in the 10 weeks prior to the test each term. Over the course of two semesters, these 2000 minutes accumulated during 85-minute classes are a loss of 23.5 instructional days, which brings the earlier figure of 33 days to 56.5 days for her classes.

In addition, the majority of the teachers prepare students for the test by reviewing with classes for two weeks prior to the test each term. When computed as two weeks of test review per term, for a total of 20 days, the total for the majority of teachers grows from 37 days to 57 out of 177 days (32%) used for testing and test preparation, with only 120 out of 177 days (67.7%) remaining for instruction. At the low end of test review, Ann spends one day reviewing for the test. This brings her total from 37 to 38 days of testing (21.5%) with 139 days (78.5%) left for instruction. At the highest end of test preparation, Karen reported daily test review for at least 45 minutes of her 85-minute block during each of the 6 weeks leading up to the state exam.

This computes to a minimum of 3 weeks or 15 days of test preparation each term, for a total of 30 days. However, she also includes standards-based practice via the computer program during this time, which is already computed into her testing day tally. I accounted for this in the following manner: 6 weeks or 30 days of 85-minute classes is 2550 minutes. I subtracted 600 minutes from that total to reflect the previously tallied 100 minutes per week of program usage for 6 weeks. Karen spent 1950 additional minutes, or 22.94 days, on test preparation beyond the computer program. When added to her previous figure of 56.5 days, the number of days for testing and preparation grows to 79.4 out of 177 days (44.9%), with the remaining 97.6 days (55.1%) for instruction. The teachers' review times vary. As reported, there are 38 to 79.4 days (21.5-44.9%) dedicated to preparation and testing and a potential 97.6 to 139 days (55.1-78.5%) remaining for instruction. The loss of 8 inclement weather and illness days drops total student instruction for the year to a range of 89.6 out of 177 days (50.6%) to 131 out of 177 days (74%). The total time lost is a range of 46-87.4 days (26-49.4%).

Therefore, my definition of "testing" includes all standardized testing such as the ACT and mandated state tests, benchmarks, all forms of data, test preparation, and the prescriptive teaching rubrics that invariably shape testing preparation and link to student test scores and teacher evaluations for overall teacher effectiveness ratings.

Participants

The participants in this study included five experienced public school English teachers. After I obtained approval from the Director of Schools and the principal, I recruited participants via email invitation. I included my personal contact information and invited them to contact me using their own private email or phone to maintain confidentiality. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time

without consequence. Participants were informed of the minimal risk of the study, which was that sharing personal work stories could cause discomfort or distress. In the event that a participant had withdrawn from the study before all data were collected, the data would have either been returned to the participant or destroyed.

I had preexisting relationships with many of the English teachers and the administration due to my work as a secondary English intern supervisor at this site. These relationships offered easier access to participants and the advantage of beginning interviews with pre-established rapport and trust, which is considered essential for dialogic interviews (Way, Zwier, & Tracy, 2015). Interviews were conducted at a location and time of the participants' choosing. With the exception of Marie, all of the participants earned at least one degree from the same state university.

Buddy

Buddy, the first teacher I interviewed, is a sixty-two-year-old white single male who has been teaching English at Laurel Bluff High School for thirty-nine years. He also completed his internship at the school. Even though he attended school in a different district, he had family ties to the Laurel Bluff community. During frequent visits to his aunt's house as a boy, he rode his bike to the school and looked in the windows. It was where he always wanted to go, and teaching was always what he wanted to do. He describes it as "a calling." His father did not approve of teaching as a career choice due to the low salary and encouraged him to pursue a career in human resources. In an effort to please his father, Buddy took business classes in college. He hated every moment of it, until his mother told him to follow his heart. He chose English because he always loved it. Once Buddy pursued his dream, his father supported him and was very proud he had made his own decisions.

In addition to his position as an English teacher, Buddy serves as a teacher evaluator and a teacher's union representative at the school. He teaches three English classes, and also co-teaches a 45-minute, yearlong reading/Response to Intervention (RTI) class with Ann this term. This limits his plan period to 45 minutes. His recent accolades include "Teacher of the Year" and inclusion in his school's Wall of Fame. He also works as an adjunct professor at a local college. When he is not teaching, he works part-time at a retirement home that has employed him since he was sixteen-years-old. If Buddy had not pursued teaching, he thinks he would have entered the ministry or another "helping profession."

Buddy's classroom reflects his interests and passions in literature and history. In the front corner, a bust of William Shakespeare rests atop a corner filing cabinet in front of the framed newspaper story "Goodbye, England's Rose." An entire wall is dedicated to bookshelves housing textbooks and young adult novels. At the back of the room, filing cabinets line the wall, with renaissance-style poster prints taped above them. A wooden library card catalog system is on top of the filing cabinets. In the right corner is a VHS tape display repurposed to hold classroom sets of the works of Shakespeare. Buddy's work area is centered in a nook on the next wall opposite the bookshelves. Above his desk is a bulletin board completely dedicated to the works of Shakespeare. The posters are so numerous, they spread to the surrounding wall. A mini-fridge, microwave, and coffee pot are also behind the desk. The room always smells of fresh coffee and cinnamon air freshener. Its fluorescent lighting is offset by small lamps around Buddy's desk, giving it a cozy feel.

Ann

Ann, a 46-year-old single white female, was the second teacher I interviewed. This is her 21st year of teaching at Laurel Bluff High School. She completed her internship at the other high

school in the county, but attended school in a nearby district. She enjoys her 15-20 minute commute because it is far enough away that she can shop privately without interacting with her work community. Ann became a teacher because she loved reading and English. When she was a child, she played school with her sister, reserving the role of teacher for herself and giving her sister homework. Ann says she found an "All About Me" book from childhood where she had written that she wanted to be a nurse, but that she had scribbled it out and replaced it with "teacher." Her parents, especially her father, did not want her to be a teacher because they worried about whether she would be able to financially support herself. However, once she graduated from college and started teaching, her father changed his mind and was quite proud of her. Ann adds that her father was always supportive of her, but he was hesitant that teaching would provide a living for her.

Ann teaches three English classes each semester, in addition to co-teaching a 45-minute, yearlong reading/Response to Intervention (RTI) class with Buddy. This limits her plan period to 45 minutes. She was the department head until 2012, when a health condition required a lengthy leave of absence. She currently serves as president of an education group.

Ann's classroom is decorated in author and book-related posters, including a breakdown of famous authors by state, quotes by authors such as Sylvia Plath and J.D. Salinger, breakdowns of authors by time period, a *Harry Potter* poster, and posters celebrating authors' works currently in the junior curriculum. Inspirational posters pepper the area around Ann's desk with lines such as "Go for the finish line," "Just be awesome," "Be the most brilliant color in the box," "You can do anything and you will," and "Do something amazing every day." She uses several lamps and air freshener on a daily basis. A Keurig is positioned directly behind her desk. Ann's television interests are evident in the posted map of "Terminus" from *The Walking Dead*. At the front of

the room is a poster featuring a bearded reader with pile of books reaching into the sky, stating how books are loved and needed, but they will not be read until the reader has a long beard. At the back of the room is a set of bookshelves with textbooks and classic novels. There is a separate bookshelf containing a class set of *The Help*. There are no young adult novels in her classroom.

Karen

Karen, the third teacher I interviewed, is a 33-year-old married white female. She is in her 11th year of teaching at Laurel Bluff High School, where she also coaches cross-country. She is a graduate of Laurel Bluff, and she completed her internship at the other high school in the county. Karen has an Ed.S. in Administration. She gave birth to her first child last spring and took a leave of absence through this fall to spend time with him. In her spare time, she works as a freelance photographer. Her photography featuring her son is prominently placed around her desk area.

Karen's classroom reveals her interests. In addition to coaching cross-country, she is also an avid runner. She devotes an entire bulletin board to her marathon and 5K race numbers; to date, there are nineteen. Her desk area is decorated with Laurel Bluff memorabilia, from pom-poms to cross-country posters. She has an unlit candle or two on her desk. The walls are covered in artwork from students past and present. To remind students how to format their papers, she posted a poster board example at the front of the room of how Justin Bieber would format his work.

Rachel

Rachel is the fourth teacher that I interviewed. She is a 33-year-old newly married white female in her 10th year at Laurel Bluff. Rachel completed her internship in a nearby district, but

she is originally from a northern state suburb. She has always loved school and books, but not children, which informed her career choice because she regards her students as young adults. Rachel became a teacher because "it was all in the books. It wasn't for the grammar or the writing or vocabulary. It was just getting kids to like books." She always wanted to be a teacher, and loved school so much that she considered getting a doctorate. Rachel is the English department head.

Half of the back wall of Rachel's classroom is devoted to multiple five-shelf bookshelves of young adult novels. Rachel often updates its inventory, offering a range of the latest bestsellers and more seasoned titles. She uses her wall space to remind freshmen of their bell schedules and to display student artwork. On her desk, an armadillo figurine holds an energy drink, and there several new young adult novels with pages marked mid-read.

Marie

Marie is a 58-year-old single white female in her 21st year of teaching. After 4 years of teaching in a neighboring state, she moved near the Laurel Bluff area, where she is now in her 17th year as a staff member. She says she is one of the few staff members who did not attend Laurel Bluff. Teaching is in Marie's blood. Her father was a teacher, and people told Marie her entire life that she would be a teacher. She fought it for years, but ended up teaching in some capacity in every job she held. Finally, she decided she should do what she enjoys and teach literature instead of focusing on loan officer real estate appraisals or filing systems. Once she entered the classroom at almost 40, she realized it was where she needed to be. Marie also teaches adjunct classes for a local college.

The highest point of Marie's classroom walls is covered in one continuous band of hand-painted affirmations and good citizenship practices in alphabetical order, beginning with "Accept

differences," "Believe in yourself," "Count your blessings," and "Dream big." Custom window treatments with a bright, cheerful flower pattern decorate the two windows. A stained-glass square of hummingbirds stopping by flowers catches the light in one of them. There are framed photos of outdoor travel destinations on the walls. A bulletin board entitled "Brain Growth" calls for students to "Change your words!" and "Change your mindset!" The left side shows pessimistic phrases on the left such as "I'm not good at English" and "I give up." On the right side, positive phrases read: "Mistakes help me improve?" "I'll try a new way," and "This may take time and effort." Random ceiling tiles have been used as canvases for vibrant student artwork from *Macbeth*, "The Raven, and "The Tell-Tale Heart."

Data Collection

I began my study by conducting dialogic interviews (Way, Zwier, & Tracy, 2015) in-person at a location and time of the participants' convenience. The purpose of these interviews was to use the dialogical data to identify how they were affected by educational reforms and to learn why they stay in their positions. Participants were given an opportunity to provide informed consent. If they agreed to participate and provided their signature on the form, I interviewed the participant. During the first interview, I reviewed the consent form, obtained signatures, established and/or built on rapport, and began the dialogic interview. Some participants answered all interview questions during the initial interview. After I studied the first round of interviews, I conducted the second round of interviews for participants for whom I had not completed the interview protocol. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for data analysis. After I studied both rounds of interviews, I analyzed them using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Dialogic Interviews

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970/2000) reviews his dialogical research method, also referred to as the psycho-social method, where in order to achieve change, the people or "subjects" are invited to develop authentic critical praxis; that is, they must critically perceive their oppressive reality in order to transform it and gain power. Although I did not use Freire's dialogic method for this interview study, I drew on his method to influence the kinds of interviews that I conducted. Freire (1972) tells us that neutrality in education is an impossibility; understanding this is the first step of critical, dialogical reflection. When the work of the oppressed does not belong to them, it becomes an exercise in dehumanization (Freire, 1970/2000). Policymakers' utilization of banking education suppresses teachers' freedom to create their world, and the silence of that dominating power prevents them from naming it. Freire (1970/2000) writes, "To exist, humanly, is to name the world . . ." (p. 88). Anything less is dehumanization. This recognition prompted me to engage in a critical, true dialogue with participants to understand how they name the world. Dialogue is an "existential necessity" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 88) that cannot be reduced to a form of idea consumption, deposits, or exchanges used to dominate. Freire (1970/2000) writes of its importance, "Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education" (p. 92-93).

Denzin (2001) calls the interview a "privilege" that "transforms information into shared experience" (p. 24). I built on this shared experience by utilizing dialogic interviews. This type of interview allows participants to "suspend assumptions about the world, open themselves to new viewpoints, and abandon a win-lose perspective" (Way, Zwier, & Tracy, 2015, p. 3) through dialogue. More specifically, Knight and Saunders (1999) describe dialogic interviews as

requiring the collaboration of the interviewer and the participant to "construct explicit accounts on the basis of the informant's experience and tacit knowledge" (p. 144). With this kind of balanced conversation, the lines between interviewer and interviewee begin to fade (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Interviewers do not simply ask questions and await answers; they engage in dialogue (Way, Zwier, & Tracy, 2015). According to Denzin (2001), the dialogic interview "exposes its own means of production" (p. 33). The effect is one of the reasons dialogic interviews are so important to qualitative research. Way, Zwier, and Tracy (2015) claim, "When interviewers engage in dialogue, participants are met by kindness and acceptance, enabling them to let down their defenses and listen to *themselves*. This self-talk and self-questioning, in turn, can lead to transformations in sedimented scripts or beliefs" (p. 3). Furthermore, a dialogue grounded in "love, humility, and faith" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 91) establishes mutual trust between the interviewer and the interviewee.

In order to achieve these "true conversations" (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 178) where participants feel safe self-questioning, the interviews begin with open-ended questions that allow the participants to transcend simple yes or no responses (Hatch, 2002). The interview becomes a scaffolding process (Rossman & Rallis, 2012) where the interviewer builds upon interviewee responses and generates questions to deepen meaning and understanding (Hatch, 2002). This process commonly uses probing questions as a way to encourage participants to "reflect on, modify, and explain initial statements" (Way, Zwier, & Tracy, 2015, p. 4). For instance, if a participant expresses uncertainty, an interviewer could take the opportunity to respond with a prompt asking why or how. Probing questions allow interviewees to participate in the probing of their unvoiced or unrealized sentiments.

Member reflections allow the researcher to share the data analysis process with

participants and create the opportunity for participant self-reflexivity (Way, Zwier, & Tracy, 2015). Mirroring, the act of repeating participants' words back to them, is a form of member checking interviewers can use to create safe spaces for interviewees. I used it because it allowed participants to hear what their words sounded like coming from another person, and it also validated that I was listening to what they had to say.

Counterfactual prompting is a tactic that utilizes the participant's imagination in supposing an alternate reality or perspective (Way, Zwier, & Tracy, 2015). A popular example is the magic wand question I included in my interview protocol. The question reads: "If you could wave a magic wand over education and make it the way you want it to be, what would it look like?" When I asked this question, I freed each participant to envision and share a new perspective without consequence.

The dialogic interview is dependent on good rapport with participants, or, as Rossman and Rallis (2012) refer to them, "interview partners" (p. 178). Freire (1970/2000) writes that a "climate of mutual trust…leads the dialoguers into ever closer partnership in the naming of the world" (p. 91). This style was a natural choice for my study based on my rapport with the staff and our established partnership in working with interns. Another reason I was drawn to the dialogic interview is because it presents participants as collaborators instead of subjects (Rossman & Rallis, 2012; Way, Zwier, & Tracy, 2015), thus connecting to Freire's (1970/2000) ideas about the humanizing power of dialogue. Way, Zwier, and Tracy (2015) encourage spending time building rapport through humor and asking about participants' interests. This in no way means that dialogue should impose, manipulate, domesticate, or sloganize (Freire, 1970/2000). Rather, "dialogue is facilitated when participants feel accepted rather than defensive" (Way, Zwier, & Tracy, 2015, p. 7). Interviewers need interviewees' trust for authentic

conversations, and as Freire (1970/2000) reminds us, "trust is established by dialogue" (p. 91). As an interview technique, "the emphasis on recognition and acknowledgment of the other makes dialogic communication a powerful vehicle for change and transformation at both individual and societal levels" (Way, Zwier, & Tracy, 2015, p. 2).

My dialogic interviews were semistructured; that is, I used flexible questions with "no predetermined wording or order" (Merriam, 2009, p. 89) that required specific data from respondents. Hatch (2002) described this type of formal interview as semistructured because the interviewer approaches the study with predetermined guiding questions, but is willing to "probe" information shared during interviews (p. 94). I approached my interviews with an interview protocol (see Appendix C), but I also listened for areas to explore further with participants. I formed less structured questions based on participants' responses in an effort to fully explore an in-depth understanding of their comments (Hatch, 2002).

Data Analysis

I recorded my first interview with a password-protected iPhone, and used a digital recorder for the remaining interviews. All audio recordings were transferred to the desktop of my password-protected, personal computer. The recordings on the digital recorder and iPhone were then deleted. I listened to the interviews several times while transcribing. The first time I listened to the interviews, I recorded my thoughts and initial impressions. Then I listened again and expanded my ideas with more details and key phrases. With each subsequent listen, I added verbatim transcription and more specifics, listening several more times to verify the accuracy of what I had transcribed. In this way, I began the process of analyzing the data using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The first step of the constant comparative method is called open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During this step of analysis, repeated listenings and read-throughs of the interview transcripts allowed me to constantly compare the data for ideas and themes. I assigned codes to these ideas and themes, constantly comparing the conceptual similarities and differences within and across interviews. Initial codes can be seen in Table 1.

During this process of constantly comparing the data, some of my initial codes changed. For instance, I previously thought of Buddy and Karen's excerpts as relative to test scores, but as I reread the transcripts, I began to see that numbers, not necessarily test scores, shaped each teacher's feelings. Buddy definitively resisted the correlation of numbers to students, which prompted me to change his code to "resisting numbers." When I recognized that Karen linked the test scores to personal satisfaction and achievement, I changed her code to "satisfaction with numbers." Examples of changing codes based on conceptual relationships can be seen in Table 2.

After I developed an initial set of codes, I used microanalysis to reveal categories and the relationships between concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For instance, I looked at codes such as "satisfaction with numbers," "resisting numbers," and "teachers are the enemy" and recognized that their relationships revealed a negative impact of testing on teachers. This discovery led to my first large thematic category, "Negative Impact of Testing on Teachers." Larger thematic categories that initial coding revealed can be seen in Table 3. Subsequently, this led to relating categories to their subcategories, called axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) because it occurs around the axis of a category.

In the process of exploring linkages between main and subcategories, I began to identify and connect relationships between ideas and themes. I then questioned if and how the major categories related. I worked back and forth in this manner, comparing the smaller ideas to major

Table 1. Example of Initial Codes

Excerpt	**Code**
"I don't believe that they're a number, a statistic, a test score . . ." - Buddy	Children aren't numbers
"The teachers are very proud of our improved test scores." - Karen	Proud of test scores
"So, there's just such mystery surrounding all of that, that I don't think that's good." - Marie	Mystery surrounding the test
"Teachers are the enemy . . ." - Ann	Teachers are the enemy
"I do feel like in this era we have the vilification of teachers with the Waiting for Superman and everybody being all on teacher's backs and everything." - Marie	Teachers are the enemy
"There's a lack of any sort of respect for authority. . ." - Rachel	No respect for authority
"I don't think it's a fair assessment of anything they do in the classroom." - Rachel	Unfair evaluation
"But I have seen teachers that are just kind of inflexible…I think maybe their heart's in the right place, but they're gonna teach this at this time on this day. Come hell or high water, this is the schedule." - Buddy	Inflexible teachers
"I see a change in students about being tested so much." - Ann	Change in students
"And I think we still [develop them as people], just in smaller doses, really." - Rachel	Students get ignored
"I just don't think they have that drive now. And you don't have fun. There's no fun to be had." - Rachel	No fun to be had
"It's been said that kids feel school is what's being done to them, not something they're personally invested in, and I feel like that's the case." - Marie	Students not invested
"I'm not leaving that unit. Yeah, I'm not on a timeframe. We will stay and talk about it until we're done." - Buddy	Not on timeframe
"We like who we work for, and we like who we're with." - Rachel	Likes principals and colleagues
"...the administration trusts the teachers to teach what they want." – Karen	Administration trusts teachers
"I would probably not choose education." – Buddy	Would choose different path

Table 2. Example of Changing Codes During Analysis

Excerpt	**Code**
"I don't believe that they're a number, a statistic, a test score . . ." - Buddy	Resisting numbers
"The teachers are very proud of our improved test scores." - Karen	Satisfaction with numbers
"I'm not leaving that unit. Yeah, I'm not on a timeframe. We will stay and talk about it until we're done." - Buddy	Teacher autonomy
"We like who we work for, and we like who we're with." - Rachel	Interpersonal
"…the administration trusts the teachers to teach what they want." – Karen	Teacher autonomy

Table 3. Categories that Resulted from Coding

Category	**Code**
Negative Impact of Testing on Teachers	Satisfaction with numbers
Negative Impact of Testing on Teachers	Resisting numbers
Negative Impact of Testing on Teachers	Mystery surrounding the test
Negative Impact of Testing on Teachers	Teachers are the enemy
Negative Impact of Testing on Teachers	No respect for authority
Negative Impact of Testing on Teachers	Unfair evaluation
Negative Impact of Testing on Teachers	Inflexible teachers
Perceived Negative Impact on Students	Change in students
Perceived Negative Impact on Students	Students get ignored
Perceived Negative Impact on Students	No fun to be had
Perceived Negative Impact on Students	Students not invested
They Stay, But	Teacher autonomy
They Stay, But	Interpersonal
They Stay, But	Would choose different path

categories and vice versa, major categories to major categories, and interviews to interviews, to name just a few of the ways I compared for connectivity. I also compared the new relationships to the ones I had already established. Within the category "Negative Impact of Testing on Teachers," I began to see how testing is negatively affecting teachers through my interviews, coding, categories, and the relationships between them. For instance, a common complaint about testing was the mystery behind it. The teachers felt that not being trusted to look at the test rendered their students' scores and the test itself meaningless and a waste of time. I realized that my initial code of "Mystery surrounding the test" was more than just a code; it was also a subcategory because it specified *how* teachers were negatively impacted by testing. Subsequently, in the category "Perceived negative impact on students," the subcategory specifies how students are negatively impacted by testing and reforms. Subcategories established through axial coding can be seen in Table 4.

Each discovery resulted in a circular comparison to the previous relationship and the themes and ideas behind it, which was then used to guide future comparisons. For example, after I used microanalysis to discover key categories and the relationships between concepts, I then compared those key categories to the initial ideas and codes that I identified during open coding. The relationships that I recognized in these comparisons informed my understanding as I explored new relationships between interviews, ideas, themes, and categories using the constant comparative method of data analysis.

Table 4. Subcategories that Resulted from Coding and Categories

Category	**Subcategory**	**Code**
Negative Impact of Testing on Teachers	The duality of how teachers understand/see/define the test	Satisfaction with numbers
Negative Impact of Testing on Teachers	The duality of how teachers understand/see/define the test	Resisting numbers
Negative Impact of Testing on Teachers	Mystery surrounding the test	Mystery surrounding the test
Negative Impact of Testing on Teachers	Demoralization	Teachers are the enemy
Negative Impact of Testing on Teachers	Demoralization	No respect for authority
Negative Impact of Testing on Teachers	Unfair evaluation	Unfair evaluation
Negative Impact of Testing on Teachers	Impact of time/content	Inflexible teachers
Perceived Negative Impact on Students	Focus on numbers/data	Change in students
Perceived Negative Impact on Students	Focus on numbers/data	Students get ignored
Perceived Negative Impact on Students	Focus on numbers/data	Students not invested
They Stay, But	Administrator	Teacher autonomy
They Stay, But	Administrator	Interpersonal
They Stay, But	They Would Not Be Teachers Now	Would choose different path

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented my research methodology. I began by providing an overview of qualitative research. Next, I provided a reflexivity statement. I then provided a research context that included information on the site, the county, and testing at the school. Next, I shared demographic participant information. Finally, I reviewed data collection methods, dialogic interviews, and data analysis methods.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

Education reform has been at the forefront of the American consciousness for over 50 years through the ESEA of 1965, NCLB, and RTT. In more recent years, reforms have transformed the profession into a business model devoid of authentic inquiry, or as Freire (1970/2000) described it, a "banking concept of education" (p. 72). Its purpose is to generate test scores that are widely thought by policymakers to gauge student learning and teacher effectiveness, using their measure to punish schools and teachers who do not deliver; thus, the entire field of education is held accountable for the performance of students on standardized tests. This system has created a general sense of frustration among experienced educators, causing many teachers to exit the profession earlier than planned. However, Laurel Bluff High School presents as an anomaly in standardized testing culture, as its ELA faculty has not changed in five years and each member has a minimum of 5 years of teaching experience. The purpose of this study is to learn how experienced secondary English teachers are impacted by education policy reform, and to find out why they stay in the profession in the context of neoliberal education. Understanding how experienced teachers are impacted by educational reforms, as well as the reasons they endure them, could help policymakers retain teachers in the future.

In this chapter, I present the findings of the study. The chapter is organized by the two research questions and their subsequent categories and subcategories. My analyses are embedded throughout the discussion of the findings.

Research Question 1: What is the impact of education policy reform on experienced high school English teachers in one rural high school?

I have divided this section into three categories detailing the ways teachers are impacted by education reform policy. The subcategories further explore and discuss how the teachers are impacted.

Negative Impact of Testing on Teachers

Educational reform, and more specifically, testing and all of its associations, has disrupted the teaching profession in an antidialogical action characteristic of "cultural invasion" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 152). Freire (1970/2000) writes, "The invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, in disrespect of the latter's potentialities; they impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression" (p. 152). NCLB and RTT allowed big business, think tanks, and policymakers to invade the culture of education (Ravitch, 2013), disrupting the flow of learning and shifting the classroom to a business model of education. These changes went into effect without the input or support of teachers who had to enforce them. Freire (1970/2000) writes further:

> cultural invasion is thus always an act of violence against the persons of the invaded culture, who lose their originality or face the threat of losing it. In cultural invasion…the invaders are the authors of, and actors in, the process; those they invade are the objects. The invaders mold; those they invade are molded. The invaders choose; those they invade follow that choice—or are expected to follow it. The invaders act; those they invade have only the illusion of acting, through the action of the invaders. (p. 152)

In the face of such violence, teachers have been reduced to objects in the banking concept of education, which Freire (1970/2000) says, "attempts to control thinking and action, leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power" (p. 77).

Not surprisingly, every teacher that I interviewed spoke to me about testing and the negative impact it has had on the teaching profession. When I asked the teachers about the biggest changes over their careers, which span 11 to 39 years in length, their answers unanimously pointed to testing. Ann identified "testing" as the biggest change. Rachel says, "Testing. Cause that leads to everything. It leads to the teachers getting burned out, the kids are cranky, the stress on the teachers, the parents think the teachers aren't doing their jobs because the scores aren't high." Marie specified the biggest change as "standardized testing." Karen's response was "data." Buddy initially said the rote checklists from the "politicians and the state" were the biggest change, but then added, "Prescriptive teaching, you know, going by the rubric. Yeah. I think that's the biggest change."

The Mystery Surrounding the Test

Several teachers complained about the lack of transparency pertaining to state tests, and subsequently, the process by which their value-added measurement (VAM) scores are computed. They cannot see the test, and yet, they must prepare students for it and make yearly improvements based on test results. The actual results do not include specific test data such as which questions students missed, that could benefit both teachers and students. Instead, during years in which the test scores are actually delivered by the testing vendor or the state, educators are given student scores that do not necessarily align with their VAMs. Frustrations increase when student scores are largely as expected, and yet, VAMs plummet. This points to why teachers believe the VAM is a terrible assessment of teaching. It reports teacher failure when

student learning is evident, and does not disclose its process and instruments, such as test content and items missed. The teachers are powerless to address specific issues because the information is not shared with them. As a result, teachers are resentful of tests and VAMs as evaluation tools and deeply skeptical of whether they are representative of their teaching.

The issue of transparency arose on multiple occasions throughout my interviews. For instance, Marie has difficulty understanding why her growth scores are poor when her students score well:

> We get the reports back and I see how my students do, and I'm pleased, and then I see what they were projected to do and how they did and I feel like that's good, but then I get my teacher effect data and it's bad. And I think ok, well, what happened? So, there's just such mystery surrounding all of that, that I don't think that's good.

Rachel is frustrated that the test is not shared with teachers. She is willing to correct problem areas, but in order to do so, she thinks the test needs to be available for review. She says:

> I would hate the test a lot less if they would let us see it. I can't fix it. If you're telling me I'm not doing it right, I would like to see it. And then I'll fix it. Yeah, I'll fix anything you want me to fix.

Despite her hatred of the test, Rachel cares about its correlation to her job performance. Similarly, in the quotation from Marie, she expressed criticism of the process by which her VAMs were computed, but shared that she had been pleased by her students' results. Both instances point to Freire's (1970/2000) assertion that the oppressed are afflicted with the duality of their own ideology and that of their oppressors. However, in this instance it is a forced duality. Each teacher is aware that failure to perform as measured by tests and VAMs will result in professional consequences. Teacher disbelief in the virtues of the test or VAMs does not

alleviate their symptoms. The result is that teachers are forced to internalize the need to clear a hurdle they cannot see alongside their feelings of oppression and disbelief in the evaluation tools. They are motivated by fear and professionalism to reach a goal in which they do not believe. The policymakers' goals become the teachers' goals, even though teachers are at odds with the ideology behind them. Over time, teachers like Marie take pride in positive test results, or in the case of Rachel, they aspire to improve them. But it is not enough for the oppressors to infiltrate teachers' belief systems with their own; they utilize oppressive practices such as withholding test contents, items missed, and in recent years, student scores due to testing vendors' failure to deliver on state contracts. Thus, the mystery behind the test contributes to the negative impact of testing on teachers.

The Pointlessness of the Test

The ELA teachers at Laurel Bluff High School do not place much value on the tests, in part because of the timeliness of test score reporting. Ann shares that teachers still have not received their scores from last school year, and she still does not how her students performed. Regardless of their scores, she says, "I feel like those aren't valid now. What's the point? The kids are gone, those students are seniors." Ann is already midway through a semester with new students, which prevents her from addressing her old students' academic needs. Like Ann, Marie points out that test scores are reported so long after the actual test that the students have already been replaced with another class. Rachel refers to the coming [state test] scores as "that whole disaster." These teachers claim to not be overly concerned about the outcome of the test because the delayed reporting has rendered its relevance null and void.

Local dissemination of testing information has contributed to teacher frustrations. After elementary and middle school students' tests were canceled last year, high school students were

still required to take the state test. Ann does not feel this was fair. According to Ann, the local news widely reported that students' scores would not be used as grades. She believes this impacted student effort on the test, calling the entire incident "ridiculous." Not only are scores and specific data not available for teachers' review, but students knew that their test performance would not impact their grades. This further contributes to teacher sentiment of the uselessness of the test.

But it is not simply an issue of delayed reporting or invalidating the test's value that has driven teacher belief of the test's uselessness. The issue is also the test itself and the vague information reported to teachers that neither helps them guide nor correct instruction. For instance, Karen does not believe testing results report anything useful, regardless of when they are delivered. She says that "teachers do not receive valuable feedback on our strengths and weaknesses, and students never receive feedback that covers what questions they got right and wrong." She calls it a "truly pointless reflection of both teacher and student performance."

These teachers work to meet policymakers' requirements amid the state's multiple test reporting failures, the media's reported weightlessness of scores in student grades, and a refusal of the state to share key test information and the VAM computing process with educators. The combination of these factors drives teacher contempt for a test that appears to serve no purpose, and furthers the negative impact of testing on teachers. When teachers spend a great deal of their time and effort reviewing for the test and the scores are routinely undeliverable by the state, they feel devalued and dehumanized. Freire (1970/2000) said, "dehumanization…is not a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed" (p. 44). The combination of duality and dehumanization, for some,

has yielded a sense of apathy in the continued onslaught of testing. As Ann commented on awaiting the previous year's test scores, "What's the point?"

Impact on Time/Content Due to Test Preparation and Testing

Overwhelmingly, the ELA teachers at Laurel Bluff spoke of earlier points in their careers when they could cover more curriculum, but said that they are now unable to teach as much content due to the increased emphasis on testing and the subsequent reduction in instructional time. More specifically, the interview data imply that teachers are covering fewer novels now due to testing. For instance, Ann says:

> I think we're pulled in so many different directions now as a teacher, it's not just teaching in your classroom. It's data, it's getting ready for the standardized test, teaching to the test, you know, our even our PLCs, that's you know, they're meant for planning, but a lot of times that's about collecting data. [Laughs] So you know, it kind of gets away from, there's days where we're not really getting to think about teaching. It's everything outside of the classroom that we're going to deal with instead of our actual job.

Buddy says, "There will never be enough time in the day for teachers." One of the big changes in his career is the switch to block scheduling, where students take four 85-minute classes each semester. Previously, students took six courses over the course of the entire school year. Block scheduling requires students to test over an entire course's content after one semester of instruction. Buddy says:

> I don't cover as much as I used to. It bothers me. But what I do cover, I cover it well. I still teach to the curriculum, but I never get to everything in the textbook. We pick and choose.

The amount of time required for test preparation and testing has negatively changed the way teachers plan and instruct over the course of their careers. As an example of how things have evolved, Rachel notes that there are some units she struggles to finish by a certain date because of all the "testing and benchmarks on top of testing." Karen does not believe education was as focused on test scores when she first started teaching, whereas today, she says, "I often feel as though I am a data collector and not a teacher." She says:

> Standardized test prep often gets in the way, and I feel as though all of the computer practice tests last year limited me in what I could teach. I had to cut some units short and even leave out a poetry unit because of the amount of test prep and actual hours of testing my students had to complete.

When Ann first started teaching, she was not "worried about getting ready for a test." From 1994 until NCLB in 2002, Ann says, "We had more time where we could actually cover more curriculum. I feel like I read more novels. We had time to do more. We had more time to teach if that makes sense." Regarding teaching in the present standardized testing climate, Ann says, "I feel like what we tend to start doing is trying to teach to that test and make sure we've kind of like covered what's on that test." Ann says that as the testing date gets closer, "we're going to start reviewing for the test, you start practicing for the test, and it takes a lot of your classroom time practicing to take a test."

According to Marie, teachers used to have more autonomy to teach lessons that kids would enjoy more. These lessons included more literature and content that would help students in college. Marie notes that she did not give multiple-choice tests at the beginning of her career; her tests were essay-based or open response. Now, she says:

> Standardized testing has put a lot of pressure to teach how to respond to a multiple-choice question. Depending on who's in charge of the school, you may have to spend a lot more time than you would want to spend. We've been testing since the first part of December, and so even if my students are not testing for me, it affects what I'm doing in my classroom.

According to all of the teachers that I interviewed, testing adversely impacts their classrooms because it pressures them to prioritize it over what they would choose to teach otherwise, be it literature, grammar, composition, etc. They lament the loss of time that they could use to explore so many facets of English. They have zero control over testing or the length of their classes, but during this school year they have complete autonomy to choose how much time is spent on standardized testing. When teachers choose to use class time to prepare for standardized tests, they lose the battle for liberation because they become cogs in the wheel of banking education. The students lose because the loss of learning time reinforces them as "receptacles" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 72) and prevents them from pursuing true inquiry. Freire (1970/2000) says, "The capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students' creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor see it transformed" (p. 73). The perpetuation of banking education creates a new generation of young people lacking critical consciousness (Freire, 1970/2000).

Time Taken in PLC to Analyze Data. ELA teachers frequently mentioned the PLC time used for data analysis as a negative impact of testing. Buddy is not pleased that he is required to attend PLC meetings to analyze data with his department instead of determining the best use of his time. He says:

> Always with my career I've been trusted to do what needed to be done. Be able to set priorities. Lately with the turn of public education, teachers aren't allowed to do that. We do not get to choose our priorities. It's done for us.

He says that "the politicians and the state" have given so many checklists to teachers that it "takes some of the enjoyment out of the teaching process." Buddy's one wish to make his teaching life easier would be "time." He says he needs it to plan, grade, and call parents. He does not think it is valuable to spend his time discussing data in PLC meetings when he could be preparing for his classes. Buddy says, "I did not become a teacher 39 years ago to teach to a test."

Neither did Rachel, who says, "Now it's like benchmark test, benchmark test, what's this number, data, data, data, and all these numbers. And I mean, I got into this for books. I didn't get into it to analyze it." Rachel's former principal used to ask how she knew her students were learning if not for testing data, and she would tell him:

> I *talk* to them. I *grade* their work. We *write* about what we read. We do writings *every* single week. We *read* every single week. When I discuss with them or talk to them as a whole or individually, *I know* where they are. I don't *need* 15 benchmarks to tell me that this kid reads below grade level. I already know that. You know it.

Echoed in their comments was the fact that the choice to analyze data is not theirs to make, and their required compliance is in direct conflict with their reasons for teaching. In this environment of oppression, there is no room for resistance. The power of the oppressor has forced them to participate in another level of banking education by reducing themselves and students to numbers.

Demoralization

Freire (1970/2000) writes that "the dominant elite increasingly structures its power so that it can more efficiently dominate and depersonalize" (p. 177). In the case of public education, the policymakers' reach extends beyond the school and into living rooms, communities, and society at large through media. In order to push their profitable legislative agenda, policymakers and think tanks use their power to communicate that education is allegedly failing America's children, which by default, means teachers are failing. This has been proven to be untrue (Berliner & Glass, 2013; Ravitch, 2013), but unfortunately, the damage to the public's perception of teachers has been done.

At Laurel Bluff High School, most of the ELA teachers lamented society's changing views of teachers. Ann talks about the trickle-down effect of state legislation into the community, and how that has impacted her students in the classroom:

> I think it's trickled down, like the legislative, you know, [the state] legislature has passed laws to hurt public education, you know, "teachers are the enemy," kind of a thing, and I think that trickles down to the home. You know because I was taught to respect teachers by adults, and I think students now are saying, you know, they're being told you know, you don't have to do what the teacher says, you can do what you wanna do, the teacher's, you know. So I think sometimes the attitude and perception of teaching has changed.

Ann wants the trust back for teachers like in the "good old days" when "people thought we were doing our job. We were *trusted* to do our jobs." Ann says, "And I think students know that teachers are stressed about testing and because it's so much more in the news about like the state legislature. There's just more. Teachers are kind of looked down upon." Freire (1970/2000) says that "dehumanization…is *not* a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders

violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed" (p. 44). The effect of the unjust order of education is demoralizing for the teachers of Laurel Bluff.

Buddy would like to use his career platform of 39 years to ask politicians, "What's in this for you to try to destroy teacher morale and the profession of teaching, and education as we know it?" Not surprisingly, looking at the progression of wealth that has exchanged hands among test preparation companies, big business, and charter schools since the passing of NCLB in 2001, the answer is money (Ravitch, 2013). Freire (1970/2000) writes

> In their unrestrained eagerness to possess, the oppressors develop the conviction that it is possible for them to transform everything into objects of their purchasing power; hence, their strictly materialistic concept of existence. Money is the measure of all things, and profit the primary goal. (p. 58)

The cost of the policymakers' purchasing power has negatively impacted teachers' relationships with parents. As an example, Rachel says parents think "teachers aren't doing their jobs because the scores aren't high." They have bought into the banking concept of education (Freire, 1970/2000) by believing if their children do not meet performance expectations, it is proof of their teacher's failure. In this flip on Freire's (1970/2000) banking concept, students make "deposits" (p. 73) in the form of test scores into a teacher's account. Failure to yield higher amounts places the teacher in default of her account. When her account is no longer in "good standing," a term often used in banking to denote fiscally responsible clients, she loses a wide spectrum of professional respect. Rachel also notes that the questioning process between parents and teachers has "flip-flopped." When she first started teaching and called a parent, "that was still when the parent believed the adult, as opposed to like, you're failing my kid, why is my kid failing?"

The students have also been adversely affected, which further demoralizes the teachers. Rachel says every year is more of a challenge because she thinks the students are visibly changing and becoming less motivated. Rachel thinks students do not see the need for books or reading in real life, so they do not feel like they need anything. She notes a lack of respect for authority, which she thinks comes from what is shared in society or social media. She says, "I just think they almost don't respect anyone. And you can see it. This year is ten times worse than last year." This statement also extends to the way students treat themselves and other students. Rachel says she likes the younger high school kids because they want to please their teachers and they fear authority. When she tells them she is disappointed, it carries a lot of weight toward helping them realize they need to work hard. This is in contrast to the kid who "called a teacher a bitch. And we said excuse me? 'You heard what I called you.' That." She likes the students who self-correct, but says, "And we're not really getting that. It's just, it's an interesting time to be a teacher, I think." With students growing more apathetic and disrespectful of authority with each passing year, teachers must work even harder to motivate their students.

At the school level, Buddy feels the effects of policy imposed on him through required PLCs. He hoped their weekly PLCs would be used for collaboration, but instead, they center on data. This year, teachers copied questions directly from their textbooks to use as student benchmark test questions during PLC time. Buddy says, "We're not even analyzing test data; we're creating a test that already exists that was given to us by the company. We're not even being original." He does not understand "these exercises in futility." The PLCs are the "most demoralizing part" of his week because he does not get to choose how to use his time.

The teachers that I interviewed want to be regarded as good teachers, and they genuinely seem to care for their students. They wish they had trust and respect, but instead, their job offers

abundant blame and weak appreciation for their efforts. The lack of public regard for their profession has negatively affected their teaching relationships, and the result has damaged their morale. They are forced to test their students, attend mandated PLCs, and struggle for the respect of students and parents. Freire (1970/2000) says

> People are fulfilled only to the extent that they create their world (which is a human world) and create it with their transforming labor. The fulfillment of humankind as human beings lies, then, in the fulfillment of the world. If for a person to be in the world of work is to be totally dependent, insecure, and permanently threatened—if their work does not belong to them—the person cannot be fulfilled. Work that is not free ceases to be a fulfilling pursuit and becomes an effective means of dehumanization. (p. 145)

The result of this climate is that the teachers feel like they are not valued and worse still, that they are "the enemy." Their goals—to affect students in positive ways, to share their love of reading, to make a difference—grow much harder to attain when they are not respected by society and their employment status hinges on arbitrary tests based on constantly evolving standards and content. Their work is no longer their work; it is prescribed by the oppressor (Freire, 1970/2000). Without personal fulfillment, teachers struggle to hold on to their sense of purpose and value. This process of dehumanization, in turn, creates an overpowering sense of demoralization among the ELA teachers at Laurel Bluff High.

Stress. Stemming from demoralization is increased stress, which Rachel notes is another negative impact of testing students all the time. However, she says she is probably "one of the few who is really not stressed." Rachel says:

> I just wave the white flag. I'm like I'll jump through the hoop. I'll test it. I'll do test prep with them, but I'm not killing myself. I'm going to teach them what I think they need to know to be successful for their remaining years in high school and in college.

Rachel says, "It is what it is. The test." Interestingly, when speaking about the test, Ann also said, "I would get them ready for it, but I just after so many years, you're like this is…you know. [Laughs] It is what it is!" I was surprised that both Rachel and Ann spoke about increased stress due to testing, but made dismissive comments regarding the test. Freire (1970/2000) says:

> As long as the oppressed remain unaware of the causes of their condition, they fatalistically "accept" their exploitation. Further, they are apt to react in a passive and alienated manner when confronted with the necessity to struggle for their freedom and self-affirmation. (p. 61)

Indeed, both responses reflected each teacher's passive acceptance of her situation. However, there was a slight difference in the way they framed them. Rachel prefaced her statement by expressing a willingness to "jump through the hoop" of testing without making it the center of her work, whereas Ann shrugged and implied that she did not focus on test preparation with her students. Of all of the teachers that I interviewed, Ann spent the least amount of time preparing her students for the test.

Ann says teaching used to be less stressful because teachers weren't "judged or evaluated by how a student did on this one-time test." She describes testing's "out of control" contributions to teaching stress:

> The worst part [of each day] is probably feeling the stress of not having enough time to get everything done that I need to get done. And that's part of feeling scattered like, you

> know, just being pulled in so many different directions. And it's actually even better this year than it was last year with our new principal.

Continuing the discussion of the impact of stress, Marie admits that she is "struggling to even know what to teach and how to teach it," pointing out that if she focuses too much time on test preparation, she is doing her students a disservice. Regarding testing, she says, "I'm just honestly not too worried about it." Despite their frustrations, both Rachel and Marie explicitly claimed to not be worried or stressed over testing. However, during the course of our interview, Rachel grew impassioned and flushed while talking about testing. She eventually said, "I guess it riles me up, but I've separated myself from it." Rachel's comment denotes a sense of self-preservation in the thick of testing culture, but in preserving herself, she also presents an implied fatalistic view of her situation that cannot be overcome. Freire (1970/2000) says

> However, the oppressed, who have adapted to the structure of domination in which they are immersed, and have become resigned to it, are inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risks it requires. (p. 47)

Marie claims to not be worried about testing, but also says, "I'm beyond fed up with all the standardized testing and I guess if there's anything that would drive me out of teaching, it would either be that or technology." The impact is so great, it could be enough to make her leave the job she loves.

In analyzing Rachel, Ann, and Marie's comments, I recognized the "alienated manner" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 61) each teacher employed in conveying the high-stakes testing culture that is making the profession more stressful. From Rachel and Ann saying, "It is what it is," to Marie being exasperated to the point that it could cause her to exit the profession, I began to recognize that the stress of their situation had caused them to compartmentalize, or as Rachel put

it, she has "separated [herself] from it." This compartmentalization is another facet of the duality of the oppressed, which Freire (1970/2000) describes as being "at the same time themselves and the oppressor whose image they have internalized. Accordingly, until they concretely "discover" their oppressor and in turn their own consciousness, they nearly always express fatalistic attitudes towards their situation" (p. 61). Testing becomes a routine they are powerless to stop, without recourse, without hope. And as Freire (1970/2000) notes, "Hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it" (p. 91).

Unfair Evaluation. Another reason for teachers' demoralization is the procedure by which they are evaluated. The teachers that I interviewed feel that standardized test scores are not a fair way to assess them. As Marie points out, some students make themselves ill trying to perform well on the test, some do not care about it, and some do not test well. Ann remembers when teachers were allowed to be in classrooms with their students when they were testing. Even then, students would "work on it for ten minutes, bubble in, and put their head down. So, it's not really fair for my job to be held accountable because they're not taking it seriously or not trying." She does not think it is appropriate to base teacher evaluations on testing. Ann feels that teachers cover standards in "different ways that can't be tested how they're trying to test."

Rachel adds to the discussion of student apathy:

> The minute you tied salary to test score, I think we got into some murky waters. Because we have a lot of kids who just Christmas tree it. They don't care. They don't care at all, and you're not going to make them care. Even if it affects your salary, some care even *less* when you say it affects *you*. [Laughs] So it's just a tough line to bear.

She does not think it assesses anyone well, even if they are receiving top scores, and that it will be a problem for the future.

Instead of focusing on the testing that Marie calls a "waste of time and money," the ELA teachers at Laurel Bluff want other forms of evaluation. Buddy would like to have a student component that is "not necessarily an input from the students," but that would ideally detail what he taught them and why he is a good teacher. Buddy would also like for his evaluator to be an English teacher who understands the discipline. Ann spoke of cumulative projects and ongoing formative assessments in lieu of excessive testing for students:

> They have to actually observe teachers in their classroom teaching students or seeing students—how my students will do projects and they do presentations—like actually see they have to talk about what they're learned or what they've gotten from something.

Marie shared several ideas for a comprehensive evaluation. First, she approves of teacher evaluations. She says she is "old school" and believes in walking by the classroom to see what is happening. She says, "Everybody knows who's not doing their job." Second, she thinks people should listen to the way her students talk about her to learn whether she is doing her job. Third, she thinks a writing folder would show students' writing growth over the duration of the class.

Such changes in the evaluation process would boost morale and add humanity to the profession. However, it is not in the oppressors' interest to see the world transformed into one of humanization and fairness, for their power would be threatened (Freire, 1970/2000). Freire (1970/2000) says, "If the humanization of the oppressed signifies subversion, so also does their freedom; hence the necessity for constant control. And the more the oppressors control the oppressed, the more they change them into inanimate 'things'" (p. 59). Maintaining an evaluation system with murky computation techniques, prescriptive teaching rubrics, unknown tests with changing standards, and VAMs allows policymakers to exercise oppressive control

over educators, and in doing so, they dehumanize themselves alongside the teachers they have reduced to objects (Freire, 1970/2000).

Remediation Plan. The constant threat of being placed on a remediation plan was another factor contributing to demoralization. When students' test scores result in low achievement and growth, the consequence for Laurel Bluff High School's teachers is remediation. Placement on a remediation plan is often framed as a helpful measure or enrichment to assist the teacher in boosting her students' performance on standardized tests. However, the meaning of the label is punitive, and when it is applied, it changes the teacher's consciousness to one of inadequacy and despair. Freire (1970/2000) explains how oppressors attempt to change the consciousness of the oppressed:

> To achieve this end, the oppressors use the banking concept of education in conjunction with a paternalistic social action apparatus, within which the oppressed receive the euphemistic title of "welfare recipients." They are treated as individual cases, as marginal persons who deviate from the general configuration of a "good, organized, and just" society. The oppressed are regarded as the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these "incompetent and lazy" folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality. (p. 74)

When applied to present-day education, teachers who are already dehumanized and oppressed are further marginalized when they are placed on remediation. The idea is the same as Freire (1970/2000) outlined above: these educators are deviants who must receive assistance and adjust their thinking in order to contribute to the oppressors' system of power. That is, they must deliver higher test scores.

The English teachers that I interviewed had critical thoughts about that possibility and how they would respond if they were assigned to a remediation plan. For Rachel, whether or not she would stay in her position would depend on how her administration handled the situation. Her wish would be for them to interview her students and conclude that they did not try. If the administration determined that there had been a lack of effort from students, she does not think she should be placed on a remediation plan. If remediation is a formality, she says, "Fine, I'll jump through that hoop, but I want it to be a hoop I'm jumping through like on paper, you're on remediation, but behind the scenes, we think this is a load of bull." If they were on her side, she would tolerate it. But if they "legitimately said no, you have to get those kids to try, I can't stand over their shoulder and force them to take a test. Especially a test I don't really agree with." If her former principal delivered the news in that manner, she says she might not have stayed. She cannot imagine her current principal handling it in a derogatory way, so she thinks she "would be onboard" if he were the one to place her on a plan. Rachel says:

> It depends on how many hoops you have to jump through and do they have the confidence in you? Is it, we understand you struggle, here, we're going to give you ways to help you fix it, let's work on it, I'm in. If they say, you didn't do your job, these aren't acceptable, I don't know. If they treat me like a professional, I'll be professional back.

Buddy said he thinks the English teachers who have been placed on remediation plans are good teachers, but "it was the luck of the draw in the students they had that semester." He said it would be "devastating" if the same had happened to him. In fact, he says, "To put me on a remediation plan because of a test score, I would've walked out. I wouldn't have stayed. I would've gone into the ministry and saved souls." Furthermore, if this year's scores return lower

than expected and they put him on a remediation plan, he would probably end his career in public education and seek additional teaching opportunities at a local college. Buddy says:

> I would leave it, and that would be hard because I love it. I've loved it for 39 years. That would be a hard way to end a career, wouldn't it? [Laughs] On a remediation plan. And it could very well happen. It really could.

In the event that his entire department is placed on a remediation plan, Buddy would stay because "misery loves company." Even if he were assigned one-on-one coaching with a literacy coach, he would try to provide moral support for the department and help them fix the issues.

After thirty-nine years in the classroom, Buddy is determined to stay in his position regardless of testing unless he is individually placed on a remediation plan. He says, "I have told my colleagues I have no intention of leaving education until I see this pendulum come back." He wants to know that teachers will be viewed as professionals and allowed to do their jobs. I asked him why he did not want to retire and view it from that side, and Buddy replied, "I just want to be a part of it."

I asked Marie if she would stay in her position if she were placed on a remediation plan as a result of test scores. She informed me that she has already been placed on one. It started three years ago, when her score was a two (out of a possible five). That year, more students scored "advanced" than projected, and regular students made gains. Her low score did not make sense to her, but when she complained to the state, they said it was because two students with health issues had not scored well. Marie does not think it was fair to include the outliers. The next year, even though the numbers suggested her students performed well, her score dropped to a one because it was hard to show gains with an advanced group. Marie says:

> I just decided, you know what? I'm not a number. I don't care. But yes, I had to go back to the four observations a year kind of cycle and all of that stuff. Yeah. It's insulting. It's demeaning. It was depressing.

Her remediation plan did not include a literacy coach. Marie says she chooses to stay focused on what is more important to her:

> Again, I just don't pay that much attention to it because you know what? I know I do a good job. The fact that kids come back to the school to tell me they appreciate how *hard* I was is more meaningful than a score from the state. Somebody that I've never met. The notes that I get saying, "Thank you for teaching me how to write an essay" are more important than their score on a multiple-choice test.

The constant threat of remediation has caused changes in the "camaraderie and interaction between teachers" and the way teachers view their students. Teachers in the department have approached Buddy due to his role as a union representative to inquire why their rosters have more struggling learners and students receiving special education services than those of their colleagues. They vocalize that it is not fair, and Buddy agrees, although he is not sure how to address it. These teachers once chose to teach struggling students, but no longer wish to do so due to the impact of test scores. Buddy's argument is that these teachers get the most gains from struggling students:

> I've said you're wonderful with these kids. But they go, well, "But my test scores won't be." Or "I'm going to end up on a remediation plan if I keep getting these students." I don't know what the answer is to that. It's wrong on every level because these are really good teachers that I would like to see keep. The teacher will say, "I love these kids, I

> don't mind teaching these kids, but I am worried about this bottom line here." And I think well yes, I can see that.

These changing teacher attitudes as a result of policy are a loss for students. Buddy says, "Now, that door's closed. Do you see what I mean? Nobody wants to teach that student because of the test scores."

Buddy also thinks it is unfair for teachers outside of the main content areas, such as librarians and world language teachers, to be exempt from growth scores. Even though in many cases they teach the same students, those educators may select options such as graduation rate and school-wide literacy. Buddy notes that those teachers will never be on a remediation plan. He thinks the impact of punitive actions such as remediation plans will be far-reaching:

> I think it's going to be very hard to keep teachers like me in this profession the way we're going. I don't think you will. I think the turnover, already we're seeing those that can retire are leaving, those that take this personally, they're going to leave, and it's not personal… I think they're just morally defeated.

Indeed, the fear of remediation further increases the demoralization of the ELA teachers at Laurel Bluff High.

Not Feeling Trusted by State Policymakers. Despite their feelings of autonomy at Laurel Bluff High, teachers do not feel trusted by state policy makers. Overall, teachers hated that they were not permitted to make professional choices outside of the content they choose to teach, citing everything from forced attendance and participation in PLCs to prescriptive teaching. Freire (1970/2000) writes:

> One of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is *prescription*. Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice

> upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness. Thus, the behavior of the oppressed is a prescribed behavior, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor." (p. 47)

The reason the teachers' perceived lack of trust from state policymakers contributes to their demoralization is because it stems from their realization that their professional lives are now the embodiment of prescribed behaviors.

Ann's response to what her magic wand would do if she could make education look the way she wanted included bringing "the trust back for teachers" and treating them like professionals like the "good old days" when teachers had more autonomy and "people thought we were doing our job." Marie says teachers had more autonomy when she first started teaching over 20 years ago. They had the freedom to "devise lesson plans that the kids would enjoy more, more literature, more writing, more things" that Marie thinks they would use if they were college-bound. Marie says that she gave essay or open response tests instead of multiple-choice tests because "I felt that's what they needed." Rachel says there used to be "less societal stress" when she started teaching, and "the state situation" was different because a different test was used.

Buddy says that prescriptive teaching, while "excellent" for new teachers who need help with structure and planning, becomes "more nuisance than aid" for experienced teachers. Buddy follows protocol, but he says:

> I don't need to state an objective three times. My students don't need to be able to verbalize my objective. They just need to be able to do it. And I can judge that. And we don't need to state objectives orally. Now I'm an evaluator, I do it. But sometimes I think, you know, naturally, this is not the way I would do it.

Although he is required to state objectives orally to his classes as part of the state's rubric for teacher performance, he moves away from the rigidity of prescriptive teaching through his autonomy to select readings for his class. He thinks teachers have to move away from textbooks if they are going to last. Buddy does not believe he needs a textbook to be a good teacher. He chooses to create his own text from outside materials such as novels, essays, and articles. Buddy says this about prescriptive teaching and creativity in the classroom:

> I can't do it the same way over and over. I wouldn't last. If I was going to teach the same way over and over, I might as well go get a job working nine to five. And doing the same thing every day. The same fill out the same forms, do you know, does that make sense?

Buddy's response to this feeling of distrust is to take action to educate himself. He began "feeling the impact of political intrusion in the classroom" with the implementation of NCLB in 2002, but it was not until Race to the Top in 2009 that he launched his political advocacy for teachers. It resulted in a master's degree at the end of his career to "renew" himself as an educator. He wanted to know more about education policy and vouchers. He says:

> We've let the politicians and these Bill Gates corporations, money, influence the direction of education. Our legislators have sold out. Literally. They have been paid to vote a certain way and it's sad for public education. The current students and parents are the two who have got to make a difference for public education. And I believe that totally.

A similar sentiment is expressed by Freire (1970/2000), who writes:

> It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This

> discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis. (p. 65)

Even though Buddy fails to recognize that teachers can also make a difference for public education, and assigns the weight of the problem to students and parents in his statement, his next comments allude to his commitment to the struggle for liberation.

Buddy recounts that a professor told him in 1977, "The dedicated teacher is the profession's worst enemy." The professor explained to Buddy that "dedicated teachers walk into their classrooms and they are totally dedicated to their children. What's going on out here, they don't pay attention to. And that's dangerous." Buddy says he never thought about it until 2002, when NCLB began. Buddy believes the implementation of NCLB changed his career. From 1977 until 2002, he was "the dedicated teacher," but then he says, "I had to walk out of my classroom and take a stand. And say this is wrong. We are headed in the wrong direction. And I regret that I was silent. I was just doing my job."

Buddy recognizes the need for dialogue, which Freire (1970/2000) calls an "existential reality" because it is the way by which the oppressed "achieve significance as human beings" (p. 88). Without dialogue, teachers continue to endure their oppression in silence, feeling a lack of trust from policymakers that contributes to their demoralization.

The Duality of How Teachers Understand/See/Define the Test

The way teachers understand, see, and define the test is entrenched in their duality (Freire, 1970/2000). Freire (1970/2000) says, "A particular problem is the duality of the oppressed: they are contradictory, divided beings, shaped by and existing in a concrete situation of oppression and violence" (p. 55). In this case, violence is the force used by policymakers to require teachers to deliver arbitrary test scores and impose severe professional consequences if

the teachers do not deliver. The teachers' testing goals have been shaped by this fear and, consequently, the damage to their professional reputations should they fail. Most of the teachers that I interviewed expressed a desire to see their students succeed as one of the reasons they teach; they all wanted to make a difference in students' lives. However, they did not mention testing as a measure of their students' success. Their new, oppressive reality is that there is an embedded threat in every test: students must succeed to support the teacher's continued employment. And if teachers want to be perceived as effective by the state, their school, and their colleagues, they must deliver gains in test scores with each passing year. Their disbelief in the validity of the test coexists with their aspiration to be viewed as a good teacher through high student test scores. The "existential duality" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 61) causes them to take ownership and/or pride in test scores they believe to be worthless.

This duality (Freire, 1970/2000) was evident in the mixed responses and emotions teachers reported when I asked them to tell me how they felt about standardized testing. Karen says

> I really take it to heart when a student does not do well on state tests. Fortunately, my students do well for the most part, so I try not to put too much stress and stock in the scores because again, I do not believe they accurately portray my teaching or my students' performance levels.

The contradiction is that she does not believe in the test as a performance indicator for herself or her students, and yet, she is emotionally affected when students fail. She also says, "The teachers are very proud of our improved test scores, and I truly believe we maximize the capabilities of our students." This statement denotes Karen's perception that the ELA teachers feel a sense of pride and accomplishment for pushing their students toward success on

standardized tests. But what does her students' testing success mean to her when she calls standardized testing a "truly pointless reflection of both teacher and student performance"?

Buddy shows a similar duality (Freire, 1970/2000) in his comments on test scores and student preparation. He says, "I was pleased we showed growth on the ACT, we continue to show growth. That's hard work by a lot of good teachers." Not only is Buddy satisfied with their ACT score improvement, but he also thinks teachers should help students with standardized testing by covering more grammar and language. In his classroom, Buddy examines what he can do differently to help students improve their test performance, although he also says, "I will never teach to meet a test score." The duality (Freire, 1970/2000) in his situation is that even though he does everything to support his students' increased scores as well as those of his department, he refuses to entertain the idea that he is teaching to the test. Upon further discussion, Buddy admitted that he embedded reading strategies and quizzes that were very similar to the standardized test into his lessons each week, but he saw it as preparing students for life and the test through reinforcing those English skills. As Freire (1970/2000) notes when the oppressed adopt the oppressor's reality, "the one pole aspires not to liberation, but to identification with its opposite pole" (46). In other words, even though Buddy is resistant to being ruled by test scores and the policymakers who require them, he aspires to high test scores because he has been shaped by and submerged in oppression.

Another component of Buddy's desire for students to score well is what the test itself symbolizes for him. When his students don't score well, Buddy says, "Well, I hate it. I hate that they don't score well. I want them to be able to read. I want them to be literate. I want them to be able to think." For Buddy, the test represents the students' ability to do all of these things. However, he has never felt it is a reflection of his teaching and furthermore, he chooses not to

rely much on test scores. He says, “I just kind of have to accept that. As an educator, you do the best you can with the students you have. You just have to move on.” He measures his students’ success with fair assessments and essay questions. Buddy thinks “those struggling students” need teachers to motivate them, not drill them with standardized tests. He believes students’ standardized test scores could improve if teachers engage students in reading and hold them accountable for it. Due to Buddy’s view of the test as representative of students’ literacy and thinking and not a reflection of his teaching, he creates distance between himself and the scores upon which he claims not to rely.

Buddy continues to demonstrate this distance when speaking of his advanced students. He says, “They’re going to get what they need. They’re on, they’re motivated, they could teach themselves, and I tell them that.” When students score well, Buddy says

> Honestly, they have had the support they needed at home, they have come from a socioeconomically advantaged family that has supported reading before K up through high school. They’ve had hands-on parents who have supported them and that’s why they’re advanced. So I don’t take that as a compliment to me, I hope I’ve again, motivated them and opened some doors for them.

For Buddy, high test scores represent what students have: the ability to think, literacy, home support, and privileged socioeconomic status. He claims to not see himself as part of the equation, and yet, he contradicts himself when he attributes the improvement in ACT scores to “hard work by a lot of good teachers” and embeds regular test review into his lessons. Furthermore, Buddy has the autonomy to teach anything he wishes, but chooses to use class time to review for the test via reading strategies and quizzes formatted like standardized tests. This

contradiction gives me cause to believe that Buddy is invested in standardized test scores because he sees them as symbolic of what a student knows and what he has taught them.

Marie's experience differs from the other teachers I interviewed because she openly admits that her view of testing has changed. She says, "I was patting myself on the back" when the tests first began and students were scoring well. Then she realized that for all of the students to be doing that well, the test is probably "not hard enough." She says:

> I'm pleased for my kids when they do well, but I don't want them to feel that the number is all that matters. What did they learn? If you're taking a multiple-choice test, maybe you guessed right? Maybe you are a good test taker, but is that going to transfer to a real-world skill? Can you read? Can you write? Can you argue successfully for a point without being offensive? I don't know.

This statement reveals much about Marie's duality (Freire, 1970/2000). She is pleased for her students when they score well, and yet, she is not certain what the test actually symbolizes because she is not sure what students have learned. A good score could be lots of things: that student can read, write, argue, or have a lucky guessing streak. When Marie's students do not score well, she does not want them to "see themselves as failures because they didn't do well on a particular test on a particular day." She does not think student test scores are a testament to her teaching. Instead, she says, "I think it's how they did on that particular day." She is more concerned with what students actually learned in her class. Marie says, "I'm just honestly not too worried about it." But as I learned, Marie works hard to avoid being placed on remediation again after a couple of years of low VAMs due to outliers on state tests.

Like the others, Ann says she is happy for her students who score well, but notes that the students who do well in class are usually the ones with higher scores. She says, "I've never

thought that that was the end all, be all indicator of what they learned and how successful they were as a student." Some students "just bubble in and they don't really care that they didn't do well." She says she knows there are always those who didn't try, or students in special education who may not do well. She hates it when good students who are not good test-takers score poorly because they are "so disappointed that they failed." She feels more for those students. Ann says:

> That makes it sound like I don't care about that test at all, but that's not true! [Laughs] I would get them ready for it, but I just after so many years, you're like this is…you know. [Laughs] It is what it is!

Ann feels joy and sorrow for students depending on their test scores, and yet, she does not see those scores as representative of student learning. She claims to care about the test, but presents good-natured apathy toward test preparation and general acceptance of the testing cycle.

Rachel does not feel that high student test scores are indicative of her teaching; rather, she suspects testing interference. She says:

> Honestly, it's not how I should think. If they score well, I think the state messed with the numbers. Which is bad, but especially these tests, which I have not seen, but you hear about. These are hard tests. They're going to struggle on them because they're still kind of used to the old EOCs. The EOCs I expected them to do pretty well on, so that wasn't a big deal. If they score really high on the [new state] test, though, the state messed with those scores.

The only elements that Rachel thinks are a reflection of her teaching are student writing and development. The featured content on each test, she says, is the "luck of the draw." She believes if teachers take credit for high test scores, they need to accept blame for low test scores. She says, "You take a share of blame in both."

When Rachel's students score far below where she estimated they would score, she says she is "disappointed" because she thinks they did not try. She views this as a reflection of their respect for her and for themselves. She adds that so far, she has only encountered outliers, but if every child failed the test, she "obviously did a lot wrong." Rachel contradicts herself by saying only writing and development reflect her teaching, but that she would accept responsibility for her class if all of her students failed. On the one hand, she is fighting oppression by refusing to take responsibility for multiple-choice tests. On the other, she would accept responsibility on the basis of her supposed failure to adequately prepare students for the test. Why? She is caught in the contradiction of her values and those of the oppressor. She wants to perform well, and this formally occurs when students perform well; otherwise, it would not personally disappoint her when students miss their predicted scores. It is interesting that Rachel suspects state interference if the scores are high, but not if the scores are low.

A further example of duality exists in two teachers' comments about testing. As mentioned above, Rachel says "Honestly, it's not how I should think" when she revealed her suspicions about testing interference. Similarly, Ann said that "this may not be the right thing to think, but I never really thought that the score reflected what they learned in my class." The ideals of the oppressor are so firmly rooted in their consciousness that speaking an opposing view causes conflict within each teacher. It is not that they have difficulty expressing their views; it is that they have accepted the view of the oppressor as the "right" view. Therefore, their opinions are automatically wrong in the culture of banking education, which "attempts to control thinking and action" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 77).

I found that the ELA teachers at Laurel Bluff High have conflicted feelings and ideas about what the test symbolizes and represents, and therefore, they have mixed emotions about

what the scores mean. Evidence of duality (Freire, 1970/2000) was present in all teachers' responses in varying degrees. They are fighting what they believe to be a bad representation of student learning and teaching performance, and in Buddy's case, he is warring with himself against the stigma of teaching to the test. Yet the banking approach to education, a byproduct of the culture of oppression, has planted within them the desire to rise to the challenges of their oppressor in an effort to both preserve their professional reputations and signal to others and themselves that they are effective teachers. Freire (1970/2000) says, "The "humanism" of the banking approach masks the effort to turn women and men into automatons—the very negation of their ontological vocation to be more fully human" (p. 74). The teachers make regular deposits at this figurative bank in the form of test results.

Perceived Negative Impact on Students

Most of the teachers commented that standardized testing has made a negative impact on students' social, emotional, and academic growth; its culture has created a pervasive sense of apathy among students. Ann believes the exponential, "out of control" growth of testing has caused a change in students. She does not think students enjoy school like they did when she first started teaching, and believes that testing is worse for students than it is for teachers. Ann says:

> I don't think high school today has as much school spirit, they're not as into the stuff you'd think teenagers would be into with the football games, and the basketball games, and actually enjoying high school. I think they've kind of lost that part of being a teenager. And I wouldn't enjoy all the testing myself.

Rachel says today's students lack investment in their learning and "there's no fun to be had." Test preparation takes place the whole month of November into December during fall semester. Rachel says:

> Like in the spring, April and May, test prep, test prep, it's *mind-numbing*. It's *ridiculous*. That's just not fun at all. That's test prep after they've taken a million benchmarks throughout the year to tell you, oh, they're not where they should be. No crap. I know that. I'm working on it. Don't give me a test to tell me they're not where they should be. I know they're not where they should be. They read at the 7th grade level. Working on it.

The "mind-numbing" present-day banking education also incorporates paternal authority (Freire, 1970/2000). Freire (1970/2000) writes:

> The atmosphere of the home is prolonged in the school, where the students soon discover that (as in the home) in order to achieve some satisfaction they must adapt to the precepts which have been set from above. One of these precepts is not to think. (p. 155)

Deprived of dialogue-dependent critical thinking, students are reduced to receptacles that recall facts at the appropriate time to prove their aptitude in a given subject. The current climate of standardized testing preparation matches Freire's (1970/2000) ideas on the teacher narration sickness that plagues education. Freire (1970/2000) writes, "The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are" (p. 72). Filled receptacles equal higher test scores, and higher test scores, according to today's policymakers, are indicative of better teachers and higher instances of learning. But the current "narration sickness" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 71) originates with the policymakers, and then trickles down to the district, then to the school, and finally, ends with the teacher teaching to the changing standards and content that will appear on the test.

The teachers at Laurel Bluff feel that standardized testing is a poor substitute for what education has lost due to continuous reforms. Marie is saddened that there is no longer time to focus on projects and meaningful assignments due to standardized testing. She says, "Kids aren't

going to remember test preparation from high school," but they might remember participating in a career fair or a play. She says, "Those are the things they're going to remember. Not test preparation."

I asked Buddy what education would look like if he could wave a magic wand to make it look the way he wanted. One of the many things Buddy described is more student involvement in high school. He spoke of "dwindling" high school traditions, and gave this year's homecoming parade as an example. There was not a single class float this year. Buddy wants every class level to have officers to get their peers engaged, and he wants an active student government.

In addition to a notable reduction in student involvement, teachers also see students under increased pressure and stress due to testing. Buddy explains the impact that testing pressure has placed on his students:

> I *don't* believe college is for everybody. You know, I think that's very unfair to put that pressure on young people. I think they may not really know what they want to do until they—they may be middle-aged before they realize what their true passion is. Yeah! Absolutely! And there is not a thing wrong with that. I think the pressure we put on young people makes them not like school! You know? I think they just feel such pressure…

Ann thinks it is unfair to require students to take three or four tests each semester. Even with recent reductions in testing time, Ann's students still lose two days of instructional time to take the exam for her class. She says, "They're over it. They're stressed out. And I don't think it's developmentally appropriate in a lot of ways." Similarly, Rachel says, "You can figure out their problems without testing them *all* the time. The kids hate it."

Buddy believes that measuring education with statistics and standards is ineffective. Regarding students, he says:

> They *need* to be able to progress gradually. They don't need to be held to benchmarks that are causing undue stress. I don't know what the damage is, but I do know in the long run, we're doing damage. I believe that with all my heart. Standardized testing is damaging to the teaching profession because so many teachers are teaching to that test as if their career depends on it. And that's sad to me. And then students are becoming test-resistant and not caring. That's not the result you want.

The policymakers, in their narration of education, have prescribed behaviors (Freire, 1970/2000) for teachers that include narrating to students. The teachers at Laurel Bluff expressed sadness, disappointment, and frustration at the deviation from the inquiry-based, dialogical education they used to know to the standardized test-driven banking concept of education in practice today. The domination and demoralization of teachers also means that students have, in turn, been dominated and demoralized. Freire (1970/2000) writes, "Education as the exercise of domination stimulates the credulity of students, with the ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression" (p. 78). Today's youth do not know any other system of education besides banking education; the weight and frequency of testing have normalized the culture of oppression in students' lives. As reported by the teachers that I interviewed, this oppression has caused an increase of observed negative changes in students.

Changes Relationships with Students

Relationships with students are paramount to all of the teachers that I interviewed. Many of them started their careers with the hope that they would make a difference in students' lives, and they find meaning when they feel like they have affected positive changes. Buddy says:

> You know, I think when you start out as a young teacher, you think you're going to change the world. You think you have that power. You think you can …But you know, the thing is, I haven't changed the world, but I've certainly changed lives. One life at a time, maybe. And in ways I don't even know. I would do it all again.

Ann says she stays in her position because she loves the relationship with the students. Over the course of her career, she has coached JV cheerleading and dance, taught theatre and yearbook, and now she works with National Honor Society. She does activities where "you get to meet students on a different level" outside of class. Rachel says one of the reasons she stays at Laurel Bluff is because "I really do like the kids. I think they have good hearts."

Almost all of the teachers told me that they are impacted when former students return to tell them about the difference they made in their lives. Buddy says he has stayed in his position because it is "personally rewarding" when former students thank him for touching their lives in some way. He says, "It's important, those connections." He believes the students also want those connections with their teachers. He says, "They *just* want that connection and they value what you say. And you've gotta make time. There's not enough time." Buddy wants them to have those connections to "take with them that they always remember." He says, "We never realize what we're giving to these young people and what they take with them. We just don't."

Similarly, Ann says one of her biggest joys of teaching is seeing former students mature, succeed, and become productive citizens. She enjoys seeing them as adults with families of their own. Ann stays in contact with them on Facebook, where she wishes them a happy birthday and they still call her "Ms. Ann." When reflecting over the memories and connections from her teaching career, Ann says, "But, you know, sometimes it's not the material, the curriculum that

you remember, it's the—the other stuff that goes with it." Karen says she "feels the purpose of her career choice" when former students share its "impact" with her. She says:

> I have a few students who went to college to become English teachers, and they went out of their way to tell me it was because of me. That is seriously my most favorite accolade, even over meeting with the governor a few years ago to discuss Common Core.

Karen says the experience "emotionally connects me with [LBHS] even more." Marie's teaching goals are "to find the joy. To not allow myself to become numb to what I'm doing. To making those connections with kids and reaching. Helping them to achieve their goals."

Although connections with students are prized among teachers, I learned that there has been a shift away from those connections as a result of policy reform. Rachel reached some realizations about the detrimental impact testing has had on her career and her relationships with students as we talked:

> I think what's sad is that at the beginning of my career, this is really sad—I almost feel bad saying it, I was more like not necessarily wanted them to like me, but I wanted to mother them and do that and probably like the last 4 years, 5 years, maybe this is how the testing has affected me, how I think it's not, but it probably has. It's turned into you need to learn something. I will love you to death and I will support you, but I need you to leave my class and be able to say I learned stuff. And it's kind of sad that it's gotten away from—like I make connections with the kids. I know the kids. But I feel like that was the priority at the beginning of my career, and now it's—I'm not even at the end, but there's so much stock on 'can they produce on a test?' that now it's like, we don't have time to wax eloquent about *this*. We need to do *this*.

The pressure for students to perform has changed Rachel's priorities, and subsequently, her relationships with students. Before standardized testing became so prevalent, there was time for Rachel to both nurture students and promote achievement. But now, she says there are some units she struggles to finish by a certain date because of all the "testing and benchmarks on top of the testing, oh they have to do this thing and that thing." She says the students' next teacher will not ask about class discussions; they will ask what the students learned about writing and why their writing is that way. Rachel says, "That's what it's going to be." Her goal for her career is to have an "effect on the kids." Rachel may be out of time to teach all that she would like to teach or to "develop them as people," but she believes the teachers are still developing students in "smaller doses." In the classroom, Rachel says her goal is that "I want them to leave better than they were."

Freire (1970/2000) writes, "Cultural conquest leads to the cultural inauthenticity of those who are invaded; they begin to respond to the values, the standards, and the goals of the invaders" (p. 153). Of all of the teachers that I interviewed, I saw the greatest example of Freire's statement in Rachel's words. Rachel's instinct is to be nurturing and foster relationships with students, but living with the duality of her desire to nurture and the oppressor's demand for high test scores has caused a shift to occur. Rachel is now fulfilling the oppressors' goals instead of seeking the authentic, nurturing relationships with students that she once enjoyed. Without those relationships, how does Rachel fulfill her sense of teaching purpose? One possibility is that achieving higher test scores has replaced the value she once placed on relationships, which, again, connects to the above quote from Freire.

Unfortunately, this situation is not limited to Rachel. Buddy states, "There's more lessons than a test score …The point is that human element. Teachers are getting so stressed over data

and teaching to a test that we're missing these opportunities to connect as individuals to people who need us." Without those connections, relationships are not forged. Without relationships, opportunities for a more meaningful education are lost.

Focus on Numbers/Data

The national and statewide focus, as noted by the majority of the teachers, is on the numbers instead of the children. Most of the teachers that I interviewed find fault with the implementation of education reform at the school level because it reduces students to numbers and data. For example, Buddy says:

> And you know I like that No Child Left Behind. I love that, that slogan, that saying, because I think that's the way it should be. But implementing it is so, you know what I mean. I don't believe that they're a number, a statistic, a test score, you know. There's so much that we don't, we can't possibly evaluate when it comes to teaching.

Both teachers and students are linked to a test that is credited with assessing the total information exchanged in a given course, but as Buddy notes, not everything can be evaluated with a test.

Similarly, most of the teachers that I interviewed expressed concern about education's problematic use of student scores to assign labels to students, and the potential damage it can inflict on students' self-esteem. Ann says:

> "This may not be the right thing to think, but I never really thought that that score reflected what they learned in my class. Like what they accomplished. I didn't think that was a good, like a great indicator of what they …And we talked about it in our department how many times can a kid hear, "You're below basic," Or "You're basic." You know that that's kind of… And so it's self-fulfilling prophecy on testing.

Ann hates it when good students who are not good test-takers score poorly because they are "so disappointed that they failed." Buddy notes how the problematic practice of labeling children according to their test results signals a lack of caring about students:

> But I don't believe in pushing a child to the frustration level. And there's such a thing as self-esteem, and I don't think we're caring enough in public education. I think we used to, but I think that we don't look enough at their self-concept, their individuality. I want my students to be *happy*… I do. I want them to be happy. And I want them… Used to, high school was the best years of your life, I'm not sure I would say that to a student now. With the pressure and the push toward you know, academics. And please, don't get me wrong. I *am* an academic teacher. But you've got to realize that telling a student over and over that you're below basic, or you're proficient? That… that is just, that's cruel. I would *never* tell my own child, "You're just proficient." And I'm not a parent, but I would never do that. Common sense tells you that that's not the way you want to deal with a human being that you want to do better. You know. I used to tell students, "Look, you're not… English isn't your cup of tea. It's not the end of the world. All I ask is that you do your very best, and I do want you trying to figure out, what is it you do like? Where is your talent? Where is your passion? And that, you know, and to me, that is good education. The whole child.

Marie feels there is "far too much emphasis" on standardized tests. She says that our brains are not standardized, and standardized testing is the wrong approach to education because it is setting students up to fail. For example, many of their sophomores are behind in reading, but their test includes 12th grade material. She believes giving students something too far out of their reach is not the way to promote achievement. Marie tells this story to emphasize her point:

> I had a reading professor years ago who used an analogy of a balloon. And he said if a kid walks into your classroom and you hand them a balloon, they feel no sense of accomplishment. None. If you have the balloon floating on the ceiling, not one of them is going to jump and try to get it. But if that balloon is just out of reach, they're all going to grab for it. They're all going to be looking for it. They're all going to want to get it. And that is an analogy for teaching. If you put it too far, they know they can't do it and they're not going to try. If you give it to them, there's no sense of accomplishment, so you've got to find that middle ground where it's just out of reach and give them the steps to get there. For some of our kids, that standardized test is like the balloon at the top of the gym ceiling.

Marie does not want her students to believe "the number is all that matters." If students do not score well, she addresses a number of variables that could influence their performance: lack of breakfast, lack of sleep, transient living in cars and tents or with Grandma, apathy, or they tried and "they still weren't good enough for the state." Instead of focusing on those scores, Marie asks what they learned in her class, if they learned to be a better person, and if they will be able to maintain a job.

On top of that state's focus on numbers and labels, the ELA the teachers that I interviewed are concerned about the emotional, psychological toll that testing takes on students. Buddy addresses the contradictory nature of teachers being forced to uphold the labels of "standardization" in education, and in doing so, he reveals the duality that exists in their oppression:

> One type of education doesn't fit everybody. Where we've gone goes back to this *standardized*. What a word …It's against everything I believe about education. There's

> nothing standardized about being human. There's no standard human—look at our political turmoil. We can't create cookie cutter students, and then label them. I grew up in an era where we're being two-faced. We don't want children labeling each other, we don't want them bullying each other, but teachers are having to be bullies. We're having to bully our students to do well on a standardized test because our career is at stake. We're being evaluated according to our [growth] scores. I would never tell a student, "You're below basic." What does that do psychologically to a human being?

The teachers at Laurel Bluff are caught in an existential crisis, or as Freire (1970/2000) calls it, "existential duality" (p. 61). They became teachers because of their love of the content, and they wanted to make a difference in students' lives. Now that desire to connect with other human beings is housed alongside the oppressors' objective for teachers to "bully" students to do well on their tests and wait for the numbers and labels to arrive. Freire (1970/2000) writes, "By means of manipulation, the dominant elites try to conform the masses to their objectives (p. 147)." When test scores, both byproducts and tools of oppression, are tied to teachers' evaluations, teachers easily conform to the whims of policymakers to protect their jobs.

Ultimately, the teachers' focus has also shifted to the numbers in spite of their worries that the state is relegating students to test scores. They have been dehumanized and reduced to numbers in their evaluations, and therefore, they focus on the test scores that generate them—not the students.

Social context. Most of the teachers that I interviewed spoke of putting their students' needs over test scores. For example, Rachel wants to see education based more on each kid and less on test scores. She says, "But I think tailor it to the kid. I think we missed that step somewhere. I think we're tailoring it to this model kid who's not really any of the kids." Rachel

feels that this change would allow teachers to "have more connections with them" and address the problems she is currently seeing. However, the community and students have changed in the midst of frequent testing, and as a result, so have their needs.

Changes in community. According to Buddy, "there's no growth right now" in the county's economy, and with an aging population and limited industry to attract younger families, some of the families are potentially unemployed and looking for work. Marie says poverty and drug issues have risen with a high population of transient students moving in and out of the area. Buddy notes an increase in struggling families, unemployment, and suspected meth production in the rural areas. He says they are beginning to see the effects of the county's high meth use at Laurel Bluff High School through the children of drug users in their classrooms. Buddy feels that schools "are the gauges of the changes that are taking place economically," and that teaching becomes a tough job in challenged schools where the parents are struggling. In those cases, Buddy says the school will struggle, and "you can't blame the teachers. As a matter of fact, those teachers in that environment deserve our praise, support, thank you."

Changes in students. Most of the teachers that I interviewed noted a visible change in students. Ann says, "I see a change in students about being tested so much. I don't think students enjoy school as much as when I first started teaching." Rachel feels that students have lost respect for authority, themselves, and almost everyone through the proliferation of social media. Similarly, Ann feels like kids kept their innocence longer in the 80s, and high school seems like a rougher place now in comparison. She talks about how social media has changed students' experience and says, "If people messed with you at school before there was social media, once you left school it was kind of over with. But now it's like that happens to you at home, it's online." She says high school today is lacking school spirit. According to her, teens are being

exposed to things they should not be exposed to, and they are growing up too fast. Ann says it is possible she has a romanticized notion of looking back at school, but she does not think she would like high school if she were a student now. Ann says she still teaches good kids, but they don't say, "Yes, ma'am, no, ma'am" like they did at the beginning of her career.

Rachel noted that the students are changing and becoming less motivated each year. She explains her views on student apathy and promotion:

> I just feel like kids aren't invested in their learning. They don't care. They don't care about any of it. And then they get to college, they struggle, and then they say oh, I wasn't prepared in high school. You *would've* been if you had done anything we assigned. But they pass them through to keep that graduation rate up. I don't know. I think the degree is watered down.

Rachel does not feel that students will apply extra effort to learn from their errors when they go to college. She says, "I just don't think they have that drive now. And you don't have fun" in high school anymore due to test preparation and testing.

Buddy has noticed a rise in students with low socioeconomic status. He says, "Teaching at Laurel Bluff is becoming harder because that population is increasing." He watches his students for physical signs that they do not have what they need, as well as classroom behaviors such as resting their heads on the desks, disengaging, etc. In addition, he watches students' grades for decreasing patterns. He says, "Some of our students don't eat lunch because of the stigma attached to being on free and reduced lunch. It bothers me." He says the cafeteria is one of the places where the differences are most notable and describes it as a "reality check." He is shocked at the number of meals the school sends home with students on the weekends. Buddy

thinks that the safest part of some students' day could be in his classroom, where he notices growing differences between enrollment in honors and regular classes. He explains:

> And our regular classes are mushrooming in size. And that's where you get your socioeconomically disadvantaged student. And I mean it's not close anymore. Those classes used to be comparable, but in my honors classes, I might—19 is a huge class, and in my regular classes, it's 30.

When I asked why he thought his honors numbers were dwindling, he said, "Well, I think the socioeconomic status of our students is changing. I think they're—we are becoming a more—a poorer school." Buddy understands outside factors can affect a student's learning. He says:

> And they may have their head down. They may not be engaged the way I want them to be, but I've got to realize they have a lot going on outside my classroom. Teachers and politicians have to realize there is a world outside that school. That *world* affects that school. And I tell my students that I know there's a world outside my classroom. I *know* that. But I want you to know that this, you know, I try to prepare you for that world outside that door.

Likewise, Marie addresses the reality of her transient and food-insecure students' lives as the numbers grow:

> They want their voices to be heard and they want to count and they want to matter. We hold out education as the golden key, and we've got to back that up with action. It's sometimes hard for them to stay awake in the classroom because they weren't able to sleep at night. So that influences how they learn, if they're hungry, and I know we have free lunch programs and all that stuff, but when you get a kid who at 15 is the only one

> employed in the family, there's a problem. There's a problem that society needs to fix, not just the schools.

According to Marie, she sees poverty in all levels of her classes, but it is not evenly distributed. Some kids from affluent homes struggle academically and are in the lower level classes. On the other hand, some students in honors courses "are from really crappy situations." She says, "Intelligence is not tied to poverty; achievement might be." Overall, Marie says there are more struggling kids in poverty than not at Laurel Bluff.

Ann does not directly address poverty as an issue in teaching, but she does mention a few instances where her students have not had what they needed, and she addressed those needs. She is the only teacher to share that she has made efforts to help her students beyond basic classroom instruction. In Ann's regular and inclusion classes, she often provides writing folders and writing utensils because "either their parents can't afford it or they just don't care enough to get school supplies." She speaks of her homeroom and the students she serves who struggle with food and clothing. On several occasions, her mother brought them fruit "because they love fruit and just, just things you don't, that they don't have at home, I guess."

I asked Rachel if she had noticed an increase in poverty over the last ten years, and she said technology made it harder to discern. Before "every kid had an iPhone 6 or all that stuff," they could tell who was struggling with clean clothes, food, and supplies. But now, she says she has to watch what students wear because she does not know who is on free or reduced lunch. She says she does not think about it when lots of students wear shorts in the winter and have new iPhones. Rachel comments, "And I understand, that's the circle of poverty, I *get it,* it's not meant to be offensive. So it's probably gotten worse because we lost jobs [here]. But we also lost students, so I feel like they moved."

However, students often reveal their hardships during class. Rachel says that the students do not have filters, and they will share when their father is in jail or if their uncle stabs their mom. They do not do it for shock value; they share it because "that's their life. So, with the poverty, they usually own it. Which is really sad." For instance, a student recently offered to pick up some food for Rachel from the cafeteria when she forgot her lunch. The student told her not to worry because it was free for her. Rachel notes seeing this public sharing of status at the beginning of the year as well. She says teachers are instructed to give fee waiver forms to all students on the first day of school to avoid drawing attention to particular students. Students say, "Oh, I need one. Can I have one? They don't care, and they'll say that with their brand new phone." Rachel says:

> So I guess you know, so that hasn't changed, because the kids don't feel like weighted down by it. Which I almost find sadder because I think if you don't feel weighted by it, you don't want to get out of it. So that's how the circle of poverty continues because you don't feel like you want to rise above it. You're just like, "Yeah. I'm poor."

Get ignored. In a school where at least 60% of the population is on free or reduced lunch, teachers are aware that students are food insecure. They reference high unemployment levels and drug use as student influences while simultaneously lamenting students' growing apathy for education and testing. When most of the teachers cite poverty as a major change or obstacle, they understand that they are battling outside stressors for student achievement. For instance, Marie does not accept schools as the reason neighborhoods fail. She says that "our schools are a reflection of society, not the other way around." She believes most people moved away from blaming the teacher and began to realize there are "bigger issues" such as poverty, drug issues, kids without shelter, and the disintegration of the family unit. Marie says, "The

public schools teach everybody, so we teach kids of prisoners as well as kids of doctors. We get the gamut, and I think we do a good job of doing that."

Yet, the ELA teachers at Laurel Bluff focus on the far-reaching power of policy reform through growth and achievement scores and decide how to help students make gains in their classes. For instance, Buddy says, "I look at that group and I make a diagnosis of what those kids need or will benefit from. And that's what I try to offer." In doing so, the majority are unintentionally overlooking basic student needs as they rise alongside unemployment and drug use. The result is the continued degradation of students' humanity due to policy reform. As Buddy described the socioeconomic diversity at Laurel Bluff High School, it is "a cross-section of humanity" due to those students from high poverty homes, those who are exposed to drug use, and those who are from affluent homes.

I asked each teacher what education would look like if they had a magic wand to make it look the way they wanted. Most teachers said they would eliminate testing. Some added that they would create college-style course offerings on an alternating schedule more in sync with students' body clocks. Buddy said there would be no age limit on high school, and adults who dropped out could return for a "utopian book in education." But not one teacher said they would use their magic wand to end poverty, feed all of their students, clothe them, or provide them with shelter. The students' human needs are being unintentionally ignored because policy reform at Laurel Bluff High School has resulted in test score tunnel vision.

Research Question 2: Why do high school English teachers stay in the profession in the context of neoliberal education?

I have divided this section into one category and two subcategories that explore why teachers remain in the profession.

They Stay, But . . .

The English teachers that I interviewed have agency in what they teach, which allows them to maintain their sense of purpose in an increasingly oppressive testing culture. This is a critical component of maintaining their humanity, as Freire (1970/2000) writes, "Work that is not free ceases to be a fulfilling pursuit and becomes an effective means of dehumanization" (p. 145). They acknowledge and appreciate their autonomy as a vital part of their happiness, and for some, as a reason they stay. But despite their relative professional freedom, they are still bound by the growing presence of policy reform at Laurel Bluff High School, which fuels several contradictions as to why they stay in their positions.

Administrator

Every teacher that I interviewed felt that they had the freedom to teach what they want to teach at their school. Specifically, the teachers consistently referred to the autonomy given to them by their administrative staff and how it played a role in their instructional choices. For instance, Marie has never been limited in what she was allowed to teach her students. She gets excited about the literature she teaches, and describes it as a "good feeling" when students enjoy or connect to it. She discusses her stance on "questionable" literature selections:

> I work with really good principals who do allow us to teach them stuff that maybe is a little questionable. All literature is questionable to somebody. I remember an inservice we were asked to come up with a list of books that parents might find objectionable. [laughs] You can't do that. You can start with the dictionary and go to the Bible. *Everything* has been challenged some place or another. I'm always willing to offer alternatives if kids find that language offends them or if situations are too adult. We can find an alternative. But I'm not afraid to teach things with adult situations or language. I let the kids know

> upfront if you are not mature enough to handle this, then we'll find you an alternative. But I think that they need exposure to situations that are similar to what they're in and many of our kids face adult situations.

Marie has autonomy to direct the instruction in her classes. She says she always covers everything on her syllabus after learning control and planning from her first year of teaching. She elects whether to drop a work of literature in favor of a writing assignment, or whether to change a novel in order to meet the interests of the class. Marie varies the syllabus and calendar based on the students' needs and her progress with teaching the content. In her inclusion class, she likes to differentiate based on the needs of the learner. She believes that putting text organizers on the board and giving them learning tools helps all kids. She specifies that she likes 10th grade inclusion because 9th grade is too needy, and seniors "get beaten down by life and they're done." In her honors classes, she loves the challenge of pushing them and developing their worldview.

Likewise, Karen considers herself fortunate to have an administration that "trusts the teachers to teach what they want." She uses her autonomy to "embed young adult literature with classics and pull in real world connections that are relatable to teenagers."

Rachel says, "I've never been told you can't teach anything." She cites her administration's attitude toward teachers as a reason she stays in her position:

> Administration-wise, we've always had an administration that just sits back and lets you do your job. They do not assume that you're *not* doing your job. They assume that you are doing a good job at your job, and you're doing what you're supposed to do, and you're educating the kids and everything is good. So they don't come at you with any accusations. They always support you, I'm assuming until you give them a reason not to. I don't know that, so I've never felt like someone's breathing down my neck. Even with

> these test scores coming with [the state test], and Common Core and that whole disaster, I always felt that in this county, you weren't a test score. Even if something weird happened and your test score plummeted, that they would say NO, I know what you're doing in the classroom. They don't try to control what you teach. They don't give you scripts. They just say do what you do. We know you're going to do it well. Just do what you do. If you need us, let us know. And I like that.

I asked Rachel why she believed the rest of her department stays in their positions. She said that many of them do not live in the community, but that they choose to work at Laurel Bluff because "We like who we work for, and we like who we're with." More specifically, Rachel says:

> So I think it's really the support we have within the school. The freedom of do what you want, if something happens, the department has your back, the principal has your back, you're fine. It's like a safety net almost.

Another factor that plays a role in this environment is that according to Rachel, "none of us are really caught up in the test scores." From the superintendent to the administration to the English department, Rachel does not believe anyone is "overly focused on it." She acknowledges that this could change once several testing issues have been resolved. Rachel says, "But I guess we're kind of burying our heads in the sand. And just surviving in a relatively happy bubble."

Rachel says the department uses their instructional "freedom" to teach young adult novels in addition to the usual classics such as Shakespeare. She says they do what they are expected to do, and adds, "It's not like we're teaching crazy, inappropriate stuff that you probably should not teach a 14-year-old, you know what I mean?" However, Rachel has been limited by school resources. Just a few years ago, she says the department did not have novels for sophomores. They have since used their school money to purchase YA novels for classrooms. Rachel says she

struggles to finish novel units as a result of reduced instructional time due to testing. Additionally, Rachel's autonomy does not require her to write a detailed syllabus; she drafts a general one so she can choose content based on her class. This generality also means that she covers everything on her syllabus without fail. Although she has never had to cut a unit, she has had to choose between texts due reduced instructional time as a result of testing. She shares that she would love to teach both a Jodi Picoult novel and *The Great Gatsby*, but chooses *The Great Gatsby* because she uses it for students' literary criticism. There is not enough time to cover both novels.

Rachel fought against her former principal's interpretation of Common Core expectations when she disagreed with him. Freire (1970/2000) writes of the oppressed, "Little by little, however, they tend to try out forms of rebellious action" (p. 64). Rachel details her rebellious action, saying, "But when our last principal said you need to be 80/20 non-fiction, I said no. I said they can read non-fiction in social studies and science. I said you cannot—that's ridiculous. That's ridiculous!"

Buddy highlights the importance of common sense paired with teacher autonomy. He says, "In my 39 years, I've never been told I couldn't teach this …I've never been told not to teach that. But I've used common sense, and I think teachers have to know their community, your parents." The only time Buddy has feared disciplinary action as a result of classroom reading is when he played an audio recording of the novel *Tyrell*. As he recalls, he forgot about the intensity of the language and let his class listen to the first chapter. Buddy says, "I thought I was going to have a heart attack!" He did not cut the chapter short, but he did check his emails in the middle of the night to make sure he was not in trouble.

Buddy enjoys the autonomy to make his own instructional choices. He uses the Socratic Method in his classes. He does not ascribe to a regimented teaching schedule; rather, he assesses students' progress and decides when the discussion is complete:

> I want to think I'm organized, but if the unit is going really, really well and we're having really, really good discussion, and I feel, and I mean I just *feel* it, you gauge it emotionally. I'm not leaving that unit. Yeah, I'm not on a timeframe. We will stay and talk about it until we're done. And then, I try to think where do we need to go next? It's not, this is where we're going. I really want to think, what, what we should we look at. What, what *should* I plan for this group? It's never an easy decision for me. I almost wish it were because thirty-nine years of reinventing the wheel over and over is hard.

He says he does not reuse plan books from previous years, and instead plans each lesson according to the needs of his class. As part of his planning, Buddy keeps his units short and provides students with a syllabus. He says he includes more content on the syllabus than his classes can cover. By listing a surplus of content that students have expressed interest in reading, he provides students with choices in novel selection and increases student buy-in. Buddy feels some textbook companies provide too much information, which requires teachers to be judicious in their selections of what they feel is important to present. He again says, "…we can pick and choose."

Buddy is working with his department to promote reading within the school. To date, they are utilizing bulletin boards and high-interest used books purchased with departmental monies. He hopes this helps reach struggling students. Buddy is also participating in a countywide reading workshop that has greatly influenced him. Laurel Bluff's English department participates in one reading day per week for all of their classes, but the principal wants them to

tie it to a reading standard. Buddy says, "What standard doesn't involve reading? Isn't reading a standard that we really need to promote? We'll see. Teachers were excited about it." He wants to hold all students accountable for reading to make sure they are engaging in the activity.

Buddy teaches two honors classes and one regular class. He creates each syllabus specifically with the needs of the class in mind. Buddy looks at style with his honors classes and assigns a style analysis essay. He says he should probably do that with all classes, but adds, "We at least look at sentences." He balances his class syllabi with grammar, reading, and discussion. By giving lots of opportunities for homework and quiz grades, he helps prevent struggling students from getting frustrated with their grades. Buddy says, "The way I design the course in a high school class is that if they are doing it and making the attempt to do it, they're learning. They're learning… And that's how I measure it. They pass." The accumulation of zeros is the only factor that can destroy a student's grade in Buddy's classes. He thinks teachers have to move away from textbooks if they are going to last. Buddy does not believe he needs a textbook to be a good teacher. He chooses to create his own text from outside materials such as novels, essays, and articles.

Finally, Ann says their principal treats the teachers like professionals and does not micromanage them. Incidentally, she shares that he was also a student at Laurel Bluff during her first year of teaching. Ann has free rein to teach what she wants, but she quickly says, "I'm not the type of person, either, that would be like, I want to do the scandalous book." She is actively trying to add more modern, contemporary works to her syllabus; however, she does not have the money to purchase novels for her classroom. Last year, Ann won a grant and purchased 30 copies of *The Help* for her AP class. It went well, but she cannot teach it this year because she does not have enough copies of the novel to accommodate her class of 34 students.

Ann enjoyed the freedom to teach the novel *The Glass Castle* with a special education teacher in her regular class. She says:

> They loved it. We had some of the best discussions with that. And that group, they would even as they were discussing, you know, one would say, "Well, going off of what so-and-so said," like they actually …We were like, this is amazing. But they really unders—they could relate to her, which was kind of sad, but they could relate to, you know. And they, we talked about you know, like if they would be stricter parents than some of their parents were, and all of them said they would be. They would be stricter, you know, than how their parents are with them. Some of them talked about their parents getting divorced, and one boy, he was like I didn't realize that it could be better. He said it was so much better that they're not together. You know. So it's just—but they—they loved that book [Laughs]. You know. So we had really good discussions, and that's, you know, contemporary.

Ann has the autonomy to give her students a new syllabus for each unit to show them the structure and help keep herself and students organized. She plans specifics ahead of time, such as audio recordings, homework, and writing assignments. She tackles the content chronologically through the timeline of American history. Ann says, "I just kind of pick and choose, like I—you can't cover everything out of every unit. You'd never get through everything." When deciding which outside texts to include, Ann says, "I kind of, sometimes I kind of pick stuff that I like, too. [Laughs] You know. Because I'm the one having—if I—at least I'm liking it if they're not. [Laughs] You know, I enjoy it!" Ann tries to cover everything on her syllabus, but that does not always happen. When "things happen" to derail her schedule, she is flexible, goes "with the flow," and tries her best.

Through their administrator, the ELA teachers at Laurel Bluff are able to maintain their power to choose what they teach. They not only maintain their autonomy, but they also feel like they are valued and treated like professionals. This factors in to their job happiness, which greatly impacts their choice to continue in their positions.

They Would Not Be Teachers Now

I asked the teachers to tell me how they would feel about school if they were students now. All five educators unanimously said they would hate it because of the emphasis on testing; as a result, two teachers said they would choose another career altogether.

Rachel would choose another career path despite her love of school and books. She says:

> "I would not be a teacher now. I wouldn't. And it's a shame, and when I see some of the interns come up, it hurts my heart to say it, but if what was happening in this state, in this government, the whole mess that's happening with charter schools and all that, no, I wouldn't do it. The blame that the teachers take for lackadaisical parents and people not taking responsibility for their actions and their own learning and education, yeah, no. I wouldn't do it.

Marie said she would "absolutely hate it" if she were a student attending school now. She says students today are expected to sit without doing anything, sometimes all day. She feels like those students during full-day inservices when she has to sit all day and figure out what someone wants her to do. She then talks about the impact testing would have on her:

> And then to have 3 weeks of testing. Every day, every day, test, test, test, test, test. I would hate it. It's been said that kids feel school is what's being done to them, not something they're personally invested in, and I feel like that's the case. And we decry

> them for not turning in work and it's like, well, it's not something they're interested in or invested in.

It is enough to make Marie question "why people would go into the profession." She notes, "Teachers are not paid according to other professions based on the education that we have and the hours that we keep, the work that we do. It's not enough." Before both of her daughters earned education degrees, they discussed the decision together. Marie says there is "still a lot of good about teaching." She is hopeful that education will move away from standardized testing and return to making education meaningful and valuable. However, she does not know if that is possible.

Despite the hatred she would have of school if she were a current student and her current uncertainty that education will be able to reclaim its value, Marie was an outlier in her response to whether she would choose to be a teacher if she were a student today. She carefully considered her answer from the dual perspectives of experience and blind idealism. She says:

> From my perspective as a veteran educator, who has witnessed the barrage of standardized testing, the increased expectations of teachers regarding data collection, the constantly changing standards and objectives, and the inequity of salary compared with other professions, maybe. As a college student with no real understanding of the financial demands of life, and completely ignorant of the emotional demands of the job—frustration with testing, parents, and snarky students, limitations on what I can and cannot do, the horrible situations so many of my students live in, etc.—with only the burning desire to make a difference in our world, yes. So, it's a complicated issue. Every job has its ups and downs. I know I've made a difference and that means a lot. I enjoy my job. I

> feel it is a valuable job and one that brings me joy, despite the negatives. I guess my maybe is a yes.

For Marie, the perspective of experience initially made her response uncertain. However, when she considered the idealistic perspective she thinks she would have as a student, she believed she would still pursue education.

Ann does not think she would enjoy testing or high school now if she were a student. She says she would be "miserable" taking math on a block schedule. Ann hopes that she would choose the same career in education, but thinks she might be tempted to work with younger students because she might think "they're still nice." However, she has heard of teacher parents redirecting their children away from education altogether because of "all this craziness."

Karen would feel "over tested and frustrated" as a student today. She says she does not know if testing would redirect her career path elsewhere, but she acknowledged it as a factor she would contemplate when making her decision.

Buddy said school today would make him "emotionally sick" and a "basketcase" if he were a student. He questions what his attendance would be due to high stress levels. He fears that the high school years are no longer the best years of students' lives and that public education does not care enough about students. He references increased pressure to perform on tests as a reason kids no longer like school. As a result, Buddy does not think he would choose public education as a career. The difference between then and now is just too great:

> I feel like 39 years ago teachers were respected. I think the principals trusted you to do your job. I think you were looked at as a professional by the community and by your supervisors. And you were allowed to make your own mistakes, as well as create your own successes. I felt empowered as an educator because I felt like my classroom was my

> world. It was my domain. And I felt very creative, and I felt like I could try new things and be innovative. With the climate in today, it's hard to be innovative. There's so many checklists… that the politicians and the state has given to teachers. It's almost like it's rote. You do this everyday, this is your checklist for every class, this is your checklist for every student, and honestly, that takes some of the enjoyment out of the teaching process. Being the true professional, being the person who thinks they can best serve these students, a checklist is not going to do it.

Buddy believes this testing climate also affects new teachers. He laments the difference between the whole child philosophy taught in colleges and the reality of standardized testing. If he were a new teacher, he says:

> I would leave college with one philosophy, walk into a high school, and go oh my god, this isn't going to work. This is not why I'm here. And then I think I would have to leave because I would be miserable.

Indeed, when I asked the teachers why they chose their profession, they spoke of their love for books, school, and their high school English teachers. No one mentioned testing as a driving factor.

Chapter 5: Implications

Through my interviews with five English teachers at Laurel Bluff High School, I was able to gauge education policy reform's impact on them and why they stayed in their positions. Using the constant comparative method, I analyzed the data for ideas, themes, and categories. The implications of these findings are discussed in this chapter.

Impact of Administration as Mediator

The teachers that I interviewed overwhelmingly spoke of a pervasive feeling of distrust by the state toward educators, but noted that at Laurel Bluff High School, they are trusted to do their jobs. Each teacher noted the support they felt from their current administration, and did not anticipate that potentially lower test scores would result in micromanagement. As Rachel stated, "Even if something weird happened and your test score plummeted, that they would say NO, I know what you're doing in the classroom. They don't try to control what you teach. They don't give you scripts." This blend of support and autonomy provided by the principal is a disruption of state power relations; that is, the principal is mediating power and giving English teachers a sense of protection and security in the face of increased state pressure to deliver higher test results. The principal's actions have returned a small degree of power to the teachers.

It is the interpersonal that matters—supportive administration, collegiality, family. The five English teachers that I interviewed do not perceive Laurel Bluff High School as merely a place of work, nor do they view their colleagues as coworkers. For them, it is much more. Buddy says, "We're there for one another. It becomes like family." Rachel calls Laurel Bluff a "family" because she thinks "almost anyone would do anything for you." As she notes, "I think we're all in it together." Marie and Karen describe Laurel Bluff as "home." Finally, Ann uses the word "community" to describe Laurel Bluff. Each of these words—family, home, community—

communicates strong emphasis on interpersonal relationships with each other and the administration. These relationships create a home away from home where they feel valued as professionals and as people. As Rachel said when asked why she thought the teachers in her department stayed in their positions, "We like who we work for, and we like who we're with."

Power relations/mediated power. The English teachers at Laurel Bluff do not feel wholly dominated by state education reform policy because their administration acts as a buffer in the distribution of power. This mediated power provides teachers with a sense of immunity at Laurel Bluff High School, where teachers are subsequently empowered to make their own instructional choices. Buddy, who has been teaching at the school the longest, made statements about autonomy such as, "In my 39 years, I've never been told I couldn't teach this" and "Nobody has ever limited me." When speaking about other teachers' "regimented" styles of teaching to the test, he said, "I will never teach to meet a test score." Even with the threat of remediation and state pressure to deliver test scores and use prescriptive teaching via the teacher evaluation rubric, he felt secure in his continued ability to choose what and how he teaches. This was consistent with all of the teachers that I interviewed.

The small ways teachers resist. The English teachers at Laurel Bluff High School demonstrated several instances of verbal resistance, but it generally did not manifest in their actions regarding test preparation. Out of the five teachers, Buddy, Marie, and Ann expressed opposition to teaching to the test. Buddy said that he refused to teach to the test or complete any test preparation with his students, but upon further discussion, he admitted that he embedded reading strategies and quizzes that were very similar to the standardized test into his lessons each week. Marie said that if she focuses too much time on test preparation, she is doing her students a disservice. She says, "I'm just honestly not too worried about it." However, she devoted

several weeks to test preparation this year. Finally, Ann acknowledged teaching to the test as part of her job, but shared that most of the English teachers are "over it" as a result of "last year's fiasco." She used to "do a push" in her classes prior to the test, but now thinks it is a waste. She did a grammar check throughout the term to teach and reinforce tested skills, and spent a day reviewing for the exam with her classes. These three teachers said that they do not care about test results, and that they will not teach to a test, but they still spent time on test preparation whether it was embedded, added at the end of the semester, or a combination of both. Incidentally, these three educators have the most teaching experience of those interviewed.

In describing the testing climate, Rachel and Ann both say, "It is what it is!" They accept that they must generate results in order to remain in good professional standing. There is an equal sense of distance and indignation regarding testing. Rachel says, "I'm like I'll jump through the hoop. I'll test it. I'll do test prep with them, but I'm not killing myself." Even so, Rachel showed resistance when her former principal told her department to teach 80% nonfiction/20% fiction. She said, "I said no. I said they can read non-fiction in social studies and science. I said you cannot—that's ridiculous. That's ridiculous!"

Being treated as human. The teachers' perceptions of their treatment in the workplace significantly impact their emotions. Ann said that "our principal treats us as professionals that we're doing our job. And he expects that and we're doing it. You know. So it's not the micromanaging being, you know." They feel appreciated first and foremost, as people, and also as professionals. The interpersonal emphasis at Laurel Bluff connects teachers to one another, to the administration, and to their humanity. For instance, Rachel noted the support and freedom the teachers have and said that "if something happens, the department has your back, the principal

has your back, you're fine. It's like a safety net almost." This connectivity, or as Rachel put it, "safety net" gives the teachers the security to resist education reform policy in small ways.

Remarginalization on the Underserving of Marginalized Students

Freire (1970/2000) noted a "duality" suffered by the oppressed that has "established itself in their innermost being" (p. 48); that is, they have internalized the consciousness of the oppressor alongside their own. This duality is evident among the English teachers that I interviewed at Laurel Bluff High School. For instance, Karen said, "The teachers are very proud of our improved test scores," but later said, "I try not to put too much stress and stock in the scores because again, I do not believe they accurately portray my teaching or my students' performance levels." Rachel said, "None of us are really caught up in the test scores. We just aren't. A few of us are more than others . . ." Buddy spoke of the school's gains on the ACT and said, "But honestly, I was pleased we showed growth on the ACT, we continue to show growth. That's hard work by a lot of good teachers." He later said, "I will never teach to meet a test score." The teachers that I interviewed are simultaneously frustrated with the demands of testing and motivated, whether by fear of remediation or of disappointing their administration, to perform well. They all want to do an exemplary job in the classroom, and they care deeply about their students. However, their rampant fear of standardized testing failure drives instructional choices and unwittingly changes their attitudes toward marginalized students. The effect is that marginalized students are remarginalized and underserved.

Focus on data and not larger systemic issues of poverty. The teachers that I interviewed largely identified teaching as something they were called to do. Rachel wanted to "mother" her students and "grow them as people." She stayed because her students needed her. Buddy says, "I just feel like this is a calling," and claims that "what teachers are, are parents."

Marie and Karen both use "home" to describe Laurel Bluff. Marie wants to "find the joy," laugh more often, and connect with her students. Ann describes teaching as a "calling." She says that a teacher's job is to teach the curriculum, but that she feels that the "job covers much more than just teaching material." She says it is a mixture of things, among them serving as a positive role model, providing structure and stability to students, and being a little like a psychologist.

The teachers generally teach a mix of levels, with the most experienced teachers assigned the most honors and AP classes and the least inclusion or regular classes. Also in the case of Buddy, Ann, and Marie, the most experienced teachers, they assigned their interns to teach their inclusion classes this fall. Buddy and Ann co-teach a 45-minute RTI reading class in addition to their normal class load. Most of the teachers that I interviewed spoke of the joy of teaching their regular students because they share their unfiltered opinions. Ann says, "And a lot of times my inclusion students, we have better discussions about things than an honors or advanced class just because they're not afraid to tell it like it is." Given the opportunity, Rachel says she would teach freshmen all day. She particularly loves the freshmen regular classes, where students have more personality and will say anything. Marie says students openly share the details of their lives, be it their fears or drug use in their home.

Further dialogue illuminated conflicting comments from two departmental leaders regarding English teachers' happiness in their teaching assignments. In her role as department head, Rachel tries to provide the staff with choices. Each spring, Rachel says she asks her department their teaching preferences for the next year. For the last four years, she says their responses have all been "same." According to Rachel, either they do not want to change anything, or they do not vocalize it. Rachel cannot control when teachers teach their classes or

when their plan periods will be, but regarding curriculum, she says, “Generally, if they ask, they get it.”

Perhaps Rachel is correct in that teachers do not vocalize preferred changes. Buddy has a unique perspective of what is transpiring within his department through his role as a school union representative. He recalls when his colleagues consciously chose to teach the most struggling students. He says, “Now, that door’s closed …Nobody wants to teach that student because of the test scores.” Buddy describes the shift in teacher preference due to test scores as “such a loss to those students.”

Buddy says teachers have approached him multiple times to ask, “Why am I getting all the SPED kids and teaching the lower level and somebody else has all the high level? How fair is this?” They are questioning why their class roll is “totally different than this other teacher’s class rolls.” They tell Buddy, “I love these kids, I don’t mind teaching these kids, but I am worried about this bottom line here.” These teachers fear low test scores and say they will end up on a remediation plan if they “keep getting these students.” Buddy does not know how to solve the issue, but he does understand their concerns, calling the gravity of the situation “wrong on every level.” Even Buddy is affected by the distribution of classes. He shares that the freshman academy teachers have the entire year to prepare their students for the test, whereas he must show the same level of growth the next year in one semester. He says he could easily end up on a remediation plan as a result.

Although their hearts drove their choices to pursue education careers, data have driven their teaching preferences away from struggling students and those living in poverty.

What Happened to English?

All of the teachers that I interviewed expressed a passion for the content material they teach; however, they admitted that they would teach differently if standardized tests were not a factor. As Ravitch (2014) noted, "the reputation and career of every teacher and principal hinge on student test scores" (p. 7). For ELA teachers, RTT's implementation of the CCSS with high-stakes evaluation consequences has "again diverted …focus from the best practices of literacy instruction" (K. Gallagher, 2015, p. 3). In other words, instruction has shifted from the teaching of English to test preparation.

Testing bubbletron. Teachers understand that their students will have to bubble in their answers using a special answer sheet when taking standardized tests. Most of the time, these tests do not measure the critical thinking skills required for writing. Instead, they focus on multiple-choice answers. Marie says, "Standardized testing has put a lot of pressure to teach how to respond to a multiple-choice question." It has also increased the fear and expectation that some students will bubble in the test at random without reading the questions, or as Rachel said, "Christmas tree it." According to Buddy, students who tire of testing become "test-resistant" and "they'll just bubble in" their answers on tests.

Do not get to teach what they want. The teachers at Laurel Bluff repeatedly spoke of their autonomy to teach what they want within reason. Both Ann and Rachel said that their instructional materials of choice had been financially limited, but that they had never been concerned about administrative approval. It appears that their biggest limitation was the way they chose to use their instructional time. Ann shared that whereas their previous principal pushed test review, the new principal does not require teachers to do any kind of test preparation. Still, the

teachers that I interviewed chose to allot varying amounts of classroom time for test preparation. For example, Karen says:

> Standardized test prep often gets in the way, and I feel as though all of the computer practice tests last year limited me in what I could teach. I had to cut some units short and even leave out a poetry unit because of the amount of test prep and actual hours of testing my students had to complete.

Another example of this exists in Rachel, who expressed that she wanted to teach more works, but would be forced to eliminate a different title in order to accommodate it. Ann and Buddy compensate for reduced classroom time when they "pick and choose" what to cover.

Freire (1970/2000) said that the heart of the duality conflict rested in choices; specifically, "between being wholly themselves or being divided; between ejecting the oppressor within or not ejecting them, between human solidarity or alienation; between following prescriptions or having choices . . ." (p. 48). This duality is even more pronounced at Laurel Bluff because the choice to complete test preparation lies with the English teachers; nothing is prescribed in this area.

When given the autonomy to choose, the English teachers that I interviewed did not choose English or their students. They chose test scores.

Teacher Attrition

Teacher attrition levels are high, with nearly 8% of the teacher population leaving each year, and most of them before retirement age (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). According to Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond (2017), the key driving factors behind teacher turnover include "a lack of administrative support, working in districts with lower salaries, dissatisfactions with testing and accountability pressures, lack of opportunities for

advancement, and dissatisfaction with working conditions" (para 5). Approximately 2/3 of the teachers leaving the profession are doing so largely due to job dissatisfaction (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). The highest turnover rates are in the South (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016), where Laurel Bluff is located.

In 2013, the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher reported that teacher satisfaction had dropped to 39%, its lowest point in 25 years (Markow, Macia & Lee, 2013). Since 2008, teacher satisfaction has dropped from 62% to 39%, with 15% of the decline between 2009 and 2011 (Markow, Macia & Lee, 2013). Running parallel to the timeline of decreasing teacher satisfaction is the evolution of testing-dependent education policy reform, beginning with NCLB in 2001, and evolving into RTT as a result of the 2009 ARRA grant. It is interesting to note that as more states adopted RTT's conditions to receive waivers exempting them from NCLB's sanctions, teacher satisfaction plummeted. Yet another factor to consider is that between 2009 and 2014, teacher education enrollments dropped from 691,000 to 451,000 (a decrease of 35%) (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Therefore, upcoming teacher supply is shrinking alongside the satisfaction levels of current teachers.

Additional research confirms that working conditions, which are greatly impacted by administrative support, have the greatest influence on teacher job satisfaction (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Liu & Meyer, 2005; Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005; Weiss, 1999). Tickle, Chang, & Kim (2011) found that administrative support has the greatest influence on teacher job satisfaction, and that teacher job satisfaction is the greatest predictor of whether teachers stay. Indeed, studies have found that administrative support is essential to preventing attrition (Day & Gu, 2009; Hancock & Scherff, 2010; Ingersoll, 2001; Worthy, 2005).

Contradiction

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the translator's note defines a contradiction as "dialectical conflict between two opposing forces (Freire, 1970/2000, p.46). Education reform policy is divisive, creating contradictions between teachers' authenticity and the policymakers' oppressive banking model of education. In an antidialogical model, power flows from the oppressor and silences the oppressed (Freire, 1970/2000). The result causes a duality within teachers that was evident in my interview data.

When I began this study, I saw Laurel Bluff High School as an anomaly because of the ELA department's turnover and retirement rate. Each of the ten teachers in the English department has been teaching at the school over five years. No new ELA teachers have been hired, and no one has resigned since 2012. In first listening to the interview data, I began to think that the teachers stayed in their positions because they claimed to be happy in their environment. Somehow, despite the ongoing contradictory, dialectical conflict between policymakers and educators, reform policy had not destroyed the ELA teachers' spirit at Laurel Bluff High. Upon further analysis, however, I began to understand the bigger picture. Their administrator protects them from oppressive reform policy, which gives them a sense of safety in the workplace. He is, in effect, a linchpin to their happiness because their professional freedoms and mutual respect both placate and humanize them. However, this status is precarious, as leadership positions inevitably change in the rapidly changing culture of testing. In addition to the probability of staffing changes, one-third of principals say they are likely to leave the profession (Markow, Macia, & Lee, 2013). Without Laurel Bluff High's leader to serve as a buffer from the effects of policy reforms, it will likely lose its distinction as an anomaly of attrition.

And Then There Were Three

Even in Laurel Bluff's seemingly utopian version of education that values teachers, something is still not working. Five teachers participated in this study. By early spring, Karen told me that she had submitted her resignation effective at the end of the school year in order to be a full-time mother. She hopes to return to Laurel Bluff someday if there's a position available for her. But the biggest surprise of all came in May. During Buddy's interviews, he told me that he loved teaching so much, he would do it for free, and that he planned to do it as long as he could. He even joked about hoping someone would drive him to work in his later years. He said, "Retirement's the worst thing in the world. You don't want to retire. Unless you're really rich." Buddy retired in May of 2017 after 39 years in education. In a school where no one leaves, 2 out of 5 (40%) of my participants left at the end of my study.

As much as the teachers appreciate their principal's efforts, it is not enough to keep them in their positions at Laurel Bluff High. These are teachers who love their students and communities, who have devoted their lives to education. And still, even in a place like Laurel Bluff, the autonomy and respect they enjoy is not enough to keep them there. Happiness, it seems, is relative. Ultimately, federal policy is dissolving the profession to the point that in due time, there will not be any experienced English teachers left to remember what it was to be human.

Implications for Research

If I were to continue this study, I would complete another dialogic interview with each teacher to further explore whether their relationships and history with their principal mediate reforms to keep them in their positions, or if internalized duality drives them to meet professional expectations and makes them stay. Next, I would use Freire's (1970/2000) dialogic method to

bring the teachers together to dialogue about my findings and the negative impacts of educational reform. Moreover, we would dialogue about how to resist oppression and rehumanize oneself while afflicted with the duality and internalized depression of neoliberal education.

More broadly, because the research implies that what administrators are doing is important, it would seem we need more research to focus on schools where attrition is low and morale is high, and what those administrators are doing. Specifically, what are the effective practices of a principal who can mediate policy so it does not result in the mass exodus of teachers?

Implications for Practice

During my last year in the classroom, I received sets of textbooks designed specifically to address the Common Core State Standards, along with matching student workbooks and a teacher guide. They were supposedly the key to academic excellence and excellent test preparation. They were celebrated by my district and my supervisors. And like so many things that were implemented before being field-tested for appropriateness, they were completely worthless. At 1500 pages and 6 and a half pounds with dense, tiny font, each textbook repelled my students from reading when I was attempting to nurture their love for it. Furthermore, my students with disabilities could not access the eleventh-grade text because they read at a range of elementary levels. So, I chose the only sensible option: I taught them actual literature.

I did this because I knew my students. I cared about them. I knew where they were developmentally, and I knew their frustration levels. What I did not know when I began teaching Louis Sachar's (1998) *Holes* was how much my students would relate to it. Many of them had either had firsthand experience at a youth detention facility, or their family or friends had attended one. I learned about lost jobs, homelessness, and hunger through their daily journals. I

learned about parents who could not read restaurant menus, and who wept when their children had to read to them. When Mr. Pendanski called Zero stupid, my students declared, "There ain't no shame in not knowing how to read." And in the pivotal moments when Zero proved himself a hero and Mr. Pendanski got his comeuppance, my students—the same ones who hated reading—erupted into cheers. It was a moment of victory because my students had connected to the text in a monumental way, but it was also one of sadness. They related so closely to Zero that it almost made me cry. How many campers at my students' version of Camp Green Lake had mocked them and called them stupid because they struggled with reading?

Eventually, people discovered that I was not using the prescribed textbooks and workbooks, and I received a phone call from a supervisor. I was told that there were lots of teachers who would love to have those materials, and that they would take them away if they didn't see me putting them to good use.

I thought about how my students already related to Zero. They knew they struggled with reading. They did not need to suffer through a developmentally inappropriate textbook to point out the obvious. What they *needed* were accessible stories to light up their imaginations. They *needed* to feel connected to people who were like them and to learn about people who were not. They *needed* to feel joy and empathy. It was that simple, and that hard.

I bought more novels.

We need to return to best practices in teaching to rehumanize the profession. First, we need to refocus on human engagement with literature. "Engagement" is not and cannot be synonymous with "test preparation." Testing has interfered with content and instruction to the point that our brief window of time to foster students' love of reading has grown smaller each year. We must not let it pass us by. Students are not robots silently awaiting Freirian (1970/2000)

deposits of knowledge. We must resurrect engaged learning in our classrooms and bring back the joy of stories. Neither can be found in prescriptive teaching materials; they exist in the magic of stories coming to life.

Second, we need to focus on relational teaching. Teachers are not building relationships with their students because they spend too much time preparing them for standardized tests. Students are adrift, and teachers regret the loss of relationships in their attempts to achieve high teacher effectiveness scores via their students' testing performance. Building relationships would likely increase student engagement and teacher satisfaction.

Third, we need authentic, complex assessment. Policymakers need to trust teachers' knowledge of their students, which is not easily assessed. Teachers have knowledge through their relationships with students and through working with them that goes above and beyond test scores. Teachers need to be trusted to know what is best for their students; therefore, assessment should be more authentic, individualized, and personalized. Policymakers should appreciate that assessment is a complex process that cannot be easily quantified.

Conclusion

When I first began working with the English teachers at Laurel Bluff High School, I assumed all of the teachers were happy. My interns received multiple gift baskets, no one left their positions, and it seemed like I had found Edutopia. Over time, my assumption grew to intrigue. Ultimately, I wanted to know why teachers were happy there, but I felt like I needed to know what their contextual experience under neoliberal reform efforts looked like. There was a possibility that they had not been affected at all. Therefore, I wanted to know if neoliberal reform was having an effect, and if so, I wanted to identify it. I realized as my study progressed that neoliberal reform was, indeed, having a large effect, which made me question why the teachers

stayed in their positions. This led to my understanding that administrators have a big impact on teacher happiness and attrition.

I chose teaching as my career because I loved stories, I loved kids, and I believed with all my heart that somehow, some way, I would make a difference. It certainly was not for the salary. I stayed for my students. I went to their football games, I fed them when they did not have food at home, and I worried about them freezing to death while they slept in their cars during the winter months. I used every literacy and writing strategy I knew, and it was my mission to make stories accessible, fun, and relevant. But the negative impacts of reform became too much. At that point, I considered my options and chose to further my education. But how many teachers have no choice but to report to work each day until they can retire? How many would happily stay if they were not routinely dehumanized? It is not fair to them. It is not fair to the students. Everything about it is disheartening. As a result, I wrote this dissertation to fight what happened to me, and what is still happening to teachers across the nation. It has given me voice, which speaks to writing, communication, and a way to rehumanize myself.

I wish I could say that this dissertation shows that administrators are doing good things and teachers are choosing to stay, but the sad truth is that two out of five of my participants left at the end of my study. The future of public education is bleak. Policymakers know that teachers are experiencing widespread dehumanization and high attrition thanks to news media reports, and yet, they continue to support and champion a neoliberal agenda. It would seem that their decisions are financially motivated; that is, the promise of exponential profits from testing and privatization far outweighs the harm inflicted upon human beings. Both teachers and students are collateral damage in their quest to fix an allegedly broken system. All parties are aware of this, which begs the question: If demoralization and attrition were the intended consequences of

punitive evaluations and testing requirements, is the end goal a brave new world where everything is an automaton? Have we descended so far that, like teachers' constant focus on data, the entirety of education hinges on numbers which only serve to propel more bottom lines and profits? If this is so, it follows that everything and everyone will become expendable by default to protect the profit margin. Will teachers be regarded as excessive expenses when students can sit at cubicles and receive instruction and assessment from a computer program? Those students will most certainly use digital textbooks and workbooks in lieu of novels to train—not teach—them to take the corresponding standardized test. Engaged learning will be a thing of the past, as teacher-student relationships will be replaced by artificial intelligence. As a result, there will be no relational teaching, and without it, how will students remain engaged and invested in their educations? They will not thrive in a dystopian education system devoid of human contact and interaction.

Teachers have resisted the profession's demands that they perform as robots, and so it is not a stretch to imagine that policymakers would seek to use robots or programs to replace them. These possibilities do not surprise me because removing humans from education would be the penultimate dehumanization. However, if this comes to pass, students will lose their humanity alongside teachers. That is a loss we cannot afford. We must resist oppression by bringing humanity back to the profession.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Email

You are invited to participate in a research study on why secondary veteran English teachers stay in their positions. I am completing this study for my dissertation at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Research will involve two 30-45 minute interviews at a location of your choice, with one follow-up as needed. There will also be one 30-60 minute focus group interview. Pseudonyms will be used in interview transcripts to protect your identity. All identifying information (references to specific people and places, etc.) will be removed. You will be able to review the interview transcripts before they are used as data in my dissertation. If you are interested in participating in this study, or if you would like to find out more about it, please contact me at avarnes@vols.utk.edu or (865) 974-2431. Please respond via your personal email or phone (call or text) to protect your privacy.

Appendix B: Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Why They Stay: A Critical Dialogical Case Study of Veteran English Teachers in a Rural High School

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a research study on why secondary veteran English teachers stay in their positions. I am completing this study for my dissertation at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

If you agree to participate in my study, I will ask you to participate in two 30-45 minute interviews surrounding your feelings, experiences, and perspectives about your job and why you continue to teach. These interviews will be completed as soon as available meeting times can be determined. These interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed, after which I will review the transcripts with you to see if I have accurately portrayed what you want to say. I will ask you to share a class syllabus with me, along with school communication regarding testing (public handouts, fliers, etc.). I will also ask to take photos of your classroom that will not include images of or information about people. After I have analyzed our interviews, I will ask you to participate in one 30-60 minute focus group interview. The focus group will be made up of your co-workers who have agreed to participate in my study. This interview will also be audio recorded and transcribed. If I have additional questions, I may ask to meet with you again for one in-person follow-up interview. This interview will also be audio recorded.

RISKS

The risks related to your participation in this study are no greater than those you would encounter in daily activities. Loss of confidentiality is one possibility, but I am taking steps to protect your information (See Confidentiality section below). Additionally, should you decide to participate in this study, I will ask you to contact me via your personal email or phone to further protect your identity. Interviews will be conducted at a location of your choosing to further reduce risk. All data will be stored on a password-protected computer. I will not reveal your participation to other employees of Anderson County Schools. However, other participants will be present during the focus group interview. I cannot guarantee that other focus group participants will maintain your confidentiality.

BENEFITS

Your participation in this study will provide no direct benefits to you. However, your involvement will add to the body of literature surrounding teacher choices to remain in their classrooms.

_____ Participant’s initials

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless participants specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link participants to the study. In addition, pseudonyms will be used instead of real names and places to protect participants' identities. All audio recordings will be deleted after their transcripts have been reviewed for accuracy and agreed upon by participants. Signed consent statements with personally identifiable information will be stored in a safe location at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville for a period of three years. After this time, they will be destroyed.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study), you may contact the researcher, Allison Varnes, at avarnes@vols.utk.edu, or (865) 974-2431. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Susan Groenke, at sgroenke@utk.edu or (865) 974-4242. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the University of Tennessee IRB Compliance Officer at utkirb@utk.edu or (865) 974-7697.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be destroyed or, if you prefer, it will be returned to you.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received (or had the opportunity to print) a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

These semi-structured, dialogic interviews will include the following questions, which may or may not be asked in this order. Some questions may be addressed through conversation, in which case they will not be asked.

1. What is a teacher's job? Why did you become a teacher? How do you feel about teaching?

2. How long have you been teaching here? Why have you stayed? Did you go to school here?

3. If you had to describe your school in one word, what would it be? Why?

4. Walk me through a typical day for you. What are the best and worst moments?

5. What was your job like when you first started teaching? What would you say the biggest change has been since you started teaching? Are there other highlights you would like to share? Best and worst moments?

6. What are your goals for your career? Where will you be in 5-10 years? How will you get there?

7. Tell me about some of your favorite teaching strategies.

8. Walk me through the syllabus for one of your classes. Would you say you always cover everything on your syllabus? If not, why is that? Is there anything you want to put on your syllabus, but can't? Why or why not?

9. Have you ever been limited in what you were allowed to teach? If so, how? Why?

10. How do you feel about standardized testing?

11. How do you feel when your students score well on state tests? How do you feel when your students do not score well?

12. How would you feel about school if you were a student attending public school now? How do you think it would impact your career choice?

13. If you had school-age kids and the opportunity to send them to private school, what would you do? Why?

14. If you could wave a magic wand over education to make it look the way you want, what would it look like?

15. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Vita

Allison Leigh-Ann Varnes has spent her entire life in public schools. Born to schoolteacher parents, she attended public schools in Tennessee, even when they were not in session. After receiving an English degree from the University of Tennessee in 2002, she realized she wanted to teach. Beginning in 2005, she taught special education for eight years. She earned a Master's Degree in Special Education from the University of Tennessee in 2012. In 2013, Allison left her district to pursue a Doctor of Philosophy in Education degree at the University of Tennessee. In her free time, she enjoys writing children's fiction. Random House Children's Books will publish her first middle grade novel, *Property of the Rebel Librarian*, in fall of 2018.