

TEACHERS, POLICY, AND DIALOGUE: SECONDARY ENGLISH TEACHERS'
TRANSACTIONS WITH EDUCATIONAL POLICY

by

TREVOR THOMAS STEWART

(Under the Direction of Bob Fecho)

ABSTRACT

High stakes testing has had such a dominant influence on educational policy over the last quarter century that we are likely to label this period in the history of American schools as the standards period (Marshall, 2009). This qualitative interview study, which was conducted in a large metropolitan area and the surrounding region in the southeastern United States, draws upon the theories of Bakhtin (1981, 1986) and Rosenblatt (1995, 2005) to inform the investigation of the influences of high stakes testing and standards-based education on secondary English teachers' abilities to engage in dialogue and transact with the policy mandates communicated to them by their administrators. Data were generated through a series of three semi-structured interviews. Participants described (1) how the discourse of policy influenced their senses of autonomy as professionals; (2) their experiences of engaging in dialogue with and contributing to the creation of policy; and (3) the influences of the policy mandates they received on their instructional decisions. The participants' experiences were analyzed using transactional analysis in order to attend to the processes of mutual shaping that occurred as these teachers sought to engage in dialogue with policy. The stories shared by the participants indicate that the top-down nature of the discourse of educational policy causes it to function as an authoritative discourse

(Bakhtin, 1981, 1986), which seeks to prohibit dialogue and results in the exclusion of teachers' voices from discussions of what counts as teaching and learning in the secondary English classroom. The experiences of these teachers suggest that the policy mandates they receive privilege the teaching of low-level skills, which do not foster critical thinking and reasoning skills. The study highlights the need for educational stakeholders to reconceptualize the discourse of policy and demonstrates the importance of preparing pre-service and in-service teachers to take on a role in the creation and implementation of policy. The implications of this study extend beyond teacher education. Education programs for school administrators must also be adjusted to include a focus on finding ways for administrators to create spaces for teachers to participate in discussions of policy.

INDEX WORDS: Education, Policy, High Stakes Testing, Standards, Social Constructionism, Language, Culture, Discourse, Bakhtin, Rosenblatt, Qualitative Interview Research, Transactional Analysis

TEACHERS, POLICY, AND DIALOGUE: SECONDARY ENGLISH TEACHERS'
TRANSACTIONS WITH EDUCATIONAL POLICY

by

TREVOR THOMAS STEWART

BA, Western Carolina University, 2003

MAT, Western Carolina University, 2005

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2010

© 2010

Trevor Thomas Stewart

All Rights Reserved

TEACHERS, POLICY, AND DIALOGUE: SECONDARY ENGLISH TEACHERS'
TRANSACTIONS WITH EDUCATIONAL POLICY

by

Trevor Thomas Stewart

Major Professor: Bob Fecho

Committee: James Marshall
Melissa Freeman

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2010

DEDICATION

To my brother, Jason: for inspiring me to take the time to enjoy life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my family: for supporting my decisions and never rushing me to find my place in the world.

To Bob Fecho: for pushing me to be a better writer. You've challenged me in ways no other teacher ever has. Your advice, encouragement, friendship, and support along the way made this experience enjoyable.

To Jim Marshall: for helping me find a topic that I could get really fired up about, and for providing a model of professional happiness to emulate.

To: Melissa Freeman: for opening my eyes to joys of qualitative research and giving me the confidence to create my own method of analysis.

To my participants, Klaus, Caroline, Maggie, John, Walter, Jenny, and Sasha: for sharing your time and your stories with me. This project would have been impossible without you. It was a pleasure working with you.

To my writing group members: for your friendship, feedback on my drafts, and suggestions of things to read. Emily, Amy, Beth, Michael, and Eric, you've helped make me a better scholar.

To my friends outside of the world of academia: for understanding when I said I couldn't go to the woods because I had to work, and for being willing to head out hiking, running, paddling, and climbing when I needed a break.

To Yellow Dog, my trusty companion: for sleeping patiently under the desk while I wrote. You spent so much time with your head in my lap while I was reading over the last three years that I'm pretty sure you could explain Bakhtin better than I can if you knew how to talk.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
CHAPTER	
1 Introduction.....	1
Contextualizing the Project.....	3
Problem Statement.....	12
Research Questions.....	14
Theoretical Framework.....	16
Subjectivity.....	26
Description of the Chapter	27
2 Review of Literature.....	29
Critiquing the Standards Movement.....	31
The Implications of Policy for Teachers.....	39
Navigating Educational Policy	47
Key Points and Where They Lead.....	50
3 Methodology and Methods	52
Methodology	53
Methods.....	57
Limitations	70
Summary	73

4	Discussion of Data.....	75
	Descriptions of Participants	77
	The Authoritative Discourse of Policy	83
	The Flow of Policy Communication.....	90
	The Influences of High Stakes Testing.....	100
	The Problem of Test-Driven Curricula	113
	Summary	119
5	Implications.....	123
	Reflections on the Problems of Authoritative Discourse.....	124
	Implications for Educational Stakeholders	128
	Implications for Educational Research	138
	Looking Across Implications	139
	Reflections on the Research Process	141
	Conclusion.....	143
	REFERENCES	147
	APPENDICES	
I	Participant Description Form.....	157
II	Interview Guide	158

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“All this work I did. And at the end, mind you, I did not have a single student fail the End-of-Course-Test. Special needs and ELLs [English Language Learners] included, all of them. But the fact that my lesson plans did not coordinate with the pacing guide, they were writing me up and putting something in my file, whatever that means.” –Sasha

The frustration in Sasha’s voice was palpable as she told me the story of a drama unit she had put together for her ninth grade students several years ago. Sasha is a creative, hard-working high school teacher who often spoke of her belief in the importance of making students active participants in learning, and her story provides a compelling example of the problems that arise when teachers receive policy mandates that seek to prohibit them from engaging in transactions with policy documents. Sasha had been given a pacing guide by her county English coordinator, which dictated the texts she should be teaching throughout the semester. She had been charged with teaching *Romeo and Juliet* during this particular six-week period. Her students, however, had read *Romeo and Juliet* in eighth grade, and they were clamoring to read something different. In an effort to engage her students by providing them with some control over their learning environment, Sasha chose to reject the pacing guide and use *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* to support the goals for her unit. This unit was designed to foster critical thinking and engage students by having them recreate scenes from the play with the assistance of actors from the Atlanta Shakespeare Company.

On the surface, Sasha's unit on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* appears to be a success story. Her students dove right into the work of the unit. They re-created and performed scenes from the play, enjoyed the unit, and passed the county mandated benchmark test for that six week time period. Then, an article lauding the work that Sasha and her students were doing appeared in the local paper. Once the administrators in her county found out that Sasha had ignored the pacing guide, she was reprimanded. Administrators began reviewing Sasha's daily plans and continually pressuring her to teach in ways that she felt inhibited her ability to engage her students in creative learning activities. Neither the fact the her students continued to meet the county's benchmark testing expectations nor her students' success on the state End-of-Course-Test (EOCT) assuaged the county administrators' anger at her. Sasha eventually left her job in the school.

Sasha's experience illustrates the problem of the current discourse of educational policy. Teachers, too often, are positioned in ways that do not allow them to transact with policy mandates and find ways to make school a place where the love of learning can come alive. Teachers who are interested in dialoging with policy mandates in order to engage students in topics of organic interest are finding themselves in untenable positions. Their abilities to respond to and shape policy mandates are limited because these policies are being communicated in ways that seek to silence dialogue. The language of these policies is static and does not offer teachers the ability to become active participants in the discussion of what counts as teaching and learning. Sasha's story, and the stories of the other participants in this study, demonstrates the need to re-conceptualize the discourse of educational policy.

In this chapter, I discuss my rationale for engaging in this research project and draw upon my experiences as a high school English teacher and a researcher to contextualize this project. I

also describe the purpose of this study and offer a description of how this research seeks to address the problems created by educational policies that privilege a narrow focus on high stakes testing. Additionally, I provide a detailed explication of the theoretical framework that forms the foundation for this study. As I bring this chapter to a close, I discuss the ways that my subjectivities have influenced this research.

Contextualizing the Project

The purpose of this qualitative study was to draw upon semi-structured interviews to develop an understanding of how policy mandates are influencing the instructional decisions high school English teachers make and their experiences as professionals. From that understanding, I have developed a discussion about the extent to which teachers are transacting—or attempting to mutually shape and dialogue with—the policy mandates communicated to them by administrators and policymakers. This discussion is grounded in Bakhtin’s (1981, 1986) notions of authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse and Rosenblatt’s (1995, 2005) concept of transaction.

How I Came to This Study

It’s interesting how words like rationale and significance can often appear to be simply placeholders working to organize a research report or proposal. As I first typed them onto the page when I was writing the proposal for this project, this is what they were—simply placeholders inscribed on the page to meet the needs of the genre in which I was writing. Slowly, however, these words began to take on new meaning as I interrogated my rationale for engaging in this research project and considered the significance of this study for me as a teacher, a researcher, a person, and for others in the field of language and literacy education.

Over the last several years I have grown increasingly frustrated with the ways in which policy mandates have become the driving force behind classroom instruction. School administrators, policymakers, and politicians, who often have little knowledge of what is going on in classrooms or contexts of the students and teachers who populate those classrooms, are dictating how lessons should be conducted. It is important to consider the implications of policy mandates that might inhibit teachers' abilities to engage in dialogue with them because these prescriptive policies can make it difficult for teachers to personalize instruction to meet the needs of their diverse students. For this reason, I am interested in conducting research that explores the possibilities of fostering dialogue between teachers and policy. Before I could begin to conceptualize what dialogue between policymakers and teachers might look like in the future, I needed to explore the ways that teachers are engaging in dialogue with the educational policy mandates they are currently receiving. This study is an effort to develop that sort of understanding so that educational stakeholders might begin to re-conceptualize the discourse of educational policy and consider the implications of policy discourse for the curricula being enacted in schools.

The Story of the Problem

As anyone who has ever embarked on the journey of writing a dissertation knows, choosing a topic is one of the most crucial decisions a researcher can make. For me, choosing a topic that is not of personal import makes this task seem insurmountable. To devote an entire year of one's life to a singular pursuit takes commitment, but it also takes motivation and passion. The problem with choosing a topic that one is passionate about is that care must be taken to develop an understanding of how that passion is influencing the study being conducted. As I considered how my subjectivities, experiences, and contexts were coloring my worldview

and my understanding of this project, I began giving some careful thought to why I have chosen to make an exploration of how teachers are dialoging with and transacting with educational policy a topic worthy of so much time and effort.

My rationale for conducting this study is directly related to my experiences as a high school English teacher. When I was teaching in a small Appalachian town in western North Carolina, I grew frustrated with the number of students who dropped out of school because they did not see the relevance of the daily activities their teachers had to offer in the course of the school day. I am, perhaps, more aware of drop out statistics than other teachers and researchers because my younger brother dropped out of high school. I have seen first hand the struggles that people can go through in their lives when they do not complete high school; this awareness has made me interested in finding ways to make schools places where students can see the relevance of schoolwork to their lives so they might be motivated to remain in school. In the county where I taught, the drop out rate ranged from six to nine percent between 2003 and 2008 (N.C. Local Educational Associations). The culture of the small town where I was teaching made it possible for me to get to know each of my students personally and develop relationships with them. Getting to know my students in this way helped me understand the importance of being able to make school relevant to students' lives.

When students' interests do not inform the instructional decisions made by teachers, too many students are left asking questions to which teachers and parents have insufficient answers. What's the use of being able to do algebraic equations simply to answer questions assigned for homework? How can algebra possibly be useful for someone who never intends to set foot in a classroom again as soon as high school is over? Why should I read Shakespeare's plays when I don't even know what these characters are talking about? These are the questions I heard

students asking on a regular basis during the time I spent teaching high school. Unfortunately, too many parents and teachers are unable to answer these questions when students ask them. So, unable to make connections between their lives and what they are supposed to be learning, too many students leave school and never return.

Sasha provides an example of a teacher who sought to help her students see the value of what they were learning in her classroom. However, her administrators met her efforts with resistance and pressured her to teach in ways that she did not believe would help her students see the value of what they were doing. Instead of acquiescing to the demands of her administrators, Sasha chose to leave her job at the end of the year. When teachers like Sasha are pressured to leave their classrooms, more students are likely to walk away from schools.

I become frustrated when I think about how many students walk away from schools without compelling answers to these types of questions. According to the U. S. Department of Education National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 8.7 percent of high school students dropped out of high school in 2007. This number rises dramatically for many sub groups. For example, the drop out rate reached 21.4 percent for Hispanics in 2007 (NCES, 2009). If there is any hope of reducing the drop out rate, teachers need the freedom to teach in ways that can make school more relevant to their students. Teachers, however, cannot easily tailor instruction to make it engaging for their students when they feel compelled to adhere to policy mandates aimed at making high stakes testing the centerpiece of classroom instruction. Sasha's story of teaching *A Midsummer Night's Dream* illustrates the ways that the current discourse of educational policy is problematic. Her efforts to address the standards she was charged with teaching while still making her class engaging for her students led directly to her being treated as though she was not doing her job.

Sasha's voice cracked in frustration as she described the futility she felt after being reprimanded by her administrators. "Even though I wrote out a whole rationale saying that I met every single standard. It doesn't matter what Shakespearean text it is, I still met the same standards during the same weeks that she [the county English coordinator] wanted them to be met. But that didn't matter, she [the county English coordinator] wanted this specific text to be taught. Even though it did not serve my students the best." Sasha believed the best interests of her students were relegated to a position of unimportance and administrators' policies were given primacy. This disconnect between the things that teachers believe are important for their students and what administrators privilege is problematic. Teachers cannot address the unique needs of their students without the ability to engage in dialogue with policy mandates.

Unfortunately, the question of how to make this happen is complex. The piece of that question that I find most compelling is how teachers can negotiate the policy mandates that seek to limit their abilities to deviate from prescriptive modes of instruction that limit the relevance of school for too many students. Therefore, this study is focused on the dialogue and transactions that occur between teachers and the policy mandates they receive as they do the valuable work of providing learning experiences for students in the secondary English classroom.

The Role of Policy in a Problematic Situation

In order to make school relevant, teachers must have the freedom to teach in creative ways that are responsive to the needs of their students. Increasingly, the value placed on high stakes testing has led to the development of a narrow view of what counts as learning and teaching in schools (Franciosi, 2004; Hargreaves, 2003; Lipman, 2004; Luke, 2004; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Schultz & Fecho, 2005). This narrow perspective makes it difficult for students' interests to be active participants in the classroom.

I believe in a model of teaching and learning that is based upon the development and exploration of questions that are of organic interest to teachers and their students. When teachers and students explore topics of organic interest and address questions that do not have prescribed *right* or *wrong* answers, classroom dialogue can facilitate authentic learning (Nystrand, 1997). Authentic learning is active and “involves organic assimilation starting from within” (Dewey, 1902, p. 9). Classroom instruction focused solely on preparation for standardized tests leaves little room for the exploration of topics of organic interest. And the result is that too many students fail to receive the kind of education they deserve.

It is important to explore the ways that teachers are navigating the ever-increasing pressure to focus on a narrow curriculum designed to prepare students to take, and succeed on, standardized tests. Cuban (2009) has argued that “finding out what typically happens in classrooms is important since in today’s policy arena, local school boards, state legislators, and U. S. presidents say again and again that without good teaching, students will not learn vital content and skills” (p. 5). Developing an understanding of how the pressure of high stakes testing is influencing teachers’ instructional practices is a crucial step in the process of developing a rationale and a plan for helping teachers navigate this pressure to create and implement relevant curricula that can draw upon students’ cultural contexts.

As Delpit (2006) has argued, all students bring unique cultural and linguistic styles with them to the classroom. A substantial body of literature supports the notion that making students’ individual cultural contexts, or what Gee (2008) called Discourses and Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005) labeled Funds of Knowledge, an integral part of the process of teaching and learning. This is a crucial first step in making classrooms places where students are actively engaged in learning. Fecho’s (2004) work highlighted the importance of drawing a range of

perspectives into instructional activities because doing so makes it possible for students to learn to interrogate these perspectives and grow from these experiences. I argue that a narrow focus on teaching for success on high stakes tests makes it difficult for teachers and students to attend to the nuances of language that are present as individuals from divergent cultural contexts transact with one another in the secondary English classroom.

Engaging students in instructional activities that attend to the tensions that exist between disparate perspectives requires teachers to create spaces for dialogue between students' cultural identities or Discourses to occur, which is no facile task. Sadly, the pressures of high stakes testing have made teachers more likely to focus on test preparation activities that do not bring students' cultural contexts into classroom dialogue. Although it is quite often much more comfortable to focus on similarities when we encounter people whose cultural contexts differ from ours, "it is in experiencing the differences that we discover ourselves" as individuals (Freire, 2005, p. 127). Often more can be learned from cultural dissonance than harmony.

There is much to be learned from the gray areas that exist in the cultural differences each person brings to the classroom. However, we cannot learn from those gray areas if we are not willing or able to devote instructional time to exploring the binaries. A narrow focus on what counts as teaching and learning leaves scant room to investigate the nuances that exist in the study of English because this focus privileges instructional activities that focus on finding *the correct* answer to a question on a standardized test. If students are only encouraged to engage in hide and seek, reading comprehension test preparation activities, myriad opportunities are missed to make learning organic and engaging.

The diverse students who are present in classrooms make teaching and learning a multifaceted act of navigating implicit cultural differences. Reflecting upon my experiences

teaching students in the Appalachian mountains of Western North Carolina has helped me to see the importance of exploring cultural differences. I found that I had much to learn about the cultural contexts of my students if I wanted to be able to connect with them and create relationships that fostered learning. As Britzman (2003) rightly argued, “pedagogy demands and constructs complex social relationships” (p. 54). The exchange of ideas that occurs as teachers and students build and navigate these relationships fosters the exploration of the nuances that exist in the process of teaching and learning. Teachers, however, must have the intellectual freedom to create and implement instructional activities designed to draw upon these relationships to make their classes relevant to the lives of their students.

In her work studying the experiences pre-service teachers, Britzman (2003) argued that speaking “as if there is one monolithic culture of teachers, students, or schools is to take up a discourse that is at once authoritative and impossible” (p. 71). Each culture brings unique nuances to the learning environment. Culture is in a perpetual state “of being reinvented, renegotiated, and reinterpreted by its participants” (p. 71). Teachers need to have the freedom to design classroom activities that allow students’ unique cultures to shape the process of teaching and learning. Gee (2008) pointed out that students will reject “teachers and schools that they perceive as hostile, alien, or oppressive to their home-based identities” (p. 39). If school policies compel teachers to focus instruction solely on test preparation activities designed to teach students to seek a single correct answer, the heteroglossic nature of culture and language cannot shape the processes of learning and teaching. As a result, teachers will struggle to find ways to make school relevant to the unique cultural contexts of their students.

Learning about my students’ cultural identities made it possible for our cultural differences to enrich classroom dialogue. However, this was only possible because I was actively

engaged in transacting with and shaping policy mandates as they applied instructional decisions I was making. Had I been solely focused on preparing students to take the ninth grade End-of-Course test, it is unlikely that I would have taken the time to make my students' cultural contexts an integral part of the learning environment. My ability to draw students' cultural contexts into classroom activities was a result of the dialogue I had engaged in with the policy mandates I received from my administrators. In my view, successful teaching and learning could not occur if I simply transmitted information to my students so they could prepare for a test. However, I realize that not all teachers engage in this sort of transactional dialogue with policy. I am interested in learning more about how the discourse of educational policy fosters or hinders this sort of dialogue.

This study is designed to offer some insight into why some teachers see opportunities for dialogue with policy and others feel constrained in ways that prohibit them from transacting with the policy mandates they receive. Sasha's story indicates that some teachers might be reticent to engage in dialogue with policy because doing so puts their jobs at risk. The discourse of educational policy privileges classroom activities that are standardized and do not include space for the exploration of students' diverse cultural contexts.

Through this study, I present a discussion that could draw educational policymakers, teachers, parents, and school administrators into dialogue about what counts as quality education (Luke & Woods, 2009). An important element of facilitating this sort of dialogue is to bring the voices of teachers to the fore as they discuss the ways they are navigating and transacting with educational policy mandates. Research displaying the nuances of meaning that exist in language and the ways we use language to communicate and construct meaning can be an effective tool for shedding some light on the experiences of teachers in the classroom. Therefore, I have

worked to use dialogue and the exploration of dialogue to come to a better understanding of how teachers negotiate and transact with educational policy.

Problem Statement

High stakes testing has come to have such a dominant influence on schools over the last quarter century that we will most likely come to label this period in the history of American schools as the “standards period” (Marshall, 2009, p. 113). As high stakes testing becomes the driving force behind instruction, “schooling has become a spectator sport” (Luke, 2004, p. 1423). Instead of being places where teachers and students share the task of constructing knowledge, schools have become places where students are, too often, positioned as receptacles to be filled with knowledge. Hillocks (2002) provided a compelling discussion of the ways in which high stakes testing is influencing schools. Instead of creating opportunities for students to engage in creative, critical thinking learning activities, “testing programs tend to restrict the curriculum to the kinds of knowledge and skills that are tested. They are likely to generate drill and memorization in classrooms” (p. 12).

When instruction based upon drill and memorization dominates classrooms, authentic dialogue between teachers and students becomes virtually non-existent. Pressure to prepare students to succeed on high stakes tests often causes teachers to rely on what Mehan (1979) labeled the initiation, response, evaluation (IRE) pattern. This pattern of classroom dialogue leaves little room for teachers and students to engage in dialogue that results from authentic questioning (Nystrand, 1997). The prevalence of the IRE pattern in high school English classes is problematic because, as Alvermann, Phelps, and Ridgeway (2007) have noted, “there is research to suggest that students at the middle and high school levels view discussions which invite a wide range of responses as helping them comprehend what they read” (p. 267). Unfortunately,

the IRE pattern continues to dominate classrooms. As a result, schools have become places where, for many students, the love of learning comes to die (Fecho & Botzakis, 2007).

Students, however, are not the only individuals whose abilities to engage in critical thinking are being hampered by the influences of standardized tests. The dialogue I have engaged in with the participants in this study indicates that this phenomenon also diminishes the love of teaching that many teachers had when they entered the profession. When teachers are encouraged to focus instruction on test preparation activities, opportunities to guide students in the exploration of diverse topics of organic interest become scarce. Increasingly, opportunities for teachers to think critically and create instructional activities that are personally rewarding are also being diminished.

As high stakes testing continues to become *the* driving force behind curricula, teachers have fewer opportunities to engage in dialogue with and shape educational policy. The result is that it has become increasingly difficult for teachers to create instructional activities designed to engage students in relevant learning activities. Applebee (1996) argued that the climate of standardized testing causes students to simply learn about the characteristics of the subjects they study instead of learning to formulate their own conclusions about topics such as literature. The focus on assessment inherent in the policy mandates, such as the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) which I discuss in chapter two, demonstrates the importance being placed on having students learn about the characteristics of literature instead of creating opportunities for them to engage in transactions with the literature they are studying. This sort of learning makes it difficult for teachers to justify lessons that ask students to think critically because they instead feel pressured to devote the majority of their instructional time to test preparation skill and drill activities.

Neoliberal educational policy seeks to reduce teachers' abilities to dialogue with educational policy as it begins to function as authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981), which seeks to prohibit new meanings to be constructed from a speaker's utterance. The "neoliberal model of governance" that has been dominating educational policy for the last quarter century is based upon a model of competition and corporate efficiency (Luke & Woods, 2009, p. 200). Reading the literature describing neoliberal educational policy has helped me see that the problems in schools today are more than just "teacher problems" that can be solved by motivating teachers to throw off the yoke of federal mandates.

During many of the conversations I had with my colleagues while I was teaching full-time, I wondered aloud why they didn't just ignore the narrow focus on high stakes tests the way I did. I wondered why they weren't willing to resist the pressure to engage in banking model (Freire, 1970) teaching practices. Banking model teaching practices rely on the transmission of knowledge instead of attending to teaching practices that allow for the development of knowledge and meaning making to be organic processes of shared learning and teaching. I have come to understand that the authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) of educational policy makes it difficult for teachers to enter into dialogue with policy mandates. The monologic nature of these policies inhibits teachers' abilities to consider the possibility that they might be able to accomplish the task of providing high-quality education without following rigid instructional plans. The aim of this study was to develop an understanding of the resources that teachers draw upon to transcend the monologic nature of the discourse of educational policy.

Research Questions

This study was designed to explore how standards period policy mandates are influencing teachers' instructional practices and experiences as professionals. This research was also focused

on developing an understanding of the opportunities teachers have to engage in dialogue with the policy mandates they receive. In order to facilitate my understanding of these concepts, I crafted the following research questions:

1. How are policy mandates influencing teachers' professional experiences (such as their sense of autonomy as professionals) in the secondary English classroom?
2. What does it look like when teachers engage in dialogue with policy and what are the conditions that enable this dialogue to occur?
3. How do policy mandates influence the instructional decisions teachers make in their classrooms?

Operationalizing “Policy”

The words we use when we engage in dialogue bring myriad connotations with them. As Bakhtin (1981, 1986) reminds us, our words are colored by the contexts in which we have used them to support previous utterances. With this in mind, it is important for me to clarify the meanings of the word policy in the context of this study. I have intentionally left the definition of policy vague. I wanted teachers to have the ability to define what policy meant for them on a daily basis. I wanted teachers to discuss the policy mandates that had the most influence on their professional experiences. I did not want to limit our discussion to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) or other national policy documents because, for many teachers, local testing policies have more day-to-day influences on the instructional decisions they make. Leaving the definition of policy vague also facilitated the discussion of how teachers receive and transact with individual school policies, such as use of cell phones during the school day or the implementation of pacing guides.

Theoretical Framework

Qualitative researchers rely heavily on theory in order to make sense of the world and interpret the data they generate during their research. Therefore, it is important for any qualitative project to have a solid theoretical foundation. The image of the foundation for typical house can serve as an effective illustration for how a qualitative research project must be constructed. Much like the foundation of a house—or any other structure—the foundations for qualitative research projects require two layers: the footers, which are concrete forms that are dug and poured several feet below the ground, and the cinderblocks erected on those footers. After the concrete footers have been poured, stonemasons build piers or block walls out of mortar and cinderblocks. A researcher's theoretical framework comprises the footers—the first and most crucial layer of the project. If the footers are not sound, the structure will, eventually, crumble under its own weight.

In the following sections, I discuss the theoretical framework that formed the footers for this project. I begin by unpacking how Louise Rosenblatt's (1995, 2005) concept of transaction informs my understanding of how people read and understand the world. Then, I explicate the ways in which Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) work can inform educators who are interested understanding how culture and language transact with models of teaching and learning. Although much of Bakhtin's work was couched in terms of the role of dialogue in literature, his theory of language is relevant to a substantive discussion of the ways in which teachers and educational policymakers use language to communicate their views of teaching and learning. Central to this study, is my understanding of Bakhtin's discussion of authoritative discourse, which seeks to dominate the forces of heteroglossia. However, my understanding of Bakhtin's work has been shaped by my experience of reading Rosenblatt's (1995, 2005) transactional theory of reading.

The Organic Process of Mutual Shaping

Louise Rosenblatt's (1995, 2005) notion of transaction forms the foundation for my understanding of any reading experience. Rosenblatt's transactional reading theory introduced the idea that reading is an experience of mutual shaping. As a teacher and literary theorist, Rosenblatt (2005a) argued that meaning is made "during the transaction that occurs between the reader and the text" (p. 7). In this view of reading, the text and the reader should not be seen as separate entities. Rosenblatt argued that the ways these two entities shape one another during the process of reading make it impossible for them to remain disconnected once the reading experience has begun.

Rosenblatt made it clear that she believed that the marks on the page that represent the words included in a text have meanings for the reader outside of the situation of reading a given text. To make her point, she argued that the word "*pain* for a French reader will link up with the concept of bread and for the English reader with the concept of bodily or mental suffering" (Rosenblatt, 2005a, p. 8, emphasis in original). The cultural contexts and past experiences with language the reader brings to a text will color his or her understandings of the words on a page—a concept Bakhtin also addressed in his theory of language, which I discuss in the next section of this chapter. In the transactional view, these reservoirs of past experience influence the meaning that the reader gleans from the text. Therefore, the reader and the text cannot be viewed as separate, disconnected entities.

A return to Rosenblatt's example of how different readers will interpret the word *pain* helps to illustrate this point. Even students from a homogenous cultural group—if such a thing exists—will have different experiences that will influence their understanding of the word *pain* when they encounter it in a text. A student who has endured the pain of breaking a leg in a soccer

match will bring a different image of the world pain than a student whose only experience with pain has been a scrape on the knee from a fall on the playground. Both students have experienced the searing feeling of injury. However, the student with the broken leg will have endured the pain for a longer period of time. This experience of sustained discomfort is likely to leave a more lasting impression in the student's mind. These students, therefore, will associate different experiences with the word, and the same will be true, to one degree or another, with the other words these students encounter as they transact with language. The result is that readers cannot help but shape the meaning of texts as they read them. The experience is organic and dynamic because past experiences cause new meaning to be made during every reading experience.

The idea that the term transaction is used to describe an organic experience of rendering new meaning becomes ever clearer when one considers how Rosenblatt clarified the difference between an interaction and a transaction. Unlike a transaction, an interaction is the result of "separate, already defined entities acting on one another" (Rosenblatt, 2005b, p. 40). To illustrate this concept Rosenblatt asked her reader to picture two billiard balls colliding on a table. These two separate and clearly defined objects remain unchanged after they collide. The term transaction, on the other hand, attends to influences of the past experiences that readers bring with them to the reading of a text and allows for how those experiences change both the readers and the meaning of the texts they read. Moreover, Rosenblatt (2005) argued that these past experiences influence the ways people understand language as they read and write or speak and listen. In the context of this research project, this is an important distinction to make because the policies that are enacted in schools are communicated in both written and spoken form.

Rosenblatt's theories are a foundational element of my understanding how people read, interpret, and attempt to shape the world around them. Moreover, her theories attended to many

of the same concepts that Bakhtin (1981, 1986) addressed in his theory of language. When brought together, these theories offer a way to understand and articulate the nuances of the dynamic nature of language. Moreover, these theories work in concert with one another to clarify how the dynamic nature of language influences the discourse of educational policy.

The Dynamic Nature of Language

In his discussion of language, Bakhtin (1981) argued that words live on the boundaries between divergent cultural contexts. To illustrate this idea, I ask you to consider the image of a river that someone from Jackson, Mississippi might picture when he or she is discussing days spent walking on the muddy banks of the Mississippi river as a child. Now, consider the very different image that one might conjure if he or she grew up walking on the rocky banks of the Gallatin River in Bozeman, Montana. Two strikingly different images can be associated with a single word. Those images are a result of the divergent experiences held by each of our imagined individuals. Experience has shaped the language each of these people might use to describe a seemingly similar object. Bakhtin's work offers a vocabulary to discuss the ways that our contexts influence our understanding of the words we use when we engage in dialogue.

Reading the theories of Bakhtin and Rosenblatt has caused me to view language as a dynamic force that cannot be understood without being attentive to the transactions that occur between individuals and cultures. Communication between individuals creates opportunities for language to evolve and meaning to be constructed. Words come alive because they are "harmonizing with some elements in this environment and striking a dissonance with others" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 277). The harmony and dissonance that exists in the dialogue that occurs in the research situation demands our attention. If we, as researchers, wish to develop understandings of the experiences of our participants, we must attend to the varied ways that

people use language to communicate. Our words are meaningful because they have history—just as the people who give voice to those words have histories. Returning your attention to our imagined children walking along river banks at opposite ends of the country will help illustrate the ways that those histories influence the connotations of the words we employ. Days spent trout fishing in the clear, blue waters of the Gallatin will leave a different impression from days spent walking along the muddy banks of mighty Mississippi. Each of those children is likely to imagine different images when the word river is called to mind because of their individual histories or contexts. The histories and contexts attached to language cannot help but influence the words researchers and participants choose to employ as they enter into dialogue. However, those histories and contexts create tension between two diverging forms of discourse.

The Dialogic Divide

Bakhtin's (1981) essay "Discourse in the Novel" provides a superb discussion of "the sharp gap" that exists between two forms of discourse (p. 342). The chasm that exists between "authoritative discourse" and "internally persuasive discourse" is particularly relevant to any discussion of how centripetal policy influences teaching and learning (p. 342). A key concept in Bakhtin's work is the notion of centripetal (centralizing) forces, which seek to unify and standardize language. These forces attempt to "centralize verbal-ideological thought" and defend "an already formed language from the pressure of growing heteroglossia" (p. 271). The concept of heteroglossia is directly linked to Bakhtin's argument that live speech is always subject to the tensions of centrifugal (decentralizing) forces, which account for the myriad ways that individuals employ words in unique ways to communicate their intentions and seek to elicit a response from the addressee.

Bakhtin (1981) argued that the authoritative word “demands unconditional allegiance” and leaves no room for interpretation or dialogue (p. 343). Moreover, authoritative discourse “binds us” and demands that we make it our own (p. 342). Resting on the authority of the past, authoritative discourse exists in a zone that is distanced from the reader or listener. In essence, the authoritative word is fully formed and “its semantic structure is static and dead” (p. 343). If one seeks to enter into dialogue with the authoritative word, the only possible rejoinders are acceptance or rejection. Authoritative discourse, then, is a centripetal force that seeks to dominate those who would attempt to enter into a transaction with a text. It resists any attempt by the respondent to enter into a relationship of mutual shaping with the texts they read.

If one looks across the chasm and considers the qualities of what Bakhtin (1981) called “internally persuasive discourse,” a very different image of language can be seen (p. 342). Discourse that is internally persuasive is born of centrifugal forces and allows us to “wrest new answers” and concepts from it (p. 346). The internally persuasive word is, in my view, transactional because it permits the generation of new meanings and authentic responses. Instead of offering a limited number of possible rejoinders, the possibilities for responding to internally persuasive discourse are limitless. The complex perspectives and understandings we bring to dialogue with internally persuasive discourse open myriad possibilities for the generation of meaning.

Authoritative discourse, on the other hand, reifies the word and leads to a “muffling of the dialogism native to it” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 346). I argue that, too often, the discourse of educational policymakers is authoritative in its intent. In chapter two I demonstrate how a close reading of educational policy documents, such as The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and *A Nation at Risk*, reveals the reality that policymakers do not wish to have the

discourse of educational policy moved into a contact zone, which would allow teachers to transact with it and engage in mutual shaping. As a result, the discourse of educational policymakers seeks to prohibit educators from transacting with policy documents and deviating from the prescribed instructional methods those documents seek to mandate.

The Absence of Dialogue

Language and its usage in the service of communicating educational policy are consistently subject to the tension that exists between centripetal forces, which seek to unite and standardize, and the centrifugal forces of heteroglossia. This tension “can be likened to an outdoor tug-of-war game” (Fecho, Mallozzi, & Schultz, 2007, p. 39). On one side of the rope, policymakers and administrators craft policy that seeks to unify and standardize education. At the other end of the rope, teachers, students, and communities are pulling the “individual fibers” that serve their unique needs as they seek to make meaning (p. 39). When enough force is exerted on both ends of the rope “to run the game in perpetuity,” this tension is healthy (p. 39). The force being exerted on either end of the rope makes it possible for the contexts, theories, and goals of both teams to mutually shape one another. When one side dominates the other, however, this tension becomes unproductive and unhealthy as dialogue ceases to exist and one point of view dictates how schools should be run without considering the diverse needs, theories, and goals of the other side. The discourse of educational policy needs to maintain a healthy level of tension to be productive. When this healthy tension exists, teachers have the ability to transact with educational policy mandates.

Seeking to Prohibit Transactions

The transactions that occur during reading have the power to help readers fashion an “internally persuasive discourse” as they seek to understand the world around them (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345). Therefore, all discourse has potential to be dialogic on some level. However, discourse that refuses to allow multiple perspectives to transact with one another is removed from dialogue and “can only be cited amid rejoinders” (Bakhtin, 1986b. p. 133). Authentic dialogue—dialogue that creates opportunities for mutual shaping to occur—does not privilege one rejoinder over another and allows meaning making to be an active, organic process.

Bakhtin (1981) made it clear that “every concrete act of understanding is active” (p. 282). In Bakhtin’s estimation, “understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition one another” (p. 282). However, a dialogic view of language and the reading experience does not preclude the existence of discourse that is authoritative and seeks to obtain unconditional acceptance from the listener or reader. Using a discussion of Tolstoy’s fiction, Bakhtin described how a speaker’s discourse could strive “to stun and destroy the apperceptive background of the reader’s active understanding” (p. 283). Any attempt to exclude the reader’s personal perceptions from the reading experience works to prohibit dialogue—such an attempt creates unhealthy tension that seeks to force the reader to accept the monologic message contained in the speaker’s discourse.

The discourse used in centripetal policy often masquerades as dialogue; however, I argue that the intent of this discourse is monologic in nature. Its goal is not to foster meaning making. Instead, the centripetal forces of educational policy seek to place educational policy in a privileged space, which removes it from dialogue. Removed from authentic dialogue, the authoritative word cannot “become a rejoinder among equally privileged rejoinders” (Bakhtin,

1986b, p. 133). Centripetal policy statements are crafted with the goal of defining the ways in which teaching and learning are supposed to occur. Functioning as the authoritarian word, centripetal educational policy becomes inert and “demands reverent repetition and not further development, corrections, and additions” (p. 133). All too often, educational policymakers fashion their utterances with the intent of obtaining wholesale acceptance of their rhetoric.

Rosenblatt (1995) cautioned that readers must consider “any information that can illuminate the author’s implicit assumptions” (p. 109). I argue that educational policy contains the implicit assumption that readers of policy statements will accept that policy part and parcel without any attempt to wrest new meanings from it. As I discuss in chapter two, it appears that authentic dialogue and the creation of internally persuasive discourse have no place in the education policy crafted during the standards period. However, the tension that exists between authoritative and internally persuasive discourse cannot be ignored.

This tension will always be present because the centrifugal forces of heteroglossia will always be present (Bakhtin, 1981). Moreover, readers must seek to actively understand texts, so dialogue will always be an essential element of discourse—even if the speaker is seeking to silence that dialogue. Of any discourse, we must ask the following questions: What is the quality of that discourse? Does it allow new meanings to be wrested from it? Discourse that attempts to silence the meanings made by the addressee must be removed from the language employed to convey educational policy in order for authentic dialogue to occur.

The generation of new understanding requires authentic dialogue. It requires an openness that is born of the absence of authoritative discourse that seeks to snap the rope in a game of tug-of-war. Mutual shaping requires the presence of a space for what Fecho, Graham, and Hudson-Ross (2005) have called “wobble” (p. 175). The concept of wobble describes the “authored place

of uncertainty that lies between and among figured worlds” (p. 175). This space of uncertainty makes it possible for divergent ideas to contribute to dialogue. The idea of that our understandings of language are constantly in a state of flux is central to my discussion of educational policy. Ideas that are in the process of being formulated and shaped by transactions require room for uncertainty. In a game of tug-of-war, the flag marking the center point of the rope wobbles fluidly back and forth over the mud pit separating the two teams when the power on both ends of the rope is equal. The flag will move towards one side when that team is exerting its influence on the rope—gaining a momentary position of strength. Healthy tension will allow the opposing side to move the flag back through the center and, sometimes, over to its side of the mud pit for a time. When sort of tension exists, both sides have the opportunity to transact with the utterances of the other and create new understandings.

Discourse that seeks to force the reader or listener to accept one particular view inhibits dialogue and prevents transactions from occurring. Bakhtin (1986a) argued that “any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances” (p. 69). The words employed by a speaker will always be influenced by the ways those words have been used in prior utterances. For the chain of utterances to exist and become part of dialogue, however, both the speaker and listener must be able to engage in active, responsive understanding. Active responsive understanding means that the listener might be inclined to move in a direction that differs from the speaker’s intent. The image of a chain link fence, much like the fence one might see surrounding a schoolyard, might offer a clearer depiction of what I argue constitutes active, responsive understanding. Instead of a linear chain—like a chain one might use to lock up a bicycle—a schoolyard fence relies on connections moving in many different directions to maintain its structural integrity.

For active, responsive understanding to occur readers must have the ability to move in different directions. They must have the freedom to transact with and wrest new meanings from the utterance. By returning to the image of our imagined tug-of-war-game, it becomes clear how forcing readers to move in a single direction forces them into a passive role and inhibits transactions. When one of the teams is exerting a dominant tension on the rope, the members of the opposing team can do little more than hold on to the rope as they are passively dragged towards the mud pit separating the two teams. Alternatively, in the process of authentic, active understanding, the listener might take the utterance in myriad directions. Monologic policy, however, seeks to force the chain to continue to grow in only one direction, which creates constraints that can limit teachers to passive roles in policy discussions. I believe that a study of how teachers are navigating these constraints would be a valuable addition to the research available to educational stakeholders who are interested in rethinking the policies of the standards period.

Subjectivity

The role that a researcher's subjectivities are playing in his or her generation and interpretation of the data should remain at the foreground of any research project. Van Manen (1990) argued that a significant problem facing researchers is "not always that we know too little about the phenomenon we wish to investigate, but that we know too much" (p. 46). I have chosen a topic to explore based on my experiences as secondary English teacher and a doctoral student interested in the role of dialogue in meaning making. I have experienced first-hand the affordances and constraints of working under the pressures of high stakes testing. Moreover, I have spent the last several years immersed in books and articles discussing the value of engaging in dialogic teaching that does not kowtow to testing pressure and eschew creative thinking for

soul-deadening skill and drill activities.

My knowledge of this topic and my enthusiasm for fostering classroom dialogue has influenced the ways I have interpreted the data I have generated through this inquiry. As I discuss in chapters four and five, some of the teachers I interviewed viewed the policy mandates they received in ways that were very different from my expectations. Therefore, I needed to work to keep my assumptions about this topic at the foreground of my inquiry and reflect on the ways in which those assumptions were influencing my understanding of the data (Peshkin, 1988). It is important for researchers to remain cognizant of the influences of their subjectivities, so this concept will appear throughout each of the following four chapters.

Description of the Chapter

I began this chapter by drawing upon the words of one my participants to help me highlight the importance of conducting a research project that explores teachers' experiences with engaging in dialogue with policy. Sasha's frustration with the constraints of standards period policies demonstrates the problems that occur when teachers' experiences and professional judgments about what is best for their students are not active participants in dialogue around educational policy. By building on Sasha's story, I have discussed the importance of learning more about the ways in which educational policies are being communicated to teachers and the implications of how those policies are being discussed. I have also clarified why I believe it is important for educational stakeholders to develop an understanding of the implications of standards and policies that are transmitted as authoritative discourse. It is difficult for teachers make their classrooms places where students see the relevance of school to their lives if policy mandates force teachers into passive roles that compel

them to focus instruction on skill and drill activities instead of activities designed to foster dialogue and critical thinking skills.

In addition to introducing readers to my research questions, I have explicated the theoretical framework that informs my work. The theories of Mikhail Bakhtin and Louise Rosenblatt offer a lens through which the quality of the discourse of educational policy can be viewed critically. Utilizing this lens creates opportunities for educational stakeholders to consider how the discourse employed by policymakers constrains teachers and influences their experiences as professionals and the instructional decisions they make. By describing how the theories of Bakhtin and Rosenblatt have influenced my understanding of the dynamic and transactional nature of language, I have also made it possible for readers to see how these theorists have influenced the methodology and methods I selected for this study, which I describe in chapter three. Moreover, the detailed discussion of my theoretical foundations contained in this chapter will make it possible for readers to follow along with me as I discuss and theorize my data in chapters four and five. To close, I emphasize that the aim of this study is to foreground the experiences of secondary English teachers in order to develop an understanding of how the discourse of educational policy influences teachers' abilities to engage in dialogue with policy and how the policies of the standards period have influenced the professional experiences and the instructional decisions made by teachers.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“The author (speaker) has his own inalienable right to the word, but the listener also has rights, and those whose voices are heard in the word before the author comes upon it also have their rights.” –Mikhail Bakhtin

Bakhtin’s (1981,1986) philosophy of language is built on the notion that no individual can dictate the meanings that words will hold for others once they enter into live speech. Discourse that attempts to do so, in Bakhtin’s estimation, is counterproductive because it attempts to stifle the centrifugal forces of heteroglossia. Since teachers function as the intermediary between administrators’ policies and students, it is important to develop an understanding of how teachers are engaging in dialogue with educational policy (Shor, 1992). This study focuses on the ways that the discourse of educational policy influences the abilities of teachers to dialogue with educational policy mandates and how their ability to do so influences the instructional decisions they make each day. Specifically, I have focused on how educational policy that is communicated as authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986) constrains teachers as they work to create engaging lessons for their students that will foster critical thinking.

With this concept in mind, I have situated this study in the literature documenting the influences of high stakes testing and standards-based educational policy and applied the Bakhtin’s (1981, 1986) concept of authoritative discourse to this discussion. I think it is important to clarify that I am not advocating an *anything goes* approach to instruction in the secondary English classroom. I am, however, arguing for a more heteroglossic approach to the

discourse of educational policy. As I pointed out in chapter one, the tension between the centripetal and centrifugal forces in language must be a healthy tension: one force should not dominate the other. When one side dominates the other, the transactional nature of language becomes stilted. The process of communication ceases to be organic, and as Bakhtin (1981) argued, we are left with only the “naked corpse of the word” from which new meaning cannot be made. Therefore, teachers must have an active voice in the creation of school policies for the tension to remain healthy. Following the footsteps of researchers like Berliner, Biddle, Hillocks, and Luke, I will be probing “the critical link between instructional policy and classroom practice” in order to highlight the implications of what happens when teachers’ voices are not active participants in the discourse of educational policy (Cuban, 2009, p. 15). Building upon the existing research on this topic and applying a Bakhtinian lens to these concepts makes it possible for me to articulate the importance of reconceptualizing the discourse of educational policy.

In this chapter, I explore the literature discussing the movement towards the creation of a school model driven by high stakes testing and prescriptive standards in order to illuminate the problems that arise from the centripetal nature policy discourse, which exclude teachers’ voices from the discussion of what counts as teaching and learning. To begin, I offer a critique of the ways that standards period educational policies are being communicated as authoritative discourse, which effectively exclude teachers’ voices from the discourse of educational policy. Through this critique, I develop an argument highlighting how policy documents such as *A Nation at Risk* (1983), NCLB (2001), and local school policies function as authoritative discourse. Then, I outline the implications for teachers of policies that function as authoritative discourse in order to demonstrate the how a myopic focus on high stakes testing has lead to the development of narrow curricula in schools. Finally, I have drawn upon the literature discussing

how teachers understand and navigate educational policy to demonstrate the need for educational stakeholders to conceptualize a new discourse of educational policy, which can empower teachers and create learning environments that will improve the education students are receiving in the in secondary English classroom.

Critiquing the Standards Movement

Reform is not a new topic in education. As far back as the 1890s “finding ways to modernize [or improve] the public schools was an urgent matter to many citizens” (Lagemann, 2000, p. 19). Much of the talk generated in the late 19th century about school reform was directly related to a movement seeking to include education in the realm of science. This push can be directly linked to Thorndike’s belief in the importance of basing decisions about education on “controlled experiments and precise quantitative measurements” (p. 59). It is not a large leap to go from basing philosophies of education on experimental studies to basing educational practices on high stakes tests designed to provide quantitative data. Drawing exclusively on quantitative data from research that attempts to position itself within the “hard sciences” allows people to cling to the belief that basing all of their decisions on empirical evidence—facts that are beyond question—will lead to the creation of more effective schools.

As a result of this focus on using quantitative data to assess the performance of American public schools, mandated high stakes assessments and standardized curricula have exerted an unhealthy tension on the discourse of policy. All too often, policy documents are crafted based solely on quantitative data that do not include the input of the teachers who are actively engaged in teaching students (Lipman, 2004, Ruth, 2003, Toll, 2001). The politicians and administrators who craft educational policy make decisions based on what they think will improve the economic prospects of the country (Giordano, 2005). However, “policymakers do not take

sufficient account of how the schools actually function, or the kinds of people teachers and educators are” (House, 1998, p.1). The idea that high stakes tests are the best indicator of student learning has gained prominence because politicians and educational policymakers have been able to convince the American public that schools are in crisis.

Critiquing the Rhetoric of Fear

The desire to lead comfortable, secure lives can be a powerful motivator. In *The Quest for Certainty*, Dewey (1988) argued, “man who lives a world of hazards is compelled to seek security” (p. 3). The reform rhetoric of the standards period sought to assuage the fears it had created in the American people by promising security through the creation of standards-based curricula that would assess the performance of schools with high stakes tests. Ruth (2003) has argued that much of the rhetoric employed in political debates during the 20th century has been aimed at labeling the public school system a failure. For example, while authoring *A Nation at Risk* (1983), the members of the National Commission of Excellence in Education (NCEE) sought to alarm the American public with “its grim message” about the catastrophic problems facing American schools (Ruth, 2003, p. 97). This message was predicated on the notion that students in American schools were lagging behind other countries. Standards-based curricula were presented as a panacea that promised to secure America’s place as a world power. As a result, standardized tests have come to be viewed as “rocks of stability” that promise to provide the security educational policymakers crave (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 14).

Teachers who are inclined to ask hard questions and deviate from the scripted lesson plans that policymakers require them to employ must be willing to risk their reputations and their jobs. Few people are inclined to question this rhetoric due to their inherent desire to for safety and security. Maeroff (1988) has argued that teachers “find themselves assigned one of the most

difficult tasks society can give, and yet they do not feel they have the authority to do what is expected of them” (p. 1). The constraints of high stakes tests reduce teacher autonomy. The standards imposed on classroom instruction are often paired with mandated tests and pacing guides that dictate instructional activities and restrict teachers’ abilities to tailor classroom instruction to meet the individual needs of their students (Sipe, 2009). In their discussion of how high stakes tests undermine education, Nichols and Berliner (2007) argue that teachers are now being positioned as “script readers, curriculum and testing technicians, not professionals” (p. 146). I witnessed this phenomenon first-hand in 2007 and 2008 when I was working as a field observer for Reading First, which was a nationwide literacy initiative designed to raise tests scores in K-5 classrooms. The teachers I observed during this work routinely read scripted lessons to their students. These lessons did not appear engaging for the teachers or the students. These teachers had little autonomy and were reading these lessons because the literacy coaches in the schools had directed them to do so. The sole focus of these lessons was preparing students to pass high stakes tests. A close reading of *A Nation at Risk* (1983), which I discuss in the following section, provides support for the argument that recent reform movements are based upon discourse that is monologic in its intent. This reform rhetoric was cloaked in patriotism and designed to incite fear. It was also crafted in a way that would make it difficult to call into question.

Critiquing *A Nation at Risk*

The publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) ensured that many Americans would form their understanding of the condition of American Schools based on what Berliner and Biddle (1995) called *A Manufactured Crisis*. I will return to Berliner and Biddle’s work in a later section. First, however, I think it is important to demonstrate that the language employed in *A*

Nation at Risk was selected with the intent of inciting fear in the American people. Bakhtin argued that every utterance is crafted with a “*speech plan*” or a goal of eliciting a desired response from the addressee (Bakhtin, 1986a, p. 77 emphasis in original). The following paragraph from the first pages of *A Nation at Risk* was clearly crafted to create the sense that the nation is under attack:

If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. We have even squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled essential support systems which helped make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament. (p. 3)

Alluding to the growing powers of Mother Russia was a brilliant stroke. Linking the future of American schools with words like “act of war” and “disarmament” all but guaranteed that Americans would feel compelled to seek security. Moreover, this rhetoric ensured that Cold War sentiments would fuel a newfound interest in school reform (Giordano, 2005). The language of this document was designed with the intent of ensuring that the American people would come to realize that they were living in a hazardous world—one with bleak future for a nation that was beginning to lag behind “evil Russians” who were intent on world domination.

The authors of *A Nation at Risk* employed fear-inducing rhetoric throughout this document in an attempt to ensure that the message of their monologue was clear. Under the ominous heading “Indicators of Risk” the members of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) made the claim that the “average achievement of high school students on

most standardized tests is now lower than 26 years ago when Sputnik was launched” (p. 8). Berliner and Biddle (1985) refuted this foreboding claim soundly with data from National Assessment of Educational Progress (NEAP). Statistical wrangling aside, it is important to consider the implications of the language included in *A Nation at Risk*. Of all the events the NCEE could have referenced in this portion of the document, they chose the launch of Sputnik. Drawing connections between Communism and the perceived problems with American schools went a long way to eliciting the anticipated response (Bakhtin, 1981) of unquestioned compliance with the reform mandates NCEE supported. Nearly thirty years later, politicians and policymakers are still engaging in the practice using authoritative discourse to elicit compliance from teachers. This can be seen in the language employed in The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB).

Critiquing the NCLB Monologue

The rhetoric of NCLB (2001) also serves as an excellent example of the monologic nature of educational policy. The NCLB statement of purpose highlights the following mandate:

all children shall have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments. (NCLB, Sec. 1001)

This mandate sounds reasonable enough. Surely, everyone agrees that all students should have access to high-quality education. A significant problem with NCLB rhetoric is that the quality of the education schools being offered to students is judged solely on high stakes testing measurements (Giordano, 2005, Hillocks, 2003, Lipman, 2004). There is no room for dialogue about what counts as high-quality education. With a focus on “measurable” data, compelling research on important issues such as the social reasons for school dropouts or “the evidence of

growing inequities among population groups and communities” that influence student learning are excluded from the rhetoric of NCLB (Meier, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, & Wood, 2004, p. xxi). The implications of the exclusion of these crucial concepts are myriad; however, the most alarming implication is that the voices of teachers, students, and communities that schools are supposed to serve are excluded from the dialogue about how schools should be run.

The monologic nature of NCLB is further revealed by the directive that this purpose shall be accomplished by:

holding schools, local educational agencies, and States accountable for improving the achievement of all students, identifying and turning around low-performing schools that have failed to provide a high-quality education to their students, while providing alternatives to students in such schools to enable the students to receive a high-quality education. (NCLB, Sec. 1001.4)

Again, politicians and policymakers have made it clear that schools will be judged based on a model of accountability that is tied to achievement—achievement that is measured solely by high stakes testing. The use of this narrow measuring stick has caused teaching in many school districts to be “reduced to the preparation for these tests” (Schultz & Fecho, 2005, p. 682). Olsen and Sexton’s (2009) research exploring the influences of centripetal policy mandates demonstrates that “most public schools now focus on and oftentimes fear annual school scores based on” state mandated tests (p. 10). When acceptable performance on high stakes tests is the only measuring stick that matters, teachers who wish to enact a dialogic pedagogy and deviate from scripted, test-based lessons find themselves in the precarious position of putting their jobs at risk. If their students do not achieve proficiency level on state mandated tests, schools risk being identified as low-performing, and the subtext of NCLB is that those schools will be closed.

In their work exploring how teachers and administrators are making sense of the standards movement, Seashore Louis, Febey, and Schroeder (2005) pointed out that many teachers feel they will be negatively labeled if their students do not achieve acceptable scores on End-of Course-tests. One teacher in this study lamented the reality that the progress made by individual students counts for almost nothing. Instead, it is only the student's score on the final test that counts. When students do not meet the standard teachers are likely to be told, "you must be a bad teacher, they must be a bad set of students" (p. 189). As a result, many teachers in this study felt tremendous pressure to "use tests similar in content and format to the state tests" to guide their instruction (p. 189). The goal was to ensure that their students would achieve the required proficiency level on their state End-of Course-Tests. Judging school quality on students' performances on high stakes tests has made it easier for politicians to critique American schools and made it more difficult for teachers to employ creative methods of instruction that are responsive to the individual needs of their students.

A Manufactured Crisis

The problems identified by political rhetoric critiquing American have more to do with the discourse of educational policy than the condition of our schools. In fact, "several scholars have demonstrated that the condition of schooling in America is not nearly as debased as it is commonly alleged" (Ruth, 2003, p. 88). Any productive discussion of how to improve American schools should begin with an honest look at the basis for these critiques. Berliner and Biddle's (1995) work draws upon multiple sources of data to refute claims that American schools are failing.

The Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) provides a compelling example of this phenomenon. Berliner and Biddle (1995) point out that the "*aggregate* total SAT scores obtained by high

school seniors fell between 1963 and 1975” (p. 14, emphasis in original). Politicians have commonly cited this decline to indicate that American schools are failing. However, the students who take the SAT are not a representative sample of the students in American schools. As Berliner and Biddle point out, “SAT scores were never intended to be aggregated for evaluating the achievements of teachers, schools, school districts, or states, and such scores have *no* validity when used for such evaluations” (p. 17, emphasis in original). Critics of the public school system have consistently relied on presenting data in this manner to support their claims that American schools are failing, and they have been successful because they have been able to convince the American public that data support their claims. As a result curricula in schools has become focused on preparing students to take standardized tests (Giordano, 2005, Hillocks, 2002, Nichols & Berliner, 2007).

McQuillan (1998) has also explored the myths of failing schools and suggested that the problems in schools are related to the focus on a narrow curriculum favoring instruction methods that focus on reading comprehension, phonics, and phonemic awareness instead of high quality, high interest reading materials. McQuillan’s work demonstrates that “there is now considerable evidence that the amount and quality of students’ access to reading materials is substantively related to the amount of reading they engage in, which in turn is the most important determinant of reading achievement” (p. 86). A narrow curriculum focused on test preparation activities reduces opportunities for students to have access to high interest reading materials that will motivate students to read deeply and often. Moreover, this sort of curriculum reduced opportunities for teachers and students to engage in problem-posing classroom activities that can foster critical thinking skills (Shor, 1992). As Brown (1991) has argued, “a tension between institution and practice is inevitable” (p. 226). When this tension becomes unhealthy and an

institution's testing goals or political agenda assumes primacy, memorization and recitation activities begin to dominate instruction. In the following sections, I discuss the implications of the unhealthy tension that exists in the discourse of educational policy.

The Implications of Educational Policy for Teachers

Educational policy is one of the key building blocks for successful schools. Like any organization, schools need to have clearly articulated goals and concepts that provide stability and continuity. However, the policies that communicate these ideas should function as guidelines that create space for dialogue and leave room for teachers to use their professional knowledge to aid in implementing them successfully. These policies should focus on creating dialogue about *what* should be taught instead of prescribing *how* things should be taught. Policies that prescribe *how* instructional goals should be accomplished make it difficult for teachers to engage in teaching practices that differ from banking model—transmission—approaches to teaching and learning. It is problematic when “policies in curriculum, testing, accountability, certification, teacher evaluation, and in-service implicitly or explicitly reinforce this ‘transmission’ model of teaching” (Brown, 1991, p. 224). All too often, teachers are receiving policy mandates in ways that limit their abilities to transcend transmission model teaching (Edmondson, 2000, Gallagher, 2009, Meier et al. 2004, McQuillan, 1998).

The mandates of neo-liberal policymakers who have gained prominence during the standards period advocate an agenda that focuses on test-preparation instructional activities. This agenda can have negative influences on teachers' concepts of self as professionals. However, there has been “little critical examination of the social implications of these policies” on teachers' concepts of selves (Lipman, 2004, p. 3). Increasingly, the literature is beginning to discuss the reality that teachers are receiving policy mandates that limit their abilities to take on

the role of professional. In her book *Adolescent Literacy as Risk*, Sipe (2009) described her efforts to understand the influences of the standards movement on adolescent literacy. Sipe's work provides a compelling example of the ways in which the educational policies of the standards period are negatively influencing teachers' abilities to function as professionals. In the wake of adopting new high school standards for English, the state of Michigan had purchased sample units that could function as examples of how teachers could address these new standards. Sipe found, however, that some school districts had "adopted these model units wholesale, presenting them to teachers as the new curriculum" (p. 51). The adoption of these prescribed units indicates that many educational policymakers believe that "teachers cannot be depended upon to develop high-quality standards-based units themselves" (p. 51). More research is needed into the negative influences of the monologic nature of the discourse of educational policy. We cannot begin to transcend this problem without input from teachers, who are experiencing the adverse affects of being excluded from the discussion of what counts as teaching and learning.

Franzak's (2008) work exploring how policy shapes the learning experiences of struggling readers highlights the reality that policy is a complex concept that needs to be explored in more depth. Teachers, Franzak has argued, activate policy as they interpret and implement the directives they receive. However, this aspect of policy "has not been deeply explored" (p. 470, See also Ruth, 2003). This study aims to address the lack of literature discussing the ways teachers receive, interpret, and implement educational policies. Much of the current literature discussing teachers and educational policy addresses how this rhetoric seems to privilege teacher-centered instruction, which results in narrow curricula and focuses on preparing students for high stakes tests, over student-centered instruction that can foster critical thinking

skills. In the following section, I discuss how this narrowing of curricula is problematic for teachers and students.

The Problem of a Narrow Curriculum

As Luke (2004) has pointed out, the narrowing of the curriculum that has occurred during the standards period has lead to “a shaving off of higher order and critical thinking skills and a lower of cognitive demand and intellectual depth” (p. 1427). This sort of curriculum favors transmission model instruction, which relies heavily on recitation literacy (Myers, 1996), and positions students as “rememberers” (Nystrand, 1997, p. 91). Instead of being asked to think critically, students are simply required to memorize answers to formulaic writing structures to be reproduced on tests. I argue that the recitation literacy model of instruction is not as productive as more student-centered models of instruction, such as problem-posing education (Shor, 1992). Evidence of viable alternatives to the recitation model of literacy instruction is readily available in the literature discussing instructional practices in the secondary English classroom.

The research of Beach and Myers (2001) provides justification of the effectiveness of student-centered models of instruction. Their work offers some useful examples of how teachers and students who utilized strategies of dialogic teaching to make meaning as they navigated represented and lived social words in the secondary English classroom. Drawing upon their experiences with designing and implementing a social worlds inquiry project in a ninth grade classroom, Beach and Myers described how the teachers provided opportunities for students to transact with an anthology of short stories about teen experiences entitled *Coming of Age*. The students had the opportunity to respond to the readings in a variety of ways, including creating a dialogue between characters from different stories in the anthology. In these responses, the students critiqued the values represented in the stories—revealing their own social values and

bringing them into classroom dialogue. These kinds of classroom activities go beyond the transmission models of classroom instruction, which privilege the seeking of prescribed answers to questions about a text, and create spaces for students to engage in dialogue that fosters transactions between differing points of view. However, educational policy that excludes teachers from the discussion of *how* instruction should be delivered in the classroom makes it difficult to enact this kind of pedagogy.

A myopic focus on testing and standards forces teachers to occupy the untenable position of teaching choosing between teaching “all the standards shallowly” or teaching deeply and risking low test scores” (Gallagher, 2009, p. 10). Hillocks (2002) conducted interviews with teachers from five different states to ascertain how state writing tests drive the instructional decisions teachers make. He found that many teachers “pushed aside” many facets of the curriculum they had set out to teach, “in order to prepare for the tests” (p. 31). As a result, many teachers began to resent these tests because they were not aligned with their pedagogical goals.

The problem of curricula focused on preparing students to succeed on high stakes tests has also been explored extensively by researchers such as Britzman (2003), Lipman (2004), and Meier et al. (2004). Britzman (2003) argued that “when knowledge is reduced to rigid directives that demands little else from the knower than acquiescence, knowers are bereft of their capacity to intervene in the world, and knowledge is expressed as static and immutable” (p. 46). Britzman’s work demonstrates that viewing knowledge as something static, which can be memorized, makes it difficult for students to be active participants in the construction of knowledge and meaning making.

Perhaps even more alarming than the influences of the narrowed view of what counts as teaching and learning is the reality that high stakes testing places teachers and administrators in

the position of having to “choose between the school and the child” (Meier et al., 2004, p. 34).

As a classroom teacher, I was horrified the first time I heard a teacher comment in the copy room that they hoped a student would drop out before test day. Maybe I was naïve, but I hadn’t considered the possibility that teachers could take such a mercenary view of their jobs. In time, I began to dismiss this as an isolated sentiment held by a few disgruntled teachers. However, NCLB and the testing initiatives it has spawned over the last twenty years have made this alarming sentiment a reality in far too many schools. Increasingly, the notion that the chief role of schools is to prepare students to take tests is guiding the curricula in American schools (Meier et al., 2004).

Curricula that focus on preparing students to succeed on standardized tests reduce opportunities for students and teachers to explore topics of organic interest to students. In his work discussing this topic, Gallagher (2009) argued that the focus on preparing students to pass standardized tests has created students who are leaving schools “without the cultural literacy needed to be productive citizens in a democratic society” (p. 28-29). Gallagher argued that students are being taught to read only in ways that will prepare them to take tests. Students should, Gallagher contends, “be reading through many windows, not just a single, narrow window that gives them a view of the next exam” (p. 29). Teachers need the freedom to design lessons that will help students see beyond the next assessment. Policy mandates that dictate both the *what* and *how* of teaching make it difficult to do so. This discourse of educational policy must create spaces for teachers to enter into dialogue with the policy mandates they receive. Teachers in the state of Georgia must work within the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) as they design their daily instructional activities. In the following section, I discuss the ways,

however limited they may be, in which the GPS do offer teachers the possibility of engaging in transactions with policy.

The Dilemma of Georgia Performance Standards

The rhetoric of *A Nation at Risk* and NCLB works to constrain teachers by creating an atmosphere of accountability in schools and demonstrates the privileged position that high stakes testing holds in designing schools and curricula. The day-to-day classroom activities conducted by teachers are governed by sets of standards prescribed by policymakers. The work of Schultz and Fecho (2005) indicated that the test-driven policies spawned by NCLB legislation leave little room for teachers to enact creative pedagogies that extend beyond test preparation activities. They argued that teachers are being constrained by “ambiguous performance goals tied to high stakes testing” (p. 685). In service to these goals, states have adopted sets of standards for teachers to follow. The Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) serve as daily reminders for teachers in Georgia’s public schools that their lessons must be conducted in ways that will allow a narrow focus on skills that will be tested by state mandated exams. However, the GPS do offer, unlike many policy documents, some opportunities for teachers to transact with educational policy.

When planning their units, ninth grade English teachers in Georgia must base their lessons on the GPS. Lessons that are focused on exploring literature must ensure that students can demonstrate comprehension of a text

by identifying evidence (i.e., examples of diction, imagery, point of view, figurative language, symbolism, plot events and main ideas) in a variety of texts representative of different genres (i.e., poetry, prose [short story, novel, essay, editorial, biography], and drama) and using this evidence as the basis for interpretation. (GPS, ELA9RL1)

The standard makes no mention of how teachers must prepare students to be able to use examples of literary devices to support their interpretations of the texts they read. Therefore, the door is left open for teachers who wish to take an inquiry stance and base their lessons on dialogue to do so. The problem, however, is that teachers know students will have to be able to sort through standardized test items that bear little resemblance to the problem-posing classroom activities they might conduct. They must decide if they are willing to risk their jobs and deviate from test preparation activities that are based on worksheets and drills aimed at teaching students how to identify particular types of diction, imagery, or tone and recite those identifications come test day.

While I was teaching ninth grade literature in North Carolina, I worked with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study, which is a set of standards very similar to the GPS. However, I chose to deviate from the rigid, test-preparation activities these standards lend themselves to and worked to focus on creating dialogue about the texts we were reading in my classes. I was in a slightly different position from the one many teachers find themselves in. I did not have a family to feed and I had no fear of losing my job—I could always go back to building houses, guiding kayaking trips in South America, or return to the Marines and pick up my sniper rifle once again. My goal was avoiding the soul-deadening work of drilling my students and using worksheets. The risks I took to engage in transactions with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study and bend the standards to fit the dialogic classroom activities I believed would be successful worked out. My students excelled on the ninth grade End-of-Course-Test. The administrators in my county were happy with my work and my students' test scores. I do not claim that what I did would work for every teacher. However, I am interested in learning more

about what happens when teachers transact with the policy mandates that are shaping their teaching environments.

The GPS create an interesting dilemma for English teachers in Georgia. By being creative, teachers could justify engaging in any number of dialogic or problem-posing activities related to the standards they are charged with teaching. However, these teachers are reminded daily that their students' test scores are the most important indicator of the quality of the teaching they are doing. The GPS make that perfectly clear by demanding that students will practice "both timed and process writing" (GPS, ELA9W4). The purpose of having students practice timed writing is clearly to prepare them for state writing tests, which are timed.

Throughout the country, teachers receive constant reminders about the importance of test scores—and the influences of these reminders are not hard to find. Postal (2009) highlighted the problems with instruction driven by testing pressures in a recent story published in the Orlando Sentinel. In 2008, the Florida Department of Education scrutinized four elementary schools because the writing samples their students produced on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) contained "replicated phrasing" (Postal, 2009). The "pretty scripted, tightly spun lesson plans" being used by teachers in these schools sent students the message that they should use specific phrases in order to obtain good scores on the FCAT (Postal, 2009). Although the Florida Department of Education told curriculum leaders that writing instruction should not become a "fill-in-the-blanks exercise," the message must have been lost in the rhetoric challenging schools to produce high test scores because testing irregularities indicated that writing instruction had indeed become a "fill-in-the-blanks exercise" (Postal, 2009).

Although the GPS do provide some latitude for teachers, the standards support testing initiatives that force teachers to make decisions about the kind of teaching they will engage in as

they prepare their students for the tests which mark the end of each course: Will they be creative and deviate from activities that teach to the test? Or should they follow the rhetoric of *A Nation at Risk* and NCLB, teach to the test, and hope students can to fill in the correct bubbles or produce formulaic writing at a lightning fast rate on test day? The former is more likely to help students learn to think critically, but the latter might provide teachers with more job security.

Teachers, as Fecho, Mallozzi, and Schultz (2007) pointed out, “feel constrained by policy-initiated pressures to teach the narrow literacy skills measured by most standardized tests” (p. 47). I am interested in exploring how teachers’ instructional practices and experiences are being shaped by those constraints in order to find and advocate for alternatives. There is a need for research that can contribute to the body of knowledge available to teachers who wish to transcend these constraints and move beyond transmission model approaches to teaching. As Darling-Hammond (1998) has argued out, “We need to learn more about how teachers make transitions from transmission-oriented teaching to approaches that foster inquiry, collaboration, and critical thinking in purposeful, culturally sensitive contexts” (pp. 12-13). However, it is not possible to learn more about this process without focusing first on how teachers engage in dialogue with policymakers and transact with educational policy mandates. Although the literature discussing the constraints of high stakes testing is plentiful, research documenting how teachers are working to navigate these constraints is scarce. This study adds to the small body of literature discussing this important topic.

Navigating Educational Policy

The social and political implications of the discourse of educational policy should not be ignored because, as Shor (1992) has argued, “no curriculum can be neutral. All forms of education are political because they can enable or inhibit the questioning habits of students, thus

developing or disabling their relation to knowledge about schooling and society” (p. 13). The implications of the politics involved in educational policy cannot be fully understood by the individuals charged with implementing those policies unless they are dialoguing with them. It is vital for teacher educators and researchers to consider the extent to which teachers are engaging in dialogue with educational policy because teachers serve the vital function of mediating “the relationship between outside authorities, formal knowledge, and students in the classroom” (Shor, 1992, p.13). If teachers do not have the freedom to engage in dialogue with policy—and make instructional decisions based on that dialogue—they cannot effectively carry out their roles of mediators of policy. In recent years, researchers have begun to discuss the negative implications of an educational system that does not allow teachers to dialogue with policy and tailor instruction to meet the individual needs of their students.

The secondary English classroom provides an excellent example of the problems that occur because of the influences of test preparation in schools. Researchers are beginning to expose the reality that this focus on test preparation is killing students’ interest in reading. In his work discussing the negative influences of the standards period on students’ reading habits, Gallagher (2009) argued:

The overemphasis on teaching reading through the lens of preparing students for state-mandated test has become so completely unbalanced that it is drowning any chance our adolescents have of developing into lifelong readers. We are developing test-takers at the expense of readers (p. 7).

The pressure being exerted upon teachers to prepare students to take tests has resulted in the implementation of classroom activities that do not foster critical thinking. Instead, teachers are acquiescing to policymakers’ demands to give testing primacy—even in the English classroom,

which ought to be a place where students learn to think critically by engaging in dialogue with the texts they read.

In much of the literature discussing the influences standards era educational policy, the constraints teachers are working under are the main topic of discussion. For example, Britzman (2003) discussed her understanding of how educational policies have come to be dictated by individuals with little teaching experience. She pointed out that “it is taken for granted that we all know what a teacher is and a teacher does. This knowledge is based upon years of observation” (p. 27). Too often, people whose only knowledge of classrooms comes from the observations they made as students dictate educational policies. Perhaps this is why lawmakers make assumptions and judgments about how classrooms should be run without any training in the education of children. Britzman pointed out that many people complete their schooling experiences with the belief that “anyone can teach” fully imprinted on their brains (p. 27). This is problematic because issues of pedagogy are hidden from the students in the classroom. Students are not privy to the rationale behind the decisions teachers make. This is exacerbated by a lack of literature discussing how teachers make these choices. Research exploring the rationale for the instructional decisions made by teachers needs to be conducted and made available to policymakers. This study aims to meet this need by discussing how teachers engage in dialogue with policy mandates and how those mandates influence the instructional decisions they make.

The Role of Teachers in Policy Discourse

If we wish to make schools places where students will learn to think critically and be prepared to contribute to democratic society, teachers must have voice in the creation of educational policy. If we view language in a way where understanding is dependent upon a response, we must think about what that means the discourse of educational policy. Students

cannot learn to think critically unless they have the ability to learn to answer authentic questions (Nystrand, 1997) instead of questions with prescribed answers that do not allow dialogue and response to drive the process of making meaning. Positioning “education as inquiry provides an opportunity for learners to explore collaboratively topics of personal and social interest using the perspectives offered by others” (Harste, 2001). The importance of allowing students to follow their interests and explore topics that are meaningful to them resonates throughout the literature discussing teaching and learning (Beach, Appleman, Hynds, & Wilhelm, 2006; Graves, 1999; Heath, 1983; Hillocks, 1982; Lensimire, 2001; Kohn, 2000; Short & Burke, 2001). Maxine Greene (1978) provided one of the most compelling discussions of this crucial element of teaching in *Landscapes of Learning* as she pointed out:

Students must be enabled, at whatever stages they find themselves to be, to encounter curriculum as a possibility. By that I mean curriculum ought to provide a series of occasions for individuals to articulate the themes of their existence and to reflect on those themes until they know themselves to be in the world and can name what has been up then obscure.” (pp. 18-19)

This model of teaching and learning requires that we conceptualize the work being done in the secondary English classroom as something more than just teaching students to read, write, and answer questions on standardized tests. However, teachers cannot enact a pedagogy that supports this kind of thinking unless they are brought into the discussion of what counts as teaching and learning.

Key Points and Where They Lead

Within this chapter, I have explored the literature focusing on standards period policies and the instructional practices that have gained preeminence over the last quarter century.

Through this exploration I have demonstrated how the discourse of educational policy functions as authoritative discourse by applying a Bakhtinian lens to policy documents, such as NCLB and *A Nation at Risk*, which are emblematic of this era. I have argued that the policies of the standards era employ a monologic discourse that seeks to govern with fear and exert an unhealthy tension that privileges the voices of policymakers over the voices of classroom teachers. This discussion has made it possible for me to point out the problems I see with the narrow view of what counts as teaching and learning that has come to dominate schools as a result of high stakes testing. I have also drawn upon the existing literature to argue that teachers are being compelled by prescriptive standards to teach in formulaic ways that do not foster students' critical thinking abilities, and I have pointed to some alternatives to these instructional practices. Perhaps most importantly, however, I have drawn upon the existing literature and the theories of Bakhtin (1981, 1986) and Rosenblatt (1995, 2005) to lay the foundation for a discussion of the implications of a discourse of educational policy that teachers resists the centrifugal forces of language.

The intent of this study is to add to the literature discussing the absence of teachers' voices in the creation of educational policy and how the policies of the standards period are influencing the instructional decisions made by secondary English teachers. This project fills an important niche in the literature because it extends the work of researchers I have discussed in this chapter by focusing specifically on how the constraints of the authoritative discourse of educational policy inhibit teachers' abilities to engage in dialogue with policy and the implications of those constraints.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

“Whoever is searching for the human being must first find the lantern.” – Nietzsche

As I describe the methodology and methods that I have employed in this study, I return to the metaphor of the foundation of a house, which I discussed in chapter one. I have dug and poured the footers by clarifying the theoretical framework for this project in chapter one. I begin chapter three by taking on the role of the stonemason and laying the blocks, or the methodological framework, that this project rests upon.

I approached this interview study from a social constructionist perspective. In line with this perspective, I argue that language and its usage are dynamic and consistently subject to the heteroglot tensions of centripetal and centrifugal forces (Bakhtin, 1981). The centrifugal forces of language seek to codify and standardize the meanings of the words we use. Alternately, the centrifugal forces of language attend to the myriad meanings words take on as they enter into live speech. The meanings of words are consistently being revised and re-conceptualized as those words are used in dialogue. When language is viewed from a Bakhtinian perspective, it becomes clear that the meanings of each word live “on the boundary between its own context and another, alien context” (p. 284). Meanings, then, are perpetually being negotiated and renegotiated when those divergent contexts enter into dialogue with one another. In this chapter, I discuss the blocks—or methodological framework—that I have erected upon the social constructionist footers that I drew upon the theories of Bakhtin (1981, 1986) and Rosenblatt (1995, 2005) to

pour in chapter one. In the following sections, I also discuss the methods (research tools) I employed as I explored this topic.

Methodology

The Bakhtinian (1981, 1986) idea that language and the meanings we derive from it are in a constant state of flux remained at the foreground of my inquiry as I engaged in dialogue with my participants and analyzed the data I generated. Of equal importance is the idea that individuals bring unique sets of experiences and worldviews with them to the research situation. Becker (2007) argued that society is comprised of individual groups, and each of these groups assigns “its own meanings to things, people, and events” (p. 206). Those meanings, worldviews, and cultural contexts, what Gee (2008) called Discourses, created myriad opportunities for me to learn from *and with* the participants in this study as we sought to generate knowledge together.

As I communicated with and came to understand my participants, I worked to remember that understanding and response, which are essential elements of dialogue, “mutually condition each other” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 282). This concept of mutual conditioning, or mutual shaping, is a cornerstone in the methodological foundation of this study. Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia builds upon the idea that words are given their meanings by “the social atmosphere of the world, the atmosphere that surrounds the object, [and] makes the facets of the image sparkle” (p. 277). The individual Discourses that researchers and participants bring to the research situation will influence which facets of which images will sparkle and ignite the generative process of meaning making and mutual shaping. Since this process is, undoubtedly, a very individual process, there is great potential for both researchers and participants to be shaped by engaging in research. With this concept in mind, I have been careful to be explicit about how the transactions with my participants have shaped my thinking about this topic in chapters four and five. I argue that much

can be learned by researchers who attend to the transactions that occur in the research situation and view research spaces as “transactional spaces” (Fecho & Meacham, 2007, p. 169).

Transactional Spaces

The concept that research spaces are transactional spaces (Fecho & Meacham, 2007) dovetails nicely with the Bakhtinian (1981, 1986) view of language that I bring to this project. If language and communication are viewed from a Bakhtinian perspective, the concept that people are in a process of mutual shaping must be considered as researchers seek to make meaning with and understand their participants’ figured worlds (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). Holland et al. used the term *figured worlds* to describe the ways that people shape and are shaped by the world around them. For example, a teacher’s view of classroom instruction is shaped by the policies that he or she is charged with carrying out. Those policies will shape the instructional activities that a teacher engages in with his or her students; however, that teacher’s past experiences will shape his or her reading of those policies. As Rosenblatt (1995) argued, each reading experience is unique and is subject to the influences of the reservoirs of past experience that a reader brings to the texts he or she reads. If that teacher teaches from a stance that values critical thinking over memorization, he or she might attempt to interpret that policy in a way that facilitates the implementation of instructional activities that privilege problem posing over memorization. This concept supports my notion that we are constantly engaging in transactions with the world.

Fecho and Meacham (2007) have argued that researchers do more than simply learn from the communities in which we conduct our research. Instead, when research spaces are viewed as transactional spaces, it becomes possible to attend to the ways in which new meanings and understandings are constructed through dialogue in the research situation. Researchers and

participants have the opportunity to develop new understandings about the worlds around them when they attend to the ways they are being shaped by engaging in inquiry. It is important, however, to consider the ways in which people seek to position themselves as they enter into dialogue with each other.

Narrative Postitionality

I wanted to attend to the transactions that occurred as I entered into dialogue with the participants in this study because this project is focused on the transactions that occur as teachers read and understand policy. This process of mutual shaping is a dynamic process, and I believe the ways that participants describe their experiences warrants significant consideration. Therefore, it was important to consider the ways that the participants constructed their stories and positioned themselves as they constructed those stories. The words people choose as they enter into dialogue are influenced by the anticipated response they hope to elicit from the addressee (Bakhtin, 1981). The ways in which participants seek to elicit a specific response from the listener must be considered as researchers elicit narratives from participants (Riessman, 2008). Participants might have been hoping to convey their competence as teachers, knowledge of their subject, position as sympathetic to the cause of school reform, or myriad other positions and personas. I sought to keep those elements of postitionality in mind as I transacted with these teachers. Therefore, the concept of narrative postitionality has played a role in the methodological framework of this study.

Archakis and Tzanne (2005) argued that participants will sequence the stories they tell carefully in an effort to position themselves in particular ways and build relationships with researchers. This positioning is a key element, in my estimation, of the ways in which people exist in their figured worlds. Attending to this positioning helped me understand the ways the

participants sought to shape the world around them as they were being shaped by their contexts. Consistent with my theoretical framework, this concept highlights the notion that people are in a perpetual process of shaping and being shaped by the world around them. We tell stories in our own ways in an effort to successfully communicate our intentions, elicit responses, and refigure our figured worlds. The stories told by the participants were the main source of data generated by this study.

Data Generation

For this study, I have embraced Baker's (2004) suggestion that the interview process should be described as the "generation" instead of the "collection" of data (p. 163). Engaging in dialogue creates opportunities for the social construction of knowledge to occur (Mishler, 1986). Therefore, I believe it is appropriate to view the interview situation as a process of generating instead of collecting data. The term collection suggests that information is already constructed and sits waiting to be uncovered by the researcher, which is inconsistent with my theoretical framework.

Summary of Methodology

This interview study was grounded in the notion that research is a transactional process. By viewing the interview situation as a collaborative space where knowledge is constructed jointly by the researcher and the participants, I have made it possible to attend the processes of mutual shaping that occur as people engage one another in dialogue. This view has also facilitated my efforts to explore the contextual nature of language and the dialogic overtones of the discourse of educational policy. I have also attended to the reality that people position themselves in specific ways in order to communicate their beliefs, intentions, and perceived roles in the world. This concept of narrative positionality has helped me develop an understanding of

the ways my participants have been shaped by and have attempted to re-shape the policies in their schools.

A homebuilder's work is not finished once the footers have been poured and the blocks have been stacked. He or she still needs to select the tools that will be required to construct the rest of the house. And those tools need to be compatible with the foundation. The construction of a timber-framed house will require vastly different foundations and tools than the construction of a house built of standard two by four studs and two by twelve floor joists. Large chainsaws are needed to build a house out of large timbers, and smaller circular saws are needed to cut standard lumber for a standard "stick built" house. Similarly, researchers must select tools for generating data that are consistent with the foundations they have constructed and the blueprints for the rest of the house. For some projects, data generation tools such as observations or surveys are appropriate. However, other projects may require interviews or documents to analyze. The key is to select data generation tools that are consistent with the theoretical and methodological foundations of the study.

Methods

In the following sections, I describe the tools I used as I engaged in dialogue with the participants in this study to generate data and explore the process of mutual shaping that occurred as a result of our dialogue.

Selection of Participants

Seven secondary English teachers from a large metropolitan region and the surrounding areas in the southeastern United States participated in this study. I have provided a detailed description of each participant in chapter four in order to contextualize their responses as much

as possible. The selection process for this study was purposeful (Maxwell, 2005). Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

- a) Knowledge of the field of English education.
- b) Willingness to reflect on and discuss their backgrounds and teaching experiences.
- c) Interest in discussing the ways that high stakes testing and policy mandates have influenced their teaching experiences.
- d) Theoretical perspectives about teaching. I sought out participants whose teaching is informed by a variety of theoretical perspectives.
- e) Willingness to read an article about dialogic teaching and engage in dialogue about the concept of dialogic teaching.

Tools for Data Generation

For this study, I conducted a series of three semi-structured interviews (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) lasting between forty-five and ninety minutes with each of my participants. These interviews, conducted between August and November of 2009, were the primary means of data generation. However, I supplemented these interviews with participant description forms (see Appendix I) and a limited number of follow up emails for clarification of topics discussed during the interview sessions. I chose to employ semi-structured interviews because I wanted the freedom to follow threads that the participants pulled from the probes I created for the interview guide (see Appendix II). Having the freedom to, at times, follow the participant's lead is consistent with my belief that knowledge is constructed as people enter into dialogue with one another. The interview process cannot be collaborative if there is not space for participants to discuss issues they find relevant to questions posed by researchers.

Semi-structured interviews represent an opportunity for both the researcher and the participant to be co-constructors of narrative and meaning (Riessman, 2008). Since I engaged in dialogue with my participants, I must recognize that I have been “an active presence in the text” that comprised the interview situation (Riessman, 2008, p.105). Therefore, I argue that the interview process is “unavoidably collaborative” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 4). In my view, interviewing is a process that is influenced by the mutual shaping that occurs as knowledge is socially constructed through dialogue. This perspective is consistent with the work of Kvale (1996), who offered the metaphor of “the interviewer as a traveler on a journey” when describing the interview process (p. 4). In this metaphor, the interviewer “asks questions that lead subjects to tell their own stories of their lived worlds, and converses with them in the original Latin meaning of *conversation* as ‘wandering together with’” (p. 4, emphasis in original). The metaphor of the traveler allows the transformative effects of engaging participants in dialogue to come to the fore.

Each of the interview sessions relied on open-ended questions and probes designed to draw the participants into dialogue and elicit narrative accounts of their experiences (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 2008). Interview one focused on the participants’ backgrounds, teaching stories, and teaching goals. Marshall (2009) has argued that educational policy is often based upon unexamined assumptions about why teachers teach. I used the first interview to generate a discussion about what motivates teachers to teach and which theories guide their teaching. Interview two focused on the teachers’ transactions with educational policy. This interview explored the characteristics of the dialogue that teachers engage in with policy and the conditions facilitate that or work to stifle this dialogue. Entering into a substantive discussion of the ways that the teachers dialogue and transact with policy mandates helped me

develop a discussion of how we, as researchers, can begin to facilitate a dialogue amongst teachers and educational policymakers about how to begin crafting educational policy that meets the needs of culturally diverse teachers and students.

Interview three was used to follow-up on salient issues I identified in my reading of the first two interviews. Additionally, I included a discussion of an article by Fecho and Botzakis (2007) focused on the concept of dialogic teaching in the third interview session. A significant element of this third interview was a discussion of how to foster instructional activities based on inquiry and dialogue and how those kinds of activities can occur in the current atmosphere of high stakes testing. Fecho and Botzakis (2007) discussed the range of possibilities that exist when instructional activities are based on dialogue and organic learning.

Utilizing a series of three interviews is an effective means of placing the participants' experiences in context and generating a substantive discussion of those experiences (Seidman, 2006). I have chosen to focus on interviews instead of other forms of data collection, such as observations, because I believe that engaging in dialogue with my participants affords me the ability to gain more insight into the instructional decisions these teachers make as they dialogue and transact with policy mandates. As Patton (1990) argued, "We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world" (p. 278). Although we can observe teachers in their classrooms and make inferences about why they choose to structure instruction in particular ways, going beyond observation can provide more insight into the instructional decisions teachers make. Observational data, as Stroud and Lee (2005) have pointed out, requires researchers to interpret behavior and provides fewer opportunities for foregrounding participants' voices and opinions. Entering into dialogue with

teachers offers researchers with the opportunity to understand the thoughts and theories that form the foundations for the choices teachers make in their classrooms.

Semi-structured interviews, then, were a sound choice for this study because I was interested in exploring the ways that people experience the world. I believe that the use of interviews that create spaces for participants to take the lead when appropriate is well aligned with a research project in which language is viewed from a Bakhtinian perspective. “In the act of understanding,” Bakhtin (1986b) pointed out, “a struggle occurs that results in mutual change and enrichment” (p. 143). Conducting semi-structured interviews provides a context for researchers and participants to transact with one another and engage in the formation of understandings that can illuminate the ways in which we are experiencing the worlds around us.

Although I saw interviews as a valuable tool to facilitate this inquiry, I was careful to ensure that I created spaces for the participants to “take longer turns at talk than are customary in ordinary conversations” (Riessman, 2008, p. 24). This required me to limit my conversational turns to statements that encouraged the participants to fully flesh out the stories they told while recounting their experiences. While I hoped to make these interviews dialogic experiences, I wanted the teachers’ experiences and stories of those experiences to comprise the bulk of the interview talk. Doing so required me to become comfortable with the anxiety that often accompanies the process of creating spaces for the participant to, at times, lead me on the journey of conducting my inquiry (Riessman, 2008).

Data Analysis

Qualitative researchers interested in studying human experience have a variety of tools at their disposal for analyzing qualitative data. However, researchers must be sure to employ data analysis tools that are consistent with their research goals and theoretical frameworks. The quote

from Nietzsche that I chose to open this chapter highlights the complexity of studying human experience. In Van Manen's (1990) estimation, the point of Nietzsche's statement was to bring forth the following questions: what does it mean to "study the human being in his or her humanness? And, what methodology is required for this kind of study?" (p. 5). Neither Nietzsche nor Van Manen would have been likely to argue that there is *a single* lantern or tool that supercedes all others in its ability to facilitate a study of human experience. Instead, their views support the idea that one must reflect upon the inquiry he or she is proposing in order to find *the appropriate* lantern to illuminate the study of human experience.

With this concept in mind, I argue that is imperative for qualitative researchers to find or, when necessary, craft data analysis tools that are congruent with the theoretical frameworks underpinning their inquiries. As I worked to identify an existing data analysis tool that would best support my research, I realized that *the appropriate* lantern did not exist. Unable to find a suitable lantern to illuminate the experiences I was researching, I set out to construct a framework for analyzing data that could be useful for me—and for other researchers interested in focusing on the transactional nature of language as they engage in social science research. In order to construct this framework, I have blended aspects of narrative analysis and thematic analysis with other qualitative analysis tools, such as memo writing, to create Transactional Analysis (TA).

A project designed to explore the process of mutual shaping that occurs as researchers enter into dialogue with participants who are discussing their experiences will be enhanced by carefully considering the transactional nature of language. This sort of project requires a data analysis tool that provides a focus on the mutual shaping that occurs as the utterances of individuals transact with one another. In order to accommodate this focus, TA provides a multi-

step process, which blends elements of narrative analysis (Mishler, 1986,1999; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 2008) and thematic analysis (Maxwell, 2005; Riessman, 2008; Rossman & Rallis, 2003) to offer researchers the ability to focus on the dynamic nature of language and its capability to shape our understanding of lived experience. In her discussion of transactional reading theory, Rosenblatt (1995) artfully argued that “language is socially evolved, but it is always constituted by individuals, with their particular histories” (p. 25). The ways in which those particular histories influence the ways that individuals shape and are shaped by the world around them are an important aspect of researching lived experience. TA can enhance research focusing on lived experiences by illuminating this dynamic shaping process.

Drawing upon narrative. Although qualitative researchers have difficulty agreeing on what counts as a story or narrative, it is possible to analyze narrative accounts in “systematic ways to generate meaningful and promising findings” (Mishler, 1986, p. 77). Researchers do not need to elicit traditional narratives—linear stories with a beginning, middle, and end—from their participants to draw upon elements of narrative analysis. Instead, researchers can encourage participants to offer examples or short narrative accounts to give shape to their experiences. Riessman (2008) has argued that narrative analysis affords researchers the ability to “interrogate how talk among speakers is interactively (dialogically) produced” (p. 105, parenthesis in original). Storytelling is one of the most effective means we, as human beings, have for making sense of our experiences in the world (Mishler, 1986). Therefore, it makes sense to elicit narratives from participants as part of the process of exploring their lived experiences (Mishler, 1986).

The chief element of narrative analysis that TA draws upon is the need to be attentive to the ways that the dialogue between the researcher and the participant influence the meaning that

is being made during the interview situation. In order to fully understand how dialogue shapes the process of meaning making, the following concepts must be considered: how might the participant be structuring his or her story in ways that are specific to the interview situation? How might the opportunity to reflect upon his or her teaching practices be coloring the participants' understanding of the instructional decision he or she has made? How might the researchers' experiences be influencing his or her understanding of the stories told by the participant? Careful consideration of these concepts helped me gain an understanding of the process of mutual shaping that was occurring during the generation of my data. Narrative analysis provided me with a lens through which these concepts could be viewed.

Building on thematic analysis. Researchers interested in exploring human experience through interview data can also find thematic analysis helpful. Maxwell (2005) argued that thematic analysis offers researchers the ability to categorize and compare data to “aid in the development of theoretical concepts” (p. 96). This approach to analyzing the data requires an inductive approach (Rossman & Rallis, 2003), which can facilitate the exploration of how the participants used language to discuss their experiences. In other words, researchers can draw upon the participants' words to develop themes and organize the data into categories to be further explored. This can be accomplished by engaging in a systematic process of reading the interview transcripts; identifying themes in the participants' responses constructed during the interview process; questioning how those responses are structured; and exploring the themes identified to develop an understanding of the participants' lived experiences.

Thematic analysis offers a way for researchers to take an inductive and constant comparative approach to analyzing the data they generate. However, this analysis tool is limited in its effectiveness. Typically, thematic analysis provides a means for categorizing and

identifying key concepts within the data. Often researchers will want to take their analysis further to explore elements within those themes. For example, I was interested in studying the mutual shaping that occurs through dialogue. I wanted to explore the themes I identified to focus on the concept of mutual shaping. Thematic analysis does provide a tool for the identification of themes. It does not, however, attend to the dynamic nature of the transactions that occur when people engage in dialogue with the texts they read or the world around them.

For example, my participants discussed ways that the policy discourse that has resulted from the increased focus on high stakes testing in their schools had influenced their teaching practices. Thematic analysis allowed me to group these examples together and identify them as areas of focus. Organizing the data in this way helped me identify the following themes in the data: (a) policy as authoritative discourse, (b) lack of teacher input on policy, (c) influences of testing pressure and standardization, (d) low-level versus high-level skills, and (e) creative versus formulaic teaching. However, I was interested in developing an understanding of how the participants' worldviews had been shaped by those experiences. Thematic analysis alone did not provide the depth of analysis I required. One of the goals for this project was to explore the ways in which discourse of policy had shaped the worldviews of my participants. Therefore, I needed to add a layer of analysis that focused on the processes of mutual shaping that could be identified within this theme. TA afforded me the ability to accomplish this goal.

The Framework for Transactional Analysis

Exploring the dynamic nature of transactions requires a data analysis tool specifically designed to consider the process of mutual shaping. Drawing upon the theories of Bakhtin (1981, 1986) and Rosenblatt (1995, 2005), TA offers an additional tier of analysis that seeks to illuminate the transactions that occur as people read and enter into dialogue with the world

around them. Rosenblatt (1995) argued that “the ‘meaning’ does not reside ready-made ‘in’ the text or ‘in’ the reader but happens or comes to being during the transaction between reader and text” (p. 7). Engaging in TA allows the researcher to look closely at each of the themes he or she had identified in order to recognize and analyze the moments of mutual shaping that are present in the participants’ stories. TA creates opportunities for researchers to focus their analysis on the ways that language and its usage shape participants’ lived experiences. In the following sections, I describe the framework that illustrates how I supplemented narrative analysis and thematic analysis by employing TA to identify and focus on the processes of mutual shaping that I saw as these teachers attempted to engage in dialogue with the policies in their schools.

TA is a multi-step process that relies on an inductive and constant comparative approach to data analysis. I employed the following steps in the analysis of the data I generated for this study. First, I engaged in the practice of writing dialogic memos to supplement the field notes I took before, during, and after each of the interviews I conducted with my participants. These memos offered me the opportunity to consider how my subjectivities were influencing my understanding of the data generated during these interviews. I discuss these memos in more detail in the subjectivity section of this chapter.

Second, I engaged in the process of mapping the interviews right after they were conducted. The mapping process consisted of listening to the interviews and noting times during the interview session when participants addressed topics that were related to my research questions. The mapping sessions also allowed me to note who initiated the discussion of topics and how they were discussed. This assisted me in my efforts to contextualize the participants’ responses to my questions. The mapping process also allowed me to begin to identify possible themes in the data. Third, I drew upon elements of narrative analysis to interrogate the ways in

which the interview situation influenced the ways that my participants had structured the responses they offered during the interview sessions. After considering how the interview situation and my transactions with the participants were influencing the data, I listened to the interviews again and read my memos and field notes to compile a list of themes. The fifth step in my data analysis process consisted of reading the transcripts and developing thematic tables where I organized the participants' responses into the themes that I had identified during the mapping process. This step drew heavily upon thematic analysis to identify themes that were consistent across the interviews.

The sixth step in the process was where TA really began to take shape and inform my understanding of the data. In this step I explored the themes to focus on the dynamic processes of mutual shaping that were occurring. As part of this process, I looked closely at the thematic tables to see what I could learn about how the participants' experiences were being shaped by the discourse of educational policy. It was at this point of the analysis process that TA was most useful. Elements of narrative analysis helped me to attend to the transactions that were occurring during the interview situation. Thematic analysis made it possible for me to focus on the content of the participants' responses. The lens of TA facilitated my focus on how the participants' experiences have been shaped by their transactions with policy outside of the context of the interview. As I employed the lens of TA, I focused my analysis on stories that participants told in order to gain some insight into how educational policies were being conveyed to them. I concentrated on the specific words they used to describe the ways that administrators conveyed the policies they were to follow. Moreover, I spent considerable time thinking about what the implications of those words were for how the participants' experiences were being shaped by those transactions with the language employed by policymakers and school administrators. I

further explored the thematic tables to identify ways in which that language influenced the instructional decisions made by the participants. This process also afforded me with the opportunity to consider the ways that the discourse of educational policy was shaping the participants' perceptions of the language of educational policy and their abilities to enter into dialogue and transact with those policies.

Reservoirs of past experience. In order to effectively employ TA, I needed to consider how my subjectivities were influencing my understanding of the data. As Rosenblatt (1995) has argued, each person has a unique reservoir of past experience that influences the way he or she understands the world. Bakhtin (1981) discussed this concept in terms of the contexts that color our understanding of the utterance. More recently, qualitative researchers have discussed this idea in terms of subjectivity. Some scholars, such as Husserl (1970) have argued that researchers can bracket these understandings, beliefs, or experiences in an effort to reduce their influences on the researcher's understanding of the data. This would be, in my estimation, a futile effort. Van Manen (1990) argued that we cannot "forget or ignore what we already 'know'" (p. 47). We can try to suppress that knowledge, but it will inevitably "creep back into our reflections" (p. 47). Therefore, I argue that it is more productive to consider and explicitly state our understandings, contexts, and beliefs.

Peshkin's work (1988) highlights the importance of being aware of how our subjectivities influence the research we conduct. While it is impossible to eliminate the influences of our worldviews and reservoirs of past experience on the process of generating and analyzing qualitative data, it is possible—if not imperative—for researchers to find ways to manage the influences of their subjectivities. By becoming aware of how our subjectivity influences our understanding of the lived experiences of others, we can "preclude it from being unwittingly

burdensome” (p. 20). It is important to note that engaging in TA will require researchers to remain attentive to the ways that their subjectivities are influencing their transactions with the participants and their utterances. Therefore, researchers must find a method for bringing their subjectivities to the surface of their consciousness. The process of memo writing offers researchers a way to become aware of how their subjectivities are influencing their projects. In my view, memo writing should be an integral part of utilizing TA.

Dialogic memos. Dialogic memos create spaces for researchers to consider and chronicle the ways that their experiences influence their understanding of the data they generate. Moreover, an important aspect of exploring the transactions that researchers identify during the data generation and analysis processes is the researchers’ ability to chronicle moments of mutual shaping and recording them in their fieldnotes and memos. Heath and Street (2008) have recommended the use of “conceptual memos” for recording the concepts that stand out to researchers about particular events during the research and analysis process (p. 79). I argue that it is useful to build on the concept of “conceptual memos” to generate *dialogic memos*. These dialogic memos function as spaces for researchers to enter into dialogue with themselves and with their participants’ responses.

Through dialogic memos, researchers can record moments of transaction that they identify and make meaning of those moments through the process of writing about them. By recording their thoughts during this process, researchers will be able to see how they are beginning to make meaning and reshape their understanding of their experiences and the experiences of the participants. These memos will also create a space for researchers to catalogue and reflect upon the methods they are employing to facilitate their inquiry. Through the process of writing dialogic memos, researchers can “cast a reflexive eye” on their processes of

generating and analyzing the data (O'Connor, 2007, p. 260). Reflexivity is a key element in the development of an understanding of the mutual shaping that occurs during the research process.

The process of writing dialogic memos was integral in my ability to increase my awareness of how the transactions with my participants were shaping my understanding of the data. As I wrote these memos throughout the processes of data generation and analysis, I was able to come to a better understanding of how my participants' contexts and stories were shaping my worldview. Returning to these memos during as I wrote about my data brought these moments of mutual shaping to the surface of my consciousness and made it possible for me to discuss these transactions in chapters four and five.

Limitations

The dialogic nature of interviewing does lead to questions about the validity of the data generated by researchers engaging in qualitative inquiry. When addressing the issue of validity in interview research, Kvale (1996) used the metaphor of a miner looking to uncover information contained in the respondent as a way to conceptualize the potential for an interviewer's biases to corrupt the data he or she is seeking. "Bias," however, "is a meaningful concept only if the subject is seen to possess a preformed, pure informational commodity that the interview process might somehow contaminate" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995 p. 18). I do not believe that participants possess information that can be contaminated during the interview process. Instead, I view the interview situation as an opportunity to facilitate the social construction of meaning. That is not to say that interviewers do not need to be wary of asking questions in ways that encourage participants to tell them what they think they want to hear. That would, no doubt, be problematic. However, the biases and perspectives that all parties bring to the interview situation are integral parts of the contexts that color the words they chose in an attempt to carry out their

speech plans (Bakhtin, 1981) and they describe their experiences in the world. Clearly, “all participants in an interview are inevitably implicated in making meaning” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995 p. 18). The biases, opinions, and subjectivities of all parties involved will influence the data that is constructed during the interview situation.

My theoretical and methodological frameworks support the view that interview data are produced through dialogue and knowledge is socially constructed during that dialogue. Baker (2004) suggested that the interview process should be described as data “generation” instead of data “collection” (p. 163). From that perspective, then, I must also, argue that the idea of uncorrupted data is a fallacy. I draw support for this perspective from Freeman, deMarris, Preissle, Roulston, and St. Pierre (2007) who argued that “there are no ‘pure,’ ‘raw’ data, uncontaminated by human thought and action, and the significance of data depends on how material fits into the architecture of corroborating data” (p. 27). In other words, the measure of a study’s validity should not be the “purity” of its data. Research should, instead, be judged on the consistency of the decisions made about generating, analyzing, and presenting data. Researchers who hope to conduct inquiries that can be considered valid or trustworthy must work carefully to ensure that their theoretical and methodological frameworks are compatible and informing the inquiry. The question of how each decision made by the researcher fits within the theoretical and methodological frameworks that underpin the inquiry should be the primary concern. There is no simple formula for making this sort of judgment. Instead of drawing upon some pre-determined formula or restrictive set of steps to followed, I argue that researchers should remain reflective and interrogate how the choices the make throughout this process are aligned with their theoretical and methodological frameworks.

TA lends itself to the deep exploration of dynamic topics that are often addressed best

using small-scale studies, which include a limited number of participants. Small-scale studies, it is important to note, are not designed to produce generalizable results. Attempting to do so would be inconsistent with a theoretical framework that attends to the unique experiences that human beings have as they read the world around them. The production of generalizable results that can be extrapolated to larger populations is, after all, a statistical process that relies on large representative samples. In my view, the processes of meaning making and dialogue are far too individual to generate results that can be generalized to large populations. TA is a data analysis tool that can be employed by researchers conducting small-scale studies designed to generate “conceptual inferences” (Riessman, 2008, p. 13). These conceptual inferences have much to offer researchers interested in learning about the social process of dialoguing and transacting with the world.

The fact that these sorts of projects are designed to create spaces for researchers to make conceptual inferences about a topic instead of producing generalizable results does not diminish the usefulness of their inquiries. Presenting data in the form of human experience, instead of raw numbers, can have powerful results—particularly in acrimonious debates over how schools should be run and evaluated. Patton’s (1990) work demonstrated the compelling nature of data representing teachers’ individual experiences with policy mandates. In his study, school board members were asked to read the pages of the teachers’ open-ended responses to questions about a newly introduced accountability program in Michigan. They did and found “they could not so easily dismiss the anguish, fear, and depth of concern revealed in the teachers’ own reflections. The teachers’ words had face validity and credibility” (p. 23). The atmosphere changed from one of attack to dialogue. Teachers and administrators began to work together and used the evaluation report to rethink the accountability system. Teachers’ words can be a catalyst for

change and the negotiation of more palatable educational policies—if they are brought to the fore. TA can function as a analysis tool that can aid in the process of bringing teachers' voices into the dialogue of educational policy.

Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the ways in which my theoretical framework has influenced the methodology and methods I have chosen to employ in this study. Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) theory of language and Rosenblatt's (1995, 2005) concept of transaction have provided me with sound footers on which I have constructed the methodological foundation of this study. My understanding of the contextual nature of language and the complex processes of mutual shaping that occur as a result of the centrifugal and centripetal forces of language influenced each of the choices I made when I selected tools to generate and analyze my data. In order to attend to the tension that exists between the unifying and heteroglot nature of language, I chose to employ semi-structured interviews to facilitate the co-construction of knowledge during the data generation stages of this study. These interviews also made it possible for me to elicit stories from my participants that foregrounded their experiences with attempting to engage in dialogue with policies in their schools.

The notion that our contexts influence the words we choose and our understandings of the world around us compelled me to search for an *appropriate* lantern to illuminate the experiences of my participants. In this chapter, I have also discussed the ways in which I blended elements of narrative analysis and thematic analysis to craft a data analysis tool that would offer me the ability to explore the processes of mutual shaping that occurred as these teachers sought to engage in dialogue with the policy mandates they received. I have also provided a discussion how my subjectivities have influenced this project and clarified the limitations of this study. As I

brought this chapter to a close, I highlighted the value of bringing the voices of individual teachers to the fore and discussed how the methodology and methods this study utilized can make it possible for teachers to be seen as valuable contributors to the discourse of educational policy.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION OF DATA

“Our superintendent has created a list of non-negotiables. Like, every meeting we're given that as a Power Point slide: Non-negotiables.” –John, high school English teacher

During our second interview, I asked John to share an example of how his county implemented new policies. He told me about a faculty meeting that occurred during pre-planning at the beginning of the 2008-2009 school year. He explained that county administrators gave a Power Point presentation during this meeting that was designed to disseminate some new policies that were being implemented. This presentation contained a list of “non negotiables” for the up-coming school year. These “non-negotiables” were elements of the new policies that the county had adopted, such as having teachers work in data teams to evaluate test scores, posting standards on classroom walls, and displaying an agenda for each day’s class on the board. John’s experiences with receiving policy mandates from his county administrators demonstrate the problematic nature of the current discourse of educational policy.

John’s administrators, like many others, employed a discourse fraught with words like “non-negotiables” as they communicated policy directives to their teachers. John pointed out that he believed these directives were to be received and accepted without question or room for discussion about their merits. John’s experience was similar to the experiences described by each of the teachers in my study. Each of the participants shared stories of receiving policy mandates from administrators in ways that reduced teachers’ abilities to engage in dialogue with and shape these directives.

In this chapter, I draw upon my participants' descriptions of their experiences to discuss and theorize how they have received and transacted with the policy mandates being implemented in their schools. I have used the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1986) and Louise Rosenblatt (1995, 2005) to interrogate the ways that teachers are receiving and attempting to engage in dialogue with policy mandates in their schools. By exploring these teachers' experiences, I demonstrate my understanding of how the discourse of educational policy functions as authoritative discourse. This centripetal force (Bakhtin, 1981) seeks to prohibit teachers from transacting with and shaping policy mandates in ways that would be responsive to the need of their students.

The ways in which the language of educational policy influences teachers' instructional decisions and the curricula in schools, discussed in the literature in chapter two, demonstrates the need to further explore the complexities of how the language utilized to convey policy mandates influences the individual experiences of teachers and their instructional decisions. Therefore, the goal of this chapter is to use the accounts provided by seven teachers from the state of Georgia to describe how they receive and dialogue with policy mandates in their counties. By employing the theoretical lenses of Bakhtin (1981, 1986) and Rosenblatt (1995, 2005) during my reading of the data and engaging in the process of Transactional Analysis (See chapter 3), I identified the following themes in the data: (a) policy as authoritative discourse, (b) lack of teacher input on policy, (c) influences of testing pressure and standardization, (d) low-level versus high-level skills, and (e) creative versus formulaic teaching.

These themes helped me organize and understand my participants' experiences; however, they are in no way discrete. The concepts contained in these categories are complex and fluid. As a result of their complexities, concepts resonated across each of the themes as I analyzed the

data. Exploring these themes made it possible for me to develop an understanding of the ways in which the discourse of educational policy has shaped the experiences and instructional choices made by each of the teachers who participated in this study. In the following sections, I foreground the participants' voices as I discuss my understanding of the data generated through this study.

First, I provide a description of the participants. Second, I use Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) concept of authoritative discourse to discuss how teachers' abilities to transact with, shape, and contribute to the creation of policy mandates are being inhibited. Third, I draw upon the participants' descriptions of their experiences to demonstrate how the pressures of high stakes testing and the authoritative discourse of policy mandates are reducing opportunities for teachers function as creative professionals who teach in ways that responsive to the individual needs of their students. Finally, I explore the teachers' experiences to discuss how the myopic focus on high stakes testing has resulted in the implementation of curricula in the secondary English classroom, which favor formulaic teaching and eschew critical thinking skills.

Descriptions of Participants

This chapter focuses on the experiences of the seven teachers who each have compelling stories to tell about their experiences with meaning making and policy. The themes and concepts I discuss in this chapter are representative of all seven participants. Mishler (1986) argued that storytelling is one of the most effective ways for people to make sense of their experiences in the world. However, stories alone are not enough to make compelling arguments. Those stories must be contextualized; the individuals telling their stories need to be more than faceless names. With this in mind, I have constructed portraits of each of the seven teachers whose experiences I discuss in this chapter. By contextualizing these teachers, I have made it possible for them to be

seen as living, breathing professionals who are dedicated to fulfilling their roles in shaping the students who populate their classrooms. These portraits are drawn from the interview sessions and from the participant profiles I asked each teacher to complete. I utilized the participants' descriptions of themselves to augment the portrait of each teacher I have created, so I could ensure that I have represented these teachers accurately. I do not intend to judge these teachers or hold them up as golden exemplars, whose philosophies and actions cannot be questioned. Instead, I offer the experiences communicated by these teachers as evidence of the ways that the current discourse of educational policy has influenced the professional experiences and instructional decisions made by teachers in the secondary English classroom.

John

John has been teaching for seven years. The school where John is currently teaching 9th and 11th grades serves 1,800 students and is located in a large city in the southeastern United States (100,000 residents). The English department in John's school includes thirteen English teachers. He describes his classroom as "student-centered" and he has set up "the desks to face one another to encourage debate/discussion." His teaching philosophy is centered on the idea that he "teaches kids first—not a text, not a subject." John was careful to point out that "his main goal as a teacher is to make students' lives better any way that he can." John believes that teaching students to express themselves through writing is one of the most important things he can do. Therefore, his instructional activities rely heavily on writing assignments that ask students to think critically. His writing assignments "always have open-ended questions and numerous choices." John is a passionate educator, who believes strongly in what he is doing. He stated numerous times during our interview sessions that he believes the freedom to teach in creative ways is very important to him.

Caroline

Caroline has been teaching for seven years. She currently teaches 9th and 10th grades in a suburban school near a major metropolitan area in the southeastern United States. Her school serves over 3,700 students, and her department houses thirty English teachers. Caroline teaches in a trailer or “mobile learning cottage” outside of the regular school building. The small size of the “mobile learning cottage” makes arranging her classroom in any other way than rows difficult. However, Caroline tries to make her classroom as student friendly as possible. She described her attempts to do so in this way: “I have various lights around my room to try to soften the dull exposed florescent bulbs overhead. I feel like without these lights, the room would have a very static feel to it and be much like one you’d find on a worksite instead of a place that is supposed to promote thinking and creativity.” Caroline’s efforts to create a welcoming classroom atmosphere are one indicator of her student-centered teaching philosophy. Caroline described her teaching philosophy by stating, “ I promote a neutral environment where students can enter and feel as though they are not judged for their comments or opinions, but I know that is not a given simply because I’d like for it to be. I cannot ensure a safe place for everyone in my room, but I try to have them understand they are always valued.” Caroline works to bring this philosophy into her practice by offering students as many opportunities to work in groups as can she work into her school calendar. She lamented the fact that her students spend thirty days each year taking high stakes tests. Caroline struggles with the pressure to prepare her students to succeed on high stakes tests while still covering all of the things she feels are valuable for students to learn.

Klaus

Klaus has been teaching for three years. He teaches 9th and 12th grades in a suburban school located on the outskirts of a large city in the southeastern United States. His school serves over 1700 students and his department houses sixteen English teachers. Klaus's classroom is small and he has found that rows are the only way to efficiently organize the desks in his room. Although his classroom may appear austere to the casual observer, Klaus works to create a safe atmosphere. As he described his classroom, Klaus pointed out, "I like to create an atmosphere of comfort. Some say that we need to be out of our safety zones for some growth; true, but establishing a community takes trust and harmony. This can be done through conversation and without throw pillows, curtains, and fishbowl activities." Klaus's description of his efforts to create a comfortable, but not frilly, classroom atmosphere demonstrates his desire to convey the seriousness he brings to his work. He believes dialogue should form the foundation for his classroom activities. Klaus pointed out that he "prefers group activities, which emphasize learning as a social process." In order to engage his students in reading activities, Klaus works to develop relationships with his students that will help him select texts that students are interested in reading and discussing.

Jenny

Jenny has been teaching in the same school where she completed her student teaching six years ago. Her school, which is located on the outskirts of a large metropolitan area in southeastern United States, serves over 1700 students. Jenny is one of sixteen English teachers in her department, and she was a finalist for the Teacher of the Year award in her school during the 2008-09 school year. Jenny describes her classroom as "very structured, but very colorful" with most of the desks facing the front of the room. She has attempted to encourage discussion by

having eight desks face the interior of the classroom. Her course load this year includes three sections of eleventh grade English, which is a course that includes a state-mandated End-of-Course-Test. Jenny described her goals for her students by saying, “I want the students to know that their opinions matter, and that as long as they are using evidence from the text, they are correct. I try very hard to make literature ‘fun’ and exciting. So many of my students are non-readers, and I want them to find something interesting and memorable in the texts that we read. I hold my students to high standards, but when asked about a text, they are free to express their true feelings.” Jenny’s desire to create a compassionate atmosphere in her classroom that also includes high expectations for her students was evident during each of the interview sessions.

Walter

Walter has been teaching for eight years. He currently teaches 10th and 11th grades in a large school located in the suburbs of a large city in the southeastern United States. Previously, Walter taught 9th, 10th, and 11th grades in a rural school in the southeastern United States. His school serves over 3,700 students, and he teaches alongside twenty-nine other English teachers. Walter provided the following description of his classroom: “If one were to enter my classroom on a given day, most likely he would find me sitting in the front of the room having a conversation with my students. The majority of our days are spent discussing pieces of literature and the ideas that swirl around a given piece.” This description demonstrates an important concept about Walter’s teaching, which he discussed in-depth during our interview sessions. Walter often talked about how he believed that literature should function as a tool for learning about the world. He said that the sometimes felt like wasn’t doing the job that his administrators contracted him to do because he focused more on the discussions that texts lead to, instead of

focusing directly on the texts themselves. This focus on discussion is related to Walter's goal of having his students "question the status quo."

Sasha

Sasha has been teaching for eight years. Currently, she teaches 9th and 10th grades in a small, start-up charter school in the suburbs of a large city in the southeastern United States. Her school serves a little more than 200 students and she shares her English department with three other English teachers. This is Sasha's second year teaching in the charter school. Previously, she taught for six years in the public school system in the same city. Sasha believes that learning should be a fun, social activity, so she has her desks arranged in groups of four or five students—except on test days when she moves the desks into rows. When asked to describe her teaching philosophy, Sasha provided the following response: "I wish to teach students how--not what--to think. I push them to think creatively and critically about the literature we study, the world around them, and their place within it. Problem solving is also important and reiterated, whether through my interactions with them, or in the activities I design. I aim to create an atmosphere that is safe for my students to take risks in their work."

Maggie

Maggie is currently teaching ninth grade English and a course focused on Mythology. However, she has taught all grade levels since she became a high school teacher twelve years ago. Maggie also has three years of experience teaching composition at the college level. She is currently teaching in a large suburban school in the outskirts of a large metropolitan area in the southeastern United States. Her English department houses sixteen English teachers and serves over 1700 students. Maggie is currently working on her Education Specialist degree and described the type of teaching she does by saying, "I prefer to use student motivation to drive the

assignments I give. I want students reading independent novels instead of doing one book as a group because I'm dissatisfied with the number of un-engaged students I've seen when classes read one book as a group." Maggie's focus on independent reading is from the appearance of her classroom. Maggie described her classroom by saying, "I have a ton of books for students in my room to the extent that I have about three times more bookshelves than anyone else. I also don't have an official teacher desk. I decided to live without it since it was only a place to pile stuff and I need the room." Her philosophy of education is grounded in the notion of harnessing student interest to create motivation.

The Authoritative Discourse of Policy

Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) theory of language describes the tension that exists between two distinct forms of discourse: authoritative discourse, which seeks to dominate and control, and internally persuasive discourse, which leaves room for interpretation and mutual shaping. In chapters one and two, I argued that the discourse employed in educational policy typically functions as authoritative discourse. I made this argument based upon my exploration of the literature discussing the standards movement and my close reading of policy documents emblematic of the era, such as *A Nation at Risk* and NCLB. However, as I move towards a discussion of how the discourse of educational policy influences the experiences and instructional decisions of individual teachers, it is important to carefully consider another aspect of the discourse of policy: the anticipated response policymakers and administrators hope to elicit as they communicate policies to teachers.

Anticipated Response and Policy Discourse

As I discussed in chapter one, responsive understanding is a key element of the Bakhtinian (1981, 1986) notion of dialogue that I have used to frame this study. I draw upon this idea in this chapter to describe how the concepts of understanding and response influence teachers' transactions with policy. Bakhtin (1986a) argued that each utterance contains a "*speech plan or speech will*" constructed with the anticipation of eliciting a particular response from the addressee (p. 77, emphasis in original). A careful look at the discourse employed by administrators as they communicate with teachers can reveal much about the anticipated response policymakers and administrators hope to elicit. Bakhtin's view of discourse artfully addresses the concept of anticipated response. If we detach our words from the connotations contained in live speech, we lose the ability to consider the responses an utterance might be constructed to obtain. The anticipated response that the speaker hoped to elicit from the listener must be considered in order to fully comprehend a speaker's speech plan.

The discussion I provided in chapter two of the discourse contained in policy documents such as *A Nation at Risk* and NCLB demonstrates that the speech plans of policy directives have been constructed to elicit the response of acquiescence. Moreover, these national-level policies are transmitted in ways that demand unconditional allegiance and leave little room for dialogue that is more complex than simple acceptance or rejection. The teachers in this study have made it clear that this form of discourse is also present at the local school level, and the importance of understanding the speech plans of county-level administrators should not be overlooked.

As I talked with each of the teachers who participated in this study, I asked them to describe how their administrators communicate policies to them. These probes were designed to help me gain some insight into the language used by administrators in order to develop an

understanding of the administrators' speech plans and the anticipated responses that their statements appeared to be designed to elicit. I wondered if the teachers were receiving mandates from their administrators in ways that fostered dialogue. I was interested in finding out if administrators were communicating policies in ways that left room for teachers to reshape the directives they received to address the specific needs of their students. Were they designed to function as an internally persuasive discourse (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986), which would leave space for mutual shaping, or were these policies designed to function as authoritative discourse? John's discussion of his superintendent's consistent use of the term "non-negotiables" provided some insight into these questions.

Non-Negotiable Policies

John's description of the non-negotiable items communicated to him by his administrators serves as an excellent starting point to discuss how these teachers are receiving the policy mandates they are expected to carry out. During my second interview with John, I asked him to clarify what he meant by the term "non-negotiable." He was careful to point out that this term was one of the "buzz words" adopted by the administrators in his county, which they used repeatedly during the Power Point presentations given by administrators during pre-planning faculty meetings. He went on to describe the concept of non-negotiables by saying, "Non-negotiables are—you must have the standard that you are teaching that day on the board, visible, on the board or on the wall. Visible for all students and all onlookers, i.e., superintendents, SIT [School Improvement Team], committee people, principals, vice-principals, people from WRESA [Western Region Education Service Alliance], and four other random people." A sarcastic tone crept into John's voice as described the laundry list of people who

might come to his classroom to see if he had posted the appropriate items on the walls of his classroom.

Before you dismiss John as a cynic who does not see the value in having clear standards or agendas posted, consider the implications of this sort of policy directive. Posting a daily agenda on the board was another one of the “non-negotiable” items communicated via a Power Point slide during pre-planning meetings at John’s school. It is hard to argue that having clearly defined plans and sharing them with students is counter-productive, and John certainly would not try to make this argument. In fact, he pointed out that he posts his agenda each day and reviews it with the class for multiple reasons: “one because it’s good practice, but two, that’s common courtesy.” The problem, however, is the rigid manner in which the agenda posting policy is being enforced in his county. John described a day when an administrator from the county office had come into his classroom to observe him during the middle of the class period. John had already gone over his agenda for the day with the class using a projector. By the time the administrator had arrived, the agenda had been covered and the class was working on another activity. John became frustrated as he said, “I got a box not checked off [on the observation evaluation form] and told make sure my agenda is posted next time. And that was silly because if [the administrator] had stayed the whole period, he would have seen all the things, you know.”

John’s story of receiving a less than perfect evaluation after this lesson demonstrates the intent of his administrators to dictate and control his actions in the classroom. Even though he had adhered to the spirit of the policy requiring him to post his agenda and explained to the administrator that he had to remove the agenda from the screen for the next activity, he was reprimanded for not having the agenda visible when the administrator came into his room. John had attempted to transact with that policy and make it useful for him.

John's attempt to re-shape the policy in a way that was productive and logistically viable demonstrates what happens when a teacher attempts to view a directive as what Bakhtin (1981) called internally persuasive discourse, which has the power to "awaken new and independent words" (p. 345). Discourse that is internally persuasive has the ability to create a synergy between policy and a teacher's theory, practice, and professional experiences. Unlike authoritative discourse, internally persuasive discourse could create opportunities for teachers to transact with a policy and shape it in productive ways that draw upon their professional experience and knowledge. In John's case, he had taken the administration's directive and further developed it by applying his knowledge of what works for him as an experienced professional. The response of the administrator to John's actions demonstrates his administration's speech plan to have their directive exist in a distanced zone that does not permit dialogue and mutual shaping. This discourse is not limited to the county where John is teaching. Sasha also provided an example of being charged to carry out policies that were communicated using the "non-negotiable" terminology.

In the county where Sasha is currently teaching in a charter school, the administrators employ a discourse that is strikingly similar. Sasha used to teach in one of the main public high schools in this county, and she described the way her county implemented a Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) initiative during the pre-planning days at the beginning of the school year several years ago. Sasha arrived at school one morning to find a directive in her mailbox stating that she was to ensure her students each read twenty five books independently during the year. She was to devote thirty minutes of her fourth period each day to SSR. The students were supposed to keep track of their progress with a reading log. I asked Sasha if there was any discussion about how this new policy would be implemented, she quickly replied, "Oh it was non-negotiable. It

was, you will do this. And we were told that we should expect for administrators to be making rounds during that time to make sure in fact that we were implementing it.” The use of the term “non-negotiable” was purposeful. It was the language used by her administration to describe the policy, and it was not the only time that Sasha’s administrators employed this discourse during her tenure in this school system.

In chapter one, I discussed Sasha’s experience with being compelled to design her classes around a pacing guide that was created by her county English coordinator. Sasha pointed out that this pacing guide included a list of prescribed anchor texts that included dates for covering specific parts of each text. When I asked her to describe the wording of the pacing guide, she responded by saying:

There were anchor texts that were non-negotiable. For example, in 9th grade, Romeo and Juliet. The Odyssey. Those are the two that stick out in my mind. Supplementals weren't quite as detailed. You will be teaching Romeo and Juliet and you will do this act on this week, etc., etc. It was very specified. And I rejected it because the, all of my 9th graders had already read Romeo and Juliet. They did in 8th grade. I figured, why do it again, that seems stupid.

Sasha’s county had designed these pacing guides to support its benchmark-testing program. This program consists of a series of tests that are modeled after the standard Georgia End-of Course-Tests. The concept behind the tests is that they can give the county, and its teachers, data indicating areas of weakness to be addressed in preparation for the End-of Course-Tests. The content of the texts specified in the pacing guide was not included in the benchmark tests.

Sasha exercised her professional judgment, and she decided to have her students read *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. She planned a unit in which students would re-write scenes from the

play and perform them with the help of the Atlanta Shakespeare Company. Sasha was eager to point out:

“the principal was all on board with it until she got a phone call from the county coordinator reading the news of how great we were doing with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* complaining that I had not abided by the pacing guide.”

TTS: Ok. So the pacing guide was do this, there's no deviation?

Sasha: Right. It's like if you got caught then you got in trouble.

Sasha's experience indicates that policy discourse in her county leaves no room for teachers to engage in dialogue with the directives they receive.

Sasha, in fact, did get in trouble for attempting to negotiate an alternative to the prescribed pacing guide she had been given. Her county English coordinator read an article in the local paper describing her students' performances, and Sasha was called into the principal's office. When I asked her to describe this for me, she replied:

Yeah, yeah. I was called into the principal's office like a naughty child. I'm just totally at a loss, you know. And caught off guard. I was actually pulled out in the middle of my planning period while grading papers. The principal had sent a messenger down, so I go in there and it's the county coordinator, my department chair, and the principal, like all sitting behind a desk, then me in front of it. My department chair was completely defending me. I did have an ally while in the room. But my principal sat there and reneged on everything that she had complimented before in order to save face in front of the person, the county. Which sent me into a tailspin. It was ugly. I'm not going to lie to you.

This meeting led to a contentious chain of events that included a series of reprimands from Sasha's administration and left Sasha feeling that she could not work as an autonomous professional in her county. Sasha resigned at the end of the school year because she tired of working in a school system that did not value her professional knowledge and desire to teach in ways that she felt were responsive to the needs of her students.

The Flow of Policy Communication

The opportunity to engage in dialogue with and transact with policy directives is influenced by the words chosen by administrators to communicate their intentions. However, teachers' abilities to be active participants in the discourse of policy are also influenced by the direction of communication. In his discussion of the process of speech communication, Bakhtin (1986a) argued that each "speaker ends his utterance in order to relinquish the floor to the other or to make room for the other's active responsive understanding" (p. 71). This concept is best illustrated by simply imagining the process of turn taking that occurs during conversation. However, it is important to note that Bakhtin argued that active responsive understanding might take on many forms, which include "response, agreement, sympathy, objection, execution, and so forth (various speech genres presuppose various integral orientations and speech plans on the part of the speakers or writers)" (p. 69, parenthesis in original). Each of the teachers in this study indicated that they believe their administrators communicated policy directives hoping to elicit the response of execution. Although the explanation Bakhtin provided of the response that various speech genres presuppose is contained in a parenthetical, it is, when placed in the context of his overarching theory of language, one of the foundational elements of his theory. A speech genre that is functioning as authoritative discourse presupposes the response of unquestioning execution—or wholesale acceptance. Bakhtin (1981) argued that authoritative discourse cannot

be divided into parts to be accepted and parts to be rejected or re-shaped. Instead, “it enters our verbal consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass” (p. 343). Its resistance to transaction funnels the flow of speech communication in a single direction.

The metaphor that Rosenblatt (2005b) used to differentiate the term transaction from interaction, which I discussed in chapter one, illustrated how balls on a pool table change directions of travel when they collide. The directions of travel change for each ball after the interaction that occurs when the balls collide; however, the ball themselves remain unchanged. Rosenblatt argued for a more organic view of the human condition. In this new paradigm offered by Rosenblatt, human beings and their environments should not be seen as separate entities. Instead, they should be viewed as parts or aspects of a total event” (40). However, there are situations when human beings—or their environments—are structured in ways that are static and resist change. Bakhtin’s (1981) authoritative discourse, for example, resists change because its “semantic structure is static and dead” (p. 343). It is an inorganic discourse that resists shaping. A return to the metaphor of the pool table can help illustrate this point. When a pool ball strikes the bumpers at the sides and ends of the table, only the ball’s direction of travel is changed. The bumper represents an immovable object—a force that dominates. This image can also be helpful when one considers the power dynamic in the discourse of policy.

When an administrator presents teachers with a list of non-negotiable policies to be implemented, it is difficult for a transaction—or any sort of mutual shaping—to occur. If the administrator’s utterance is completed with the intent of eliciting blind execution from the teachers, the utterance takes on the role of the bumper on the pool table—a force that seeks to send teachers moving in a prescribed direction. Teachers, of course, are free to engage in the transactional process with that directive. They may choose to reshape that directive in ways that

are responsive to the needs of their students, like Sasha did with her choice to have her students read *A Midsummer Night's Dream* instead of *Romeo and Juliet*. However, those teachers must be willing to face the consequences for their choices. This concept highlights the reality that, all too often, the discourse of educational policy takes on a static quality and flows in only one direction: top-down.

Uni-directional Discourse

The concept of a uni-directional flow of speech communication in the discourse of policy surfaced consistently throughout the interviews I conducted with each of the participants. In fact, my understanding of this concept was enhanced by my transactions with the teachers in this study. Prior to talking with the participants, I had not really considered this facet of the discourse of policy. I had not thought about the reality that policy, like many unsavory things, flows downhill. However, as Walter and I were talking about the ways in which policies are discussed in his county, he brought the concept of top-down communication to the surface of my consciousness. During our second interview, I asked him to describe the opportunities for teachers to have input on the creation of new policies. He pointed out that his county is extremely large, and when I asked him to expand on that he replied:

“Oh man, I don’t know. I think there are 150,000 kids in the system. It's monstrous. I think it is the biggest system in the state. And it's run like a corporation. And it's the top down approach. And it's uh...there are, you can get on committees that steer things. Or that they'll ask for two people to be from a certain school to go and meet with this group that's talking about this issue. And you can have some input, but largely it's just top down. It says this is the mandate from on high and you’re just gonna deal with it.”

Walter's use of the phrase "top-down" resonated with me. I found this concept of the top-down approach intriguing. Although Walter pointed out that there is room for teachers to have input, the tone of his voice as he spoke those words indicated that he did not believe that input was valued. This sentiment was echoed by each of the other teachers of the study, and I will return to this concept later in the chapter when I discuss the lack of input teachers feel they have on the creation of policy. First, however, I want to further explore the top-down flow of policy communication.

When I asked Walter if he would be willing to take on the responsibility of having a voice in the policies implemented in his county, he replied:

Yeah. Definitely. I mean definitely, definitely. Because I feel like if you're versed in what's going on behind the scenes, I think it makes you a better teacher. Because you kind of understand. And it makes you a better professional because you understand why decisions are made and you get the whole picture as opposed to the slanted picture you get down in the trenches as a teacher. Because decisions that come at you, you say, this is terrible. But if you were to know the whole picture it might be that it was the lesser of two evils. So you might say, ok, well we took this sacrifice to keep this worse thing from coming, so I mean I think that that and it might also change your perception. Because I get pretty bitter sometimes about the stuff that comes flying down at me.

Walter's point about the significance of being involved in the decision making process is valuable. If teachers are involved in the process of crafting new policies, they are more likely to understand the rationale behind them. When teachers are excluded from the process and expected to simply execute policies created by someone else, bitterness creeps in. This bitterness is problematic because it reduces buy-in from teachers. Walter made this point clear when he said,

“the top down does create resistance in my mind. But if it was bottom up, I would probably buy into it more. Largely because it would look a lot more like what I wanted.”

Caroline also expressed frustration with the uni-directional flow of policy in her county when she described the manner in which her county implemented a benchmark testing policy similar to the one that was being supported by the pacing guides Sasha was charged with using. As Caroline was describing the way that the benchmark testing policy was communicated to her, she said:

The benchmark came down without anyone really running it by us. No one asked us what were good forms of assessment and whether or not we felt this was a valid test. They claimed that we had input because asked people from various schools to come and make questions or whatever. But ultimately the county determined this is what we're going to do and this is how we're going to implement it. With very little feedback as far as maybe the best way to start implementing these. I don't think anybody was resistant to the benchmark as an idea. But it was just dropped on top of us, if that makes sense.

Her choice of words like “came down” and “dropped on top of us” are revealing. They support the notion that policy discourse in her county moves in one direction: down from the county administration to the level occupied by the teachers. Although Caroline did point out that some teachers had the opportunity to have input on the types of questions that would be included in these tests, she was very adamant about her dissatisfaction with the way that the policy was communicated to her and eventually implemented. Caroline’s characterization of policy communication was echoed by Maggie, who also used some interesting language to describe the discourse of policy in her county.

When I asked Maggie to explain to me how new policies were communicated to her and her fellow teachers, she described how her administrators disseminated a new policy regarding supplemental textbook adoption: “We were schooled in departments. We were schooled as the whole school.” I was intrigued by the way Maggie used the word “schooled” in this context. Her tone of voice suggested that she was not using this term in positive manner. In fact, it seemed to me that she was using this term in a derogatory way to suggest that the administrators were communicating a decree that was not to be questioned. I found this interesting because Maggie’s philosophy of education is based on the idea that school should be a place for discussion—a place where multiple perspectives are valued. However, she seemed to be using the word “schooled” to suggest that there was an authority whose voice should not be questioned. I asked her to clarify what she meant, and she replied, “The policy was read in our department meeting and discussed and what you had to do.” The discussion Maggie was referring to was limited to an explanation of the disclaimer that teachers would be expected to include their syllabi if they were going to have students read a book that contained any controversial material.

After asking Maggie to clarify her use of the term for me, it became clear that she was, indeed, using the term “schooled” with negative connotations—connotations that communicated her dissatisfaction with the way her administrators transmitted policies to teachers in ways that did not leave room for dialogue. Maggie’s use of the term “schooled” in this manner is indicative of the transmission model of education that continues to pervade American public schools. It suggests that this model has become so entrenched in the culture of schools that it also dominates the discourse of policy communication between teachers and administrators. The uni-directional flow of policy discourse made Maggie, and the other teachers who participated in this study, feel like they had little input in the creation of the policies they were being asked to carry out in their

classrooms. While these teachers expressed a desire to be involved in the creation of policy, I realize that it would be unreasonable to expect every teacher to take part in the creation of policy. However, the views expressed by the participants in this study underline the importance of making it possible for teachers who wish to take on this role to do so.

Lack of Input on Policy

In each of the interviews I conducted with these teachers, I asked them to discuss the roles they saw for themselves in the creation of the policies being implemented in their schools. When I asked Jenny this question, she echoed what Walter had alluded to when he commented that he didn't believe opportunities to be on committees to steer things amounted to any real opportunity to change things. Jenny said:

I don't see them [administrators] ever asking us how we feel about it. Maybe those county teachers of the year, those teachers that are on, I mean, maybe they're put on boards that make these policies, but I don't see them ever asking me. I don't see anything ever happening when I'm asked to fill out a survey. I don't see evidence it goes anywhere.

Jenny was not alone in making the assertion that she does not ever see any evidence that her input influences the creation of new policies.

Like Jenny, Walter could also offer a telling example of the experience of feeling like county-level administrators had ignored the input of teachers. When I asked him to describe the level of input he felt like teachers in his county have on policy decisions, he said, "I mean they throw us bones every now and again and try to make us feel like we have a voice in what's going on. But it's really, I think it's just kind of placating." He provided the following example when I asked him to describe what he meant by this:

Well, there's last year with the benchmark tests. The county offered up a benchmark viewing night where you could go and look at the benchmark test. You couldn't take a copy of it with you. And it was after hours, like at six o'clock in the evening. You could go and look at the tests and you could make suggestions. And submit those suggestions in writing, like maybe within a couple of days. We had several teachers that went to this. I was not one of them. Several teachers went to this, saw some issues that they thought were pressing on the test. And the changes were not made. And so it's almost like, they're just doing lip service. Just saying, hey, you do have a voice, but not really. And, that's a point of frustration with us.

I think it's important to point out that Walter's failure to attend this meeting was not an issue of apathy. His role as the baseball coach at the school prevented him from being at this meeting. It is also important to consider the fact that the teachers were not even objecting to the implementation of the benchmark testing policy. Their concerns were related to the validity of the items that were going to be included on the test. The purpose behind the policy was to provide teachers with assessment data that could help them focus their instructional strategies in ways that would be responsive to the needs of their students. It seems particularly important to consider the teachers' concerns about the items on the tests. However, those concerns were not addressed and the teachers grew even more frustrated because their professional opinions had been ignored.

Klaus also discussed the feeling of having a lack of real input on policy. When I asked him to describe his role in the creation of the policies being implemented in his school, he made it clear that he feels like administrators do not heed his concerns by saying:

I would just like to be stakeholder in policy. Yeah, I hate that I'm not. It unnerves me that I'm a third year, starting third year teacher, and I don't have any stake in policy and what's decided and how it's made. I feel like they ask me as a motion. As just a general kind of like, well, let's just go ahead and do this. Not that it's going to amount to anything. And I really wish I was heavily involved in creating policy.

Klaus emphasized that he felt like he was only ever asked about things as a motion—not in meaningful ways that might result in change. For Klaus, his desire to have input on policy is not simply a desire to have a little more control over his environment. Instead, his motivation is tied directly to his goal of being an effective teacher.

I asked him to describe a policy that had been implemented without any opportunity for teachers to shape the policy, and he described an “instructional extension” initiative that his school implemented this fall. This initiative was designed to carve out a twenty-five minute block of time each day for each teacher to work with a particular group of students to provide “remediation and enrichment.” Klaus expressed his frustration with how this policy was implemented by saying:

I didn't know we had enacted that until the first day of preplanning. And that's very disheartening to be like, this is a major change in policy. This is a major change in my day and my planning. Because that instructional extension time is for remediation and for enrichment, I guess for going beyond. And I'm not quite using that time as wisely as I could be because mainly, I let students make-up any missing work or retake anything during that time.

Klaus was upset because he felt like he had been given this block of time in which he was supposed to be getting to know his students and helping them improve in areas where they were

struggling. However, he was not given the time he felt was appropriate to prepare to do so. He pointed out that the policy was announced via an email he received during the first day of pre-planning, and he was upset because he did not feel like his administration had considered his needs to be a “reflective practitioner” who could spend time preparing to use this time with his students wisely.

The frustration Klaus expressed with how the exclusion of his voice in the implementation of new policies inhibited his abilities to enact a pedagogy that he felt was effective was also voiced by John. During pre-planning faculty meetings last year (2008-2009) John’s superintendent presented the faculty with a Power Point presentation describing a new policy that required teachers to work in “data teams.” These data teams were labeled a “non-negotiable” policy that had to be followed precisely. Each data team was required to select a “power standard,” which was a specific area of the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) that a large number of students struggled with on a previous standardized test. The data team was required to select a specific teaching strategy that they believed would help these students master this element of the GPS. Teachers were then required to make post-tests for each unit that would provide the data team with information about how the students were progressing in relation to this “power standard.” When I asked John what happened if the teaching strategy they had chosen to implement did not appear to be effective, he grew animated as he said, “what we’re told time and time again is no matter what along the way with those forms of assessment, we are never allowed to take out the teaching strategy that we chose.”

John was frustrated because he was being required to continue to implement a teaching strategy that he knew was ineffective simply because a county policy says that he has to do so. It is counterintuitive. As a dedicated teacher, who is concerned with providing his students with the

best instruction possible, John bristles at being told to do something that his professional judgment tells him is ineffective. In John's opinion, "the whole thing [the data team policy] is testing to see what is 'best practice.' And it's not about the kids. It's about finding evidence of best practice." Teachers and administrators alike can agree that finding effective ways to address areas in which students struggle is sound pedagogy. However, the search for effective teaching practices should not include requiring teachers to ignore their professional judgments in order to collect data to support a testing initiative. The increased focus on high stakes testing is an issue that the teachers who participated in this study expressed frustration with during each of the interview sessions.

The Influences of High Stakes Testing

In chapter two, I explored the literature discussing the influences of the ever-increasing focus on high stakes testing. Cuban's (2009) work discussed the tension between enacting a teacher-centered pedagogy, which relies on the transmission of knowledge, and teaching from a student-centered stance that seeks to prepare students to be independent decision makers. In the beginning of this chapter, I provided descriptions of the teachers who participated in this study in order to demonstrate that each of these teachers prefers to teach from a student-centered stance. Their goals for their students are aligned with the objective of helping students learn to think critically. However, these teachers are feeling the pressure to prepare their students to perform well on standardized tests. In spite of the student-centered pedagogy they prefer to enact, the pressures of high stakes testing have influenced the instructional decisions made by each of these teachers. In the following sections, I draw upon the participants' experiences to discuss the influences of high stakes tests and standardization on their experiences as professionals and the instructional decisions they make.

A Tension Between Two Agendas

In chapter one, I discussed the gulf that Bakhtin's (1981) theory of language exposed between authoritative and internally persuasive discourse. The divide between these forms of discourse is, in many ways, similar to the chasm that separates two contrasting agendas that are present in the secondary English classroom. Talking with the teachers who participated in this study was integral to my ability to come to a better understanding of the tension that exists between the agendas of preparing students to succeed on high stakes tests and the agenda of preparing students to leave the high school English classroom with the skills they need to think critically and independently.

This tension became very clear to me during my discussions with Caroline. As we were discussing the benchmark testing policy that had been implemented in her county, Caroline lamented the reality that so much of her instructional time was being spent focused on having students take the benchmark tests. In fact, during the second interview, she said, "I spend thirty days alone out of my year testing them with standardized testing. We calculated it last year because we got really fired up in my classes about the benchmarks. Because they had to do a pre-test, and then they have the benchmark, and then they have to do the post-test, which is a final." When I asked her how to say more about this, she replied, "I get frustrated that I only get them for 150 days and I'm supposed to have them for 180. I have found it more difficult to do everything I think is important and still prepare them for the tests." The amount of instructional time being devoted to the administration of standardized tests is alarming. The problem losing of instructional time to testing initiatives is exacerbated by the class time teachers lose each year to school activities such as pep rallies, assemblies, students leaving early to attend sporting events, and myriad other activities that are part of the high school experience.

I do not want to paint a picture of Caroline that suggests she is a radical who does not believe in assessment or any forms of accountability. In fact, she stated, “I think that there are times when I need to be held accountable, I agree with that. And I think there are times when my students need to be held accountable.” However, Caroline worries about the implications of the focus on high stakes testing. During the third interview, we returned to the topic of her county’s benchmark testing policy, and she shared her fears with me by saying:

But my fear is, is at what cost does a benchmark come in my classroom? So I almost feel like I've got two agendas going on in my classroom at one time and I'm having for the past few years a very difficult time of merging those two agendas together. Of making sure my students are successful on the standardized test, but at the same time still teaching the things that I feel are important or the critical ones that are social justice, the critical thinking, reflective thinking.

The tension between these two agendas can become prohibitive. It can lead teachers down the path of focusing on skill and drill test preparation activities that are more easily served by a teacher-centered pedagogy. Or, teachers who have the ability to be creative can learn to work within the standards and still teach from a student-centered stance.

Caroline serves as an example of a teacher who works to overcome the tension pulling her in the direction of a teacher-centered pedagogy that serves the test-driven agenda that her county administrators appear to bring to their discussions of policy with teachers. Caroline pointed out that she “can still meet the curriculum that needs to be taught before this test but [she] can also weave in, you know, the things that [she] wants to weave in.” When I asked her how she navigates this difficult terrain, she shared her belief that making the lessons relevant to students’ lives was the key by saying:

Ok, I can do the skill and drill and I can review those kinds of things [such as literary terms or vocabulary] but how can I include the practical applications. The issue with the tragic hero and looking at voices that might be silent or might not be present or might be silenced by power in Oedipus will be, like, I'm still teaching Oedipus and I'm still getting across that idea of tragic hero and I'm still teaching all those stupid literary terms that they have to know. But then we can also look at it critically. So it's not just reading a story and answering the questions at the end of it. But actually thinking critically and giving them critical questions.

When Caroline teaches texts that are mandated by her county's curriculum guide, such as *Oedipus Rex*, she draw upon the social justice lens that forms the foundation for her teaching philosophy to engage her students in activities that will ask them to view the text with a critical eye and look for issues of power at work in the play. By doing so, she can support the GPS goal of having students understand a literary term, such as tragic hero, while also supporting her agenda of fostering critical thinking skills in her students. This is, however, no easy task. It is hard work, and it is hard work that must be accomplished on a time-line that is abbreviated by losing instructional days to her county's benchmark testing initiative. This work is made even more difficult by the standardization of curricula that has appears to value the mastery of low-level skills instead of higher-level critical thinking skills.

Teaching for Mastery of Low-Level Skills

As the curricula in schools become more standardized, it has become easier for teachers to focus their instructional activities that will prepare students to succeed on high stakes tests. Caroline and the other teachers who participated in this study could reduce the amount of work they do to prepare for their classes by teaching from the pacing guides provided by their

counties, utilizing worksheets provided by textbook companies, and teaching from other packaged instructional materials designed to focus on the test preparation activities.

Jenny, who is currently teaching an eleventh grade class that includes a focus on preparing her students to succeed on a state-mandated standardized writing test, provided an example of how much easier it can be to focus on formulaic classroom activities designed to teach students how to take a standardized test. When I asked her to describe how preparing her students for this test was influencing her lessons, she pointed out that her class would spend “two days drilling” during the next week and “spend 100 percent of our class time looking at past writing prompts, some essays that received good scores, some essays that received excellent scores, some essays that those students did not meet the expectation.” Each of the teachers who participated in this study felt that they had a duty to their students to give them the skills they would need to succeed on these tests. They felt that they would be doing their students a disservice if they did not spend some time focusing on test taking skills at some point during the semester.

Jenny, however, admitted to taking this preparation one step further. When I asked her to describe how she prepared her students for this writing test, she said:

I even go as far as tell them, you know, because it's persuasives [persuasive essays] that they are going to be asked to argue one side or the other and we don't know the idea of course, but, or the topic, but I even tell them don't even necessarily argue the direction that you feel. You know, if it's about dress code, the majority of my kids do not want dress code. But, can't you think of a lot of good reasons that a school should have a dress code. Why don't you argue that? Because that's going to be the easiest to argue and that's going to get you through the test.

Jenny's desire to help her students get through the test and receive an acceptable score is understandable. A teacher's job is to help his or her students succeed. However, the pressure teachers feel to serve the agenda of high stakes testing can, sometimes, lead them to do things that may not be aligned with their teaching philosophies. In Jenny's case, she even went so far as to encourage her students to write essays that would include the answer that might be the most closely aligned with what the essay graders want to hear. Jenny admitted, "I tell them to abandon their personal thoughts and write the best essay they can to pass the test." It is important to note that Jenny was not asking her students to argue for a point of view they disagreed with in order to bolster their debate skills. She was asking her students to craft arguments that would be more likely to appease the people grading the essays in order to increase their chances of passing the test.

I don't want to give the impression that Jenny routinely engages in this sort of teaching. In fact, when I asked Jenny to describe her goals for her students during our first interview, she said:

I want them to walk into my room and using what we read and what we write about and what we look at and what we talk about, I want them to understand who they are better.

Are they ever going to know truly who they are? I don't know if any of us know that.

Especially not at 16 and 17. But I want them to understand more about what they believe and why they believe it.

Jenny's story demonstrates how easy it is for teachers to succumb to the pressure of high stakes tests. She referred to spending this time as "making sure that they [her students] can jump through that hoop and pass the test." Although she wants her students to leave her classroom with the ability to think critically and truly understand why they view the world in a particular

way, Jenny felt that it was necessary to abandon those goals for a few days during the semester in order to help her students master the low-level skill of passing a standardized writing test.

It is interesting that Jenny was willing to share that story with me. Each of these teachers seemed concerned with presenting the image of being dedicated to preparing students to think critically. They all discussed feeling the pressure to prepare students to succeed on high stakes tests. Only Jenny, however, shared an example of how that pressure led her to compromise those goals for period of time. Other teachers spoke of spending small amounts of class time teaching students how to take multiple choice tests and other forms of test preparation, but they inevitably re-directed these portions of the interviews to point out that they believe the skills assessed on these tests are low-level skills that do not prepare students to think critically.

Maggie provided a compelling discussion of the tension she feels regarding spending instructional time on test-preparation activities. She noted that it is common among the teachers in her department to spend large amounts of time engaging students in activities that are designed to prepare students specifically for taking standardized tests. While she could not name specific activities employed by specific teachers, she said she felt that the attitude in the department had “bent towards getting some better test scores.” Maggie feels the pull towards teaching her students how to take standardized tests, but she has trended towards eliminating these activities in the last two years, in spite of increased pressure to include them. When I asked Maggie to say more about this, she replied:

“I have to examine [other teachers’ rationales], because I don’t want to be up on my little high horse saying oh, ‘this doesn’t matter, that doesn’t matter and it hurts the kids.’ So I really have to examine [those rationales] and like I said, every year when everybody around me starts worrying about doing some test prep and stuff, I have to consider how

much it's beneficial. Sometimes I'm tempted to go do some. And then, most of the time I decide not to because I remember the glazed look in their eyes.

This “glazed look” in the eyes of her students is precisely what Maggie’s instructional philosophy seeks to avoid. She wants her students to be engaged and motivated to learn. In her estimation, lesson focusing on test-preparation activities are ineffective because they do not engage the students in higher-order thinking activities that can draw upon the individual interests of students. Maggie’s beliefs are aligned with Rosenblatt’s (1995) transactional reading theory, which is based upon the “need to prepare the student to engage in the highly personal process of evoking the literary work from the text” (p. 31). Instead of focusing on test preparation activities that make literature an artifact to be studied, Maggie endeavors to get to know her students on a personal level so that she might help them find texts to read and connect with on a personal level. By doing so, she believes she can help them learn about themselves and the world through reading.

The perspectives shared by these teachers is supported by the work of Meier et al. (2004), who have argued that “there is abundant reason to believe that the skills needed to do well on these tests at best reflect a shallow kind of learning and at worst indicate only a better ability to take tests” (Meier et al., 2004, p. 35). So, the question become one of why should teachers do the extra work required to address higher order thinking, by engaging students activities like learning to look at issues of powers in plays like *Oedipus Rex* as Caroline has done or recreating scenes from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* like Sasha did with her students? The answer provided by these teachers is that they see themselves as professionals who have a responsibility to do more than just address low-level skills.

Caroline expressed this sentiment during our first interview by saying, “So, that's the biggest thing that drives me is that I think my obligation is to create responsible citizens for our country. And I don't think responsible citizens just sit back and accept information as is. But they question and they challenge it.” It is this sort of motivation that drives these teachers to do more than simply prepare their students to master low-level skills, such as memorizing grammar rules or literary terms in a vacuum.

Caroline's belief is supported by Rosenblatt's (2005d) admonition that teachers have a “responsibility first of all to develop the habit and the capacity for aesthetic reading” (p. 79). Neither Caroline nor Rosenblatt is suggesting that the English classroom should be a place where any reading should be accepted without question. Caroline wants her students to have the ability to question what they read and learn. Rosenblatt's theory provides a justification for finding ways to draw upon the experiences students bring to printed or spoken texts that make them come alive and engender the motivation necessary to engage in the act of questioning a text.

Learning or Remembering

The lesson plans teachers create are designed to support specific learning objectives. Teachers in Georgia typically include a section in their lesson plans that list specific elements of the GPS that they intend to address in a given lesson. For example, a ninth grade teacher might design a lesson to address Georgia Performance Standard ELA9RL5, which states:

The student understands and acquires new vocabulary and uses it correctly in reading and writing. The student

- a. Identifies and correctly uses idioms, cognates, words with literal and figurative meanings, and patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings or functions.
- b. Uses knowledge of Greek and Latin prefixes, suffixes, and roots to understand the

meanings of new words.

- c. Uses general dictionaries, specialized dictionaries, thesauruses, or related references as needed to increase learning.

Designing a lesson around this standard requires a teacher to make a choice. He or she might decide to focus the lesson on having students memorize common words that indicate a certain tone in a poem. This lesson might include having students memorize a list of words that typically indicate that a poet was attempting to give a poem a melancholy tone. This would certainly be useful knowledge for students to have as they prepare to take a standardized test, such as an End-of-Course-Test, which will ask them to identify the tone of a passage from a poem. Alternatively, this teacher might choose to transact with the GPS and shape it in a way that asks students to generate ideas about how specific words might influence the tone of passage. Both activities would address the skills required by the standard. However, each activity requires students to engage in different kinds of thinking.

A lesson designed to offer students to draw upon their own contexts to make associations with literary devices, such as tone, asks students to engage in the process of transacting with language. This sort of lesson would ask students to engage in the transactional process of selecting “concrete details or parts of the text that had struck them most forcibly” and making connections between those details and their personal experiences (Rosenblatt, 2005d). On the other hand, teachers might ask their students to engage in the process of rote memorization in order to support the goal of being able to recall information during a high stakes assessment.

As Jenny’s experience demonstrates, it is tempting for teachers to engage their students in lessons that focus on memorization when they are faced with the pressures of preparing students to succeed on a standardized test. That pressure increases when these tests are structured in ways

that will require students to access a large number of definitions, such as literary terms. Lessons focused on memorization can, quite often, appear to be an efficient means of covering long lists of terms. However, in *The Book of Learning and Forgetting*, Frank Smith (1998) argued that items learned through rote memorization “will be learned slowly and doomed to rapid forgetting unless they are rapidly attached to a framework of knowledge that we already possess” (p. 37). In Smith’s estimation, high stakes tests value memorization, which does not provide opportunities for students to access higher order thinking skills that will allow them think deeply and retain information. Smith’s argument that new information needs to be connected with prior experience resonates with Rosenblatt’s (1995) belief that students’ past experiences function as “the raw materials” that facilitate meaning making (p. 25). John echoed this sentiment when I asked him if he saw a difference between the types of learning activities he might engage his students in by saying:

Yes. I call one memorizing, banking, depositing, dumping, whatever, all those terms you would see. And the other thing [critical thinking] I consider learning. I don’t consider the other thing an even type of learning. I just don’t. I consider that just absorbing something and regurgitating it on whatever form you’re asking them to do it. I don’t think that’s learning. It’s memorizing. Or parroting.

John’s response indicates that he does not view memorization as an effective means of learning. His students might be able to retain information long enough to remember terms and pick them out of a reading passage on a test, but he indicated that he does not believe this amounts to learning the higher-order skill of being able to think critically. John’s response is supported by Rosenblatt’s (2005d) argument that the educational and informative values of literature “often fail to emerge at all if the texts are offered as the means for the demonstration of reading skills”

(p. 83). When considered in concert with one another, the beliefs of John and Rosenblatt come together to clarify the value of seeing literature as a tool that can help students move beyond the basic skills of demonstrating reading ability and proficiency with identifying literary terms.

When I asked Walter to describe what kinds of skills he thought standardized tests assess during our third interview, he replied, “basic skills. One hundred percent basic. All the standardized tests that I’ve come across, I’ve never seen one that really, really probed critical thought.” Earlier in the interview, Walter had made it clear to me that he values a discussion-based approach to teaching that sought to go beyond the basic skills. He allowed that students have to have basic skills, or the ability to answer “black and white” questions that could only be answered if students knew the basics. However, his belief in the importance of critical thinking drives his teaching and keeps him motivated to stay in the profession. When I asked Walter to explain why he thought it was important to move beyond the basics with the students, he replied:

It took me awhile to realize that the only way for me to survive as a teacher was to do what was comfortable for me. And I realized that the black and white was not something that was going to work if I were to stay in this profession. And I think it takes a lot of self, you have to be very, very self-reflective about what you're doing. And I don't think that all teachers are like that. I think that some teachers will just fall into the trap of the veteran teacher comes in and say, hey, here is this notebook, follow this. And so they get that notebook and they follow it and it's easy. And it works—the kids do their work, the kids probably get the material to an extent. And they say hey, yeah, this teaching thing isn't so hard. And so I think that a lot of it it's a perpetuating cycle. I think it my be redundant, but...it's like the older teachers, the veteran teachers have this set method of teaching and in trying to do helpful things for the incoming teachers, they're in actuality

hurting the students.”

Walter’s response indicates that he believes focus on the “black and white” hurts the students because instruction stops at the basic level and does not ever focus on activities that foster critical thinking. Moreover, Walter believes that teaching only basic skills at a memorization level makes teaching an unrewarding job—a job that he is not interested in having.

The struggle, then, is for teachers like Walter to find the time and motivation to be creative thinkers who can work within standards like the GPS to engage their students in activities that amount to more than “parroting” information. However, the pressure to focus on test-preparation activities in the classroom makes moving beyond basic skills that are easily measured by standardized tests difficult for teachers.

Caroline made this point clear to me as we discussed the benchmark testing policy that had “trickled down” to her from county administrators. Caroline pointed out that, “at the end of the day [her school] has to market itself as a world class school, whatever that means.” When I asked her what I thought she thought her administration meant by “world class school,” she replied:

That we meet standards that are set the by nation and the state. So we can look at our numbers and say well, our English department in our school is the highest—has the highest scores on the EOCT's each year. That's something that we can show to parents or show to legislature and say, we are doing what we're supposed to do.”

I asked Caroline if she believed that high test scores were an indicator that a school was doing a good job. Her belief that test scores do not necessarily indicate that schools are successful and students are learning became clear as she replied emphatically, “No, it just means our students can take tests.” In spite of her belief that test scores are not necessarily the best evidence of

student learning, Caroline, like the other teachers who participated in this study, feels the pressure to teach curricula that are becoming increasingly narrow and driven by high stakes testing. Each of these teachers lamented the reduced opportunities they see for engaging their students in instructional activities designed to foster critical thinking skills. The frustration they expressed with policies that favor mastery of low-level, memorization-based skills highlights the problems that arise when high stakes tests dominate the curricula in schools.

The Problem of Test-Driven Curricula

John has seen the increased focus on high stakes tests manifest itself in alarming ways. During the month of November (2009), the students in John's school who failed to pass their End-of Course-Tests the previous year began going to remediation tutoring sessions during the school day. John was one of the teachers required to run these thirty-minute tutoring sessions during his planning period. Having students attend tutoring sessions prior to re-taking the End-of-Course test sounds innocuous enough. However, these students are pulled from their elective classes in order to attend these sessions. The not so implicit message being sent by the administrators in John's county is that subjects without an End-of-Course-Test are expendable. John believes this message is having damaging effects on his students.

As John and I were discussing his belief in the importance of having class discussions that could foster critical thinking, he grew frustrated as he said, "The thing is—by eleventh grade I have soul-deadened kids." Then, he went on to explain by saying:

And to ask them to be active participants in this, to ask them or to provide them like this blurring of hierarchies and ask them to take control of some of their own ideas and language and to do self-selected projects and what interests you and things of that nature, they don't know what the hell you're talking about. They don't know, they may

understand words come out of your mouth, but they've never seen that. Or if they have, they don't believe in it. They don't believe in themselves because they've been deadened. Many of them don't believe in themselves for other obstacles they've met in high school or school. They don't believe in this as something that actually happen in the classroom and they don't really know what it's like to have life and energy and passion in learning because it's been so many years. So when you offer that up it often flops. It often meets with resistance, the very kids that you think would want it the most, resist it. And they say give me my worksheet. Tell me what to do. And it is hard day after day after day to try to fight that when you're human yourself and sometimes you almost want to be like, you know what, fine, here's a worksheet. Let me deposit some information and you just spit it back out on that. I don't care with the best of us. And I work with those best of us in my dept. The best of us still talk about how tempted we are to be sucked into that or how we have been sucked into that or at least worked our plans to come close to that. Because the kids just are dead and it's tough. It's tough.

John's frustration is not uncommon, and it should not be interpreted to mean that he has given up on his goal of being a discussion-based teacher who asks his students to assume responsibility for their learning. Instead, I think John's response highlights how frustrating it can be to teach in ways that are not supported by a school culture that is conditioning students to engaging memorization instead of critical thinking. Students are constantly provided with reminders of the value placed on tests scores.

The importance of preparing for high stakes tests is also made clear to teachers who are not required to spend their planning periods running tutoring sessions. When teachers like Caroline plan the units they intend to teach throughout the course of the year, they must consider

the reality of the amount of instructional time they will have. Caroline's experience of losing thirty of her one hundred and fifty instructional days to testing inevitably influences her plans. Her county's desire to laud its high test scores also influences the plans she creates. When I asked her how the testing focus in her county influenced her plans, she replied:

Typically, with language arts it's always going to be the literary terms. The ninth graders are always going to learn the parts of the plot, conflict, all that kind of stuff. Because the thing with standardized testing is you can only really test them on those types of skills.

And then it's going to be grammar and purposes for writing, and things like that.

Recognizing a main idea in passages and stuff. It's the same thing that they've done since they've been in elementary school, I feel. And so, we go over it and we talk about it. But

I try to move on to the more critical aspects of what I think they need to learn.

Caroline works hard to find time to work activities that will help her students see the world from another person's perspective. She often uses journal activities that she can clearly link to the GPS to funnel into classroom discussions, which will draw students into conversations that help them question their own viewpoints. However, time for activities like these can be hard to come by because of testing initiatives.

Breadth Not Depth

Walter's instructional time has also been limited by the time-consuming benchmark testing policy. As I discussed this policy with him, Walter lamented, "now with the bench mark, it does not allow for that [taking time to cover things in-depth]. Because like I said, it's the plowing through. It's the, let's see how much material we can cover. It's the...mile wide and inch deep." Each of the teachers in this study expressed their frustration with the shallow, test-driven curricula that they are being asked to implement.

The concept of curricula driven by high stakes tests and more focused on breadth than depth resonates with Rosenblatt's (2005c) discussion of the problem that occurs when high school students become conditioned to read only for the purpose of comprehending the general meaning of a text. She likened this situation to the problems encountered by beginning readers by arguing:

The beginner, sounding out the words on the printed page without comprehension of their meaning has failed to link the words to experience. Parallel this to the high school student who reads a story or poem or play as an academically and socially required exercise in words. It is something to verbalize about, to summarize, to analyze, but not something to be related to the ongoing stream in his own life. (p. 65)

By narrowing high school curricula to include a myopic focus on test preparation activities students are being trained to see texts as things to decode—puzzles to solve—instead of vehicles for learning about the world. Klaus, who is currently teaching a reading course for students labeled as “struggling readers” provided a compelling discussion of how numbers drive assessment in his county has become.

During the third interview, I asked Klaus to describe how he saw a discussion based class fitting in with the test-drive curricula his school was favoring. He replied by telling me it was hard to convince his administrators that assessments that do not result in measurable, numeric data, are valuable. He grew frustrated as he told me, “if you can't measure it, if you can't put a value on it, if you can't put a score on it. That's a problem. You've got to be able to associate a number with it.” I asked Klaus to explain why he said this, and he told me about a conversation he had with his principal at the end of the fall semester of 2009. His principal had asked him to provide data to assess the students in his reading class. Klaus had not been given any sort of a

standardized assessment to administer to the students in this course. As a result, he could not provide his administration any numeric data to show his students' growth in reading comprehension. He did, however, offer to provide his principal with "student feedback, interviews, and other qualitative data" that he had collected as part of his course assessments. Klaus told me his principal said, "No, I need hard data. I need numbers." Klaus was frustrated by this response because it devalued the work he had been doing to build relationships with his students and assess and address their needs in creative ways. The narrative, non-numerical data he had collected was dismissed as unimportant by his administration. The message was clear: numerical data are the only relevant indicators of progress.

Creativity. Each of these seven teachers discussed the importance of being able to draw upon professional knowledge and creativity to tailor instruction and assessment to meet the needs of their students. As Klaus talked about the trend towards county mandated pacing guides that he hears teachers in other counties talking about, he said:

I hear how they do it in [another county near his own]. One of the things they do is stay on task every single day with the basal reading texts which are mandated curriculum, so that if a student was moved from one classroom to another, overnight, the next day he would be on the same page with the same thing, same topic, same discussion, same questions. And that to me is the most terrifying thing about teaching. If that became a reality.

I asked him what was "terrifying about that, and Klaus replied, "It takes any soul out of teaching. It just absolutely sucks the life out of it." Creativity, for many teachers, is the lifeblood of their craft. Being able to draw upon their creative energy is what drives them to get up in the morning and feel good about going to work.

Creativity is more important now than ever before given the tension between the agenda of producing high test scores and the agenda of engaging students in lessons that will foster critical thinking. During the third interview, I asked Walter to consider reconciling the different agenda that are inherent in a standardized, test-driven curriculum and a curriculum driven by dialogue and critical thinking. Walter expressed his belief that it is important for teachers to be creative in this era dominated by high stakes testing as told me:

I don't think that the two can be reconciled. But I think that that's where the teacher comes in. The teachers got to be innovative enough to figure out a way to do that. Plus care enough to do that and not let the test handcuff them in such a way where they say, 'well, I just can't.' You've got to be creative enough or just buck the system enough and say, we're going to do what we do and we'll let the chips fall where they may. A lot of times that's the case for me. I just say I'm going to do what I do and I'll let the chips fall where they may and I'm just going to hope that these kids pull through for me on the test. Walter's commitment to discussion-based teaching is grounded in his philosophy that students will learn more when they are actively engaged through dialogue with others. This commitment gives him the courage to "buck the system" and hope for the best. He realizes that he is taking a risk. He is in touch with the reality that he could lose his job if his students do not perform well on standardized assessments. However, he believes that what he is doing will help his students succeed on the tests and, more importantly in his estimation, life beyond the classroom.

John also expressed the belief that schools should not be run in ways that squelch creativity and value only scores on tests. In fact, this belief is central to his philosophy of teaching. As we were talking about the trend towards more standardized curricula that has resulted from the increased focus on high stakes testing during the first interview, John was

adamant that he was not interested in working a school environment that became so formulaic that it was similar to working on an assembly line. John expressed this belief by saying:

If they [schools] suddenly became something like, I guess, a factory that was just—ah, something that I was putting out for numbers and test scores. Then yeah, it would be very different. But I would quit tomorrow. Again, if you go back to the beginning of this conversation, if I'm going to spend 50 hours of my week, which of my waking moments is most of my life, I'm not going to give that up to something like numbers, money.

Something that actually, Bob Fecho once said, is a soul deadening life or profession, you know. I just can't do that. I won't do that. I certainly wouldn't do it for the money we're paid.

The freedom to be creative and teach in ways that are responsive to his students' sustains John's motivation to do the difficult work of teaching. The financial security provided by a teacher's salary is not what drives him. Like the six other teachers who participated in this study, finding ways to effectively engage his students in critical thought keeps him fresh, and he bristles at the thought of losing that ability. In many ways, the ability to teach in creative ways brings an element of quality to the teaching profession.

Summary

In the book *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, Robert Pirsig (2005) discussed the struggle to answer the question of how to define quality. As part of this struggle, he came upon the idea that the university is “the Church of Reason” (p. 145). Pirsig fleshed out this concept by writing:

The real University is a state of mind. It is that great heritage of rational thought that has been brought down to us through centuries and which does not occur at any specific

location. It's a state of mind which is regenerated throughout the centuries by a body of people who traditionally carry the title of professor, but even that title is not part of the real University. The real University is nothing less than the continuing body of reason itself. (p. 148).

I happened to be reading this book for a second time while analyzing the data for this study, and my dialogue with the participants in this study shaped my experience as I re-read Pirsig's novel. I had never made the connection between Pirsig's *Church of Reason* and the public school system. However, my transactions with my participants and the experience of re-reading Pirsig's work made me realize that I was also searching to define quality.

In this study, I have been engaged in a search to understand the quality of the discourse of educational policy. I have also been working towards developing an understanding how the quality of policy discourse influences the way schools are being run. The commitment to creativity and critical thinking expressed by these teachers made me consider what *the real School* is. Through talking with these seven teachers, I have learned that I do not think the real School is a place that can be defined by bricks, mortar, tests, or books. The real School is the place where critical thought is fostered—a place where students can learn to reason. Teachers, however, must have the freedom to be creative if they can effectively execute their duties in the real School.

The words encapsulated in the pages of this chapter represent my efforts to foreground the participants' voices in ways that would demonstrate what I have learned about their experiences. Writing this chapter has been a reflexive and recursive process, which began long before I sat down at the keyboard to start composing the words that would chronicle what I have learned from engaging in this research. Throughout work of conducting interviews, writing field

notes, listening to and mapping each interview, writing memos, organizing the data into themes, and exploring those themes to consider the transactional processes that were occurring, I was writing this chapter in my mind and in my notes.

I began this chapter by introducing each of the teachers who participated in this study in order to bring some context to the experiences I used their words to foreground. Using these experiences, I have discussed the ways in which policy mandates have been communicated to these teachers as authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986). Looking across the experiences of John, Maggie, Walter, Sasha, Jenny, Klaus, and Caroline, it becomes clear that these teachers are attempting to engage in dialogue with policies that were designed to resist that dialogue. The experiences shared by these teachers demonstrated the uni-directional flow of communication that is presently governing the discourse of educational policy. Throughout the body of this chapter, I have provided examples my participants shared with me that indicate that the uni-directional flow of communication has resulted in scant opportunities for teachers to have an input on the creation and implementation of policy. Instead, these teachers are being compelled to enact curricula that are often at odds with their pedagogical goals.

The experiences shared by my participants indicate that high stakes testing has negatively influenced their experiences as teachers. The standardization of curricula has created constraints that limit their abilities to engage in the instructional practices that they believe are most effective. After building upon the discussion of the tension between the agenda of high stakes testing and the agenda of fostering critical thinking provided by my participants, I explored the curricular problems that have developed as a result of the increased standardization of schools. These teachers shared their frustration with being compelled to engage in teaching practices that position students as rememberers, instead of critical thinking, reasoning individuals.

In this chapter, I have also focused on the desire to be creative, innovative professionals that each of these teachers shared with me during the data generation process. It is this desire that, I believe, motivates these teachers to get up each morning and continue to immerse themselves in the arduous work of teaching. John's disdain for engaging in formulaic, "soul-deadening" work, which was emblematic of each of the participants' yearning to be seen as creative professionals, highlights one of the most significant concepts in this chapter: The discourse of educational policy must move away from authoritative discourse and become an internally persuasive discourse—a multi-voiced discourse that leaves room for dialogue and mutual shaping. If the discourse of educational policy does not become multi-voiced, it impossible to create a school model that is responsive to the individual needs of students—a *real School* that privileges reason and critical thought over rote memorization and numerical assessment data.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS

“The Church of Reason, like all institutions of the System, is based not on individual strength but upon individual weakness. What’s really demanded in the Church of Reason is not ability, but *inability*. Then you are considered teachable. A truly able person is always a threat.”

—Robert Pirsig

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of how the discourse of standards era policy is influencing the instructional decisions secondary English teachers make and their experiences as professionals. “Transactions between teachers and their students” as Lortie (2002) has pointed out, “have usually been mediated by a third party” (p. 2). This study was designed to explore how the discourse used by administrators and policymakers has mediated the teachers’ experiences and their abilities to engage in dialogue with policy mandates. To facilitate my understanding of these concepts I have drawn upon Bakhtin’s (1981, 1986) theory of language and Rosenblatt’s (1995, 2005) concept of transaction. In the preceding four chapters, I have discussed my rationale for engaging in this study; explicated the theoretical framework underpinning this research; explored the literature discussing the influences of the high stakes testing on American schools; presented a discussion of my methodology and methods; and explored this topic with the help of the voices of seven teachers. In this final chapter, I discuss the implications of my research.

I begin by unpacking the problems I see with the authoritative discourse of educational policy. Then, I describe how this problematic discourse has resulted in a myopic focus on high

stakes testing in the curricula being implemented secondary English classrooms. This description will be followed by a discussion of the implications of this narrow focus for the future of the discourse around educational policy and for teacher education. As I bring this chapter to a close, I discuss my reflections on my research process and the implications of this project for my future research.

Reflections on the Problems of Authoritative Discourse

My memory of my first transaction with Bakhtin's (1981,1986) theory of language remains vivid, even after spending the better part of the last three years reading and re-reading his words. As the opening activity for a doctoral seminar I took on Bakhtin and literacy, Bob Fecho had provided a list of quotes from Bakhtin for the class to respond to in a free-writing activity. I chose the following quote from Bakhtin's (1986a) essay "The Problem of Speech Genres" for my response:

Neutral dictionary meanings of words ensure their common features and guarantee that all speakers of a given language will understand each other, but the use of words in live speech communication is always individual and contextual in nature. (p. 88)

The memory of reading these words has been burned into my consciousness because this moment was when I began to find the words to articulate my thoughts about the ways that our contexts influence the ways we use language.

I had the inkling that Bakhtin's words might help me unpack the concepts that had been bubbling beneath the surface of my consciousness. I did not, however, realize that his words could become the foundation for the research that would come to define the early part of my career as a scholar. Later, when I began to develop an understanding of Bakhtin's concept of authoritative discourse, I realized that I had found one of the things that I had been looking for

when I walked into Fecho's seminar: a framework for understanding how language is used in the discourse of educational policy. Engaging in this research project has been pivotal in my ability to develop an understanding of the implications of the ways authoritative discourse used to communicate educational policy.

The teachers who participated in this study made it clear to me that they believe their administrators communicate the policies implemented in their schools in ways that resist the transactional process of mutual shaping. As Rosenblatt (2005c) has argued, "we draw upon our reservoir of past experience with people and the world" as we make meaning through reading (p. 75). Those past experiences make each reading experience unique. Teachers, for example, have professional knowledge and experiences that shape their efforts to receive and read policy mandates. Those experiences make it difficult for them to accept policies wholesale—without an attempt to reconcile those policies with their instructional philosophies or their goals for their students. Instead, their reservoirs of experience cause them to attempt to enter into dialogue with the directives they receive. However, the experiences of my participants, which I discussed in chapter four, indicate that the discourse used by their administrators "demands," as Bakhtin (1981) wrote, "not only quotation marks but a demarcation even more magisterial" (p. 343). It is a discourse that these teachers must either fully accept or fully reject—at their own peril.

I approached this study with the perspective that administrators would want their teachers to be thoughtful individuals, who are capable of critical thought. My experiences as an English teacher included opportunities to shape the policies being enacted in the high school where I taught. What I have come to realize, however, is that my experiences were quite different from the experiences of my participants. I have learned that teachers who have the capacity to read policy mandates with a critical eye take great risks when they seek to exercise that ability by

engaging in the process of mutual shaping. Sasha's experience of deviating from the county-mandated pacing guide she received provides a clear example of these risks.

The epigraph I used to open this chapter was chosen because it alludes to one of the key implications that I have gleaned from this study: teachers who read policy critically represent a threat to the authoritative word. When these teachers attempt to engage in dialogue with policy—accepting some parts and rejecting others—they undermine the authority contained in the magisterial decrees made by administrators and other educational policymakers.

The top-down flow of policy communication and the limited opportunities to participate in the creation of policy discussed by my participants in chapter four provide support for the argument that the discourse of educational policy is designed to control teachers and prescribe the types of curricula they will enact in their classrooms. The literature I explored in chapter two and the experiences of these teachers I highlighted in chapter four indicate that the one of the chief goals of the discourse of educational policy over the last quarter century has been to ensure that the curricula enacted in schools serve an increased focus on producing high scores on standardized tests. This narrow focus on what counts as teaching and learning in the secondary English classroom has created significant problems with the curricula in schools. Instead of focusing instruction on the development of critical thinking skills, teachers are being pressured to engage their students in instructional activities that are designed to address low-level skills, which are more aligned with memorization than reason and independent thinking.

Implications of Narrow Curricula for Teachers

The focus on high stakes testing has come to dominate the curricula enacted in secondary English classrooms in ways that undermine teachers' abilities to lead their students in the development of the critical thinking skills they need to become successful, independent people

when they leave the high school English classroom. My participants, who are inclined to resist these narrow instructional goals, repeatedly expressed their discontent with being excluded from the discussion of what counts as teaching and learning. The myopic focus on test preparation and skill and drill activities reduces teachers' abilities to function as creative professionals. The importance of creativity in teaching was a topic discussed consistently by each of my participants. However, Sasha provided a compelling statement about the implications of squelching teachers' creative energy. She pointed out that she believed that "teachers are creative people and we want to express ourselves as educators." She went on to say she felt the lack of autonomy and freedom she had was "very stifling." Sasha elaborated on this idea when she told me that she believes this stifling environment was the reason why "we have a revolving door of certified teachers leaving the profession" within three to five years.

Sasha's point addresses one of the key implications of this study: educational stakeholders must find ways to begin to reshape the discourse of educational policy. The constraining nature of the authoritative discourse of educational policy is pushing creative teachers out of the classroom. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) (2002) reported that, based on the most recent statistics available, nearly one third of teachers leave the profession in their first three years and nearly half leave the classroom by their fifth year. The demands of learning to manage a classroom, mastering the material to be taught, and planning engaging lessons for students make teaching an arduous profession.

The hard work of teaching brings little in the way of financial rewards for those who enter the profession. However, the intellectual rewards of teaching can be quite fulfilling. The teachers in this study all discussed the satisfaction they receive when their students succeed. Their experiences suggest that these intellectual rewards are one of the key reasons they

continue to return to their classrooms each fall. But here is the rub: the current discourse of educational policy has created an environment that reduces opportunities for teachers to reap these rewards. Their administrators are not valuing the creativity and desire to engage students in critical thinking skills these teachers bring to their schools. Graves (2002) has argued that “professional control in the classroom continues to lessen and the role of supervisors continues to increase” (p. 41). The experiences shared by the teachers who participated in this study support this argument. They told me that they try to shut their doors and do what they think is best for their students whenever possible. However, teachers cannot, as Graves pointed out, “close the door on prescribed materials, methodologies, and evaluations” (p. 41). The experiences of receiving benchmark testing policies, directives to work in data teams, and prescribed pacing guides my participants discussed in chapter four demonstrate that teachers are being compelled to surrender control of their classrooms to the agendas of politicians and administrators. Moreover, their experiences indicate that their voices are being excluded from the policy discussions that dictate the curricula being delivered in their schools.

Implications for Educational Stakeholders

Teachers, administrators, politicians, educational researchers, and the American public all have an important stake in the effectiveness of our schools. This study foregrounds some significant implications for educational stakeholders. First, if the abysmal teacher retention rate is going to be addressed, educational stakeholders must begin to consider ways to re-conceptualize discourse of educational policy so that it might move away from authoritative discourse and function as what Bakhtin (1981) called internally persuasive discourse. Unlike authoritative discourse, this sort of discourse would be brimming with creativity and productivity. Space must be created for teachers to engage in dialogue with these policies and

exercise their creativity and professional judgment to decide what is best for their students and reshape those policies in ways that will make them useful for them. The experiences discussed by the teachers who participated in this study indicate that there is much work to be done to repair the relationships between teachers and policymakers. Second, teacher educators must take up the mantle of responsibility to prepare future teachers to become active participants in policy discussions once they leave the academy and begin working in their schools. Third, teacher educators, researchers, and in-service teachers who believe that curricula should be focused on addressing critical thinking skills instead of test-driven skill and drill activities must find ways to bring their beliefs to the fore ways that will compel policymakers to see the value in assessments that provide more than numerical data.

Implications for Policy Dialogue

One of the most surprising things that I learned from this research is that teachers are reticent to play an active role in the creation of educational policies. This was an area where my prior experiences were problematic. As a classroom teacher in a rural Appalachian North Carolina town, I had the good fortune of working in school system that did not have mandated pacing guides, benchmark tests, or large meetings during pre-planning where administrators talked about “non-negotiables” using Power Point slides. I was able to teach in ways that were not constrained by oppressive policy mandates. I also felt that the administrators in my county valued my input on policy matters. The adversarial relationship between teachers and administrators described by the participants in my study made it difficult for them to feel the same sense of agency that I had experienced. This acrimonious relationship between teachers and policymakers has serious implications for efforts to move forward and bring teachers’ voices into discussions about policy in schools.

The contentious relationships that have developed between teachers and administrators have created a growing sense of pessimism, which became evident as I talked with my participants. During the third interview session, I asked each teacher what kinds of roles they think teachers can play in the future development of policy. Each of the participants expressed the belief that they saw little room for their voices to influence the policies being enacted in their schools. Jenny pointed out that she simply did not believe that her voice would be heard, and she added, “maybe I just don’t believe in my own power, but I just try to focus on what goes on in my classroom.” Jenny’s doubt was echoed by each of the other teachers I interviewed. John, however, expressed much more than doubt that his voice would actually be heard. When I asked John if he would be willing to take a role in developing policy in his county, he replied that he would, “if I thought, if...society, and No Child Left Behind, and my individual boss's hadn't done all they've done over my lifetime and previous lifetimes to make us feel so powerless and so little and so un-united that I actually believed they would listen.”

The feeling of division and powerlessness that John described is not uncommon in the teaching profession. Britzman’s (2003) work, which discussed many of the cultural myths associated with teaching, highlighted the perception that the “good” teacher passively accepts unfavorable working conditions and does not “seek more of a voice in the governance of schools” (p. 29). This perception persists because teachers are, in many instances, divided. In some cases teachers have chosen this division because they, as Lortie (2002) noted, have not traditionally challenged the organization of public high schools that tends to isolate teachers from one another. Teachers have made it possible for administrators to exert more power over them by tending to shy away from solidarity; this independence does not come without some problems. As Nichols and Berliner’s (2007) research has demonstrated, the pressure teachers are

feeling from administrators and the federal government to push students to succeed on tests has led to talented teachers leaving the profession. Many of the teachers Nichols and Berliner interviewed reported that they “must shoulder the burden of ensuring that their schools receive funding” by producing high test scores (p. 150). Decades of working in isolation, being told what to do, and receiving directives that prescribe how to do it have conditioned teachers to acquiesce to the authoritative discourse of educational policy.

The experiences shared by the participants in this study indicate that teachers when choose to deviate from policies they disagree with, they typically do so behind the closed doors of their classrooms. They hope that their administrators will be too busy to check in on them. Like Walter, they cross their fingers and hope that their students will “come through for them” with acceptable scores on test day. There is much work to be done if there is to be any hope of making the discourse of policy a transactional discourse—one that is part of an organic paradigm that sees individuals and their environments in process instead of being static objects acted upon (Rosenblatt, 2005b).

Bakhtin’s notion of internally persuasive discourse leaves room for this to occur. As Bakhtin (1986) argued, “the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else’s” (p. 345). Its multi-voiced quality is fraught with creativity and productivity. However, policymakers must create spaces for teachers’ voices to be heard, and they must give them some assurances that their voices *will actually* be heard. The teachers who participated in this study made it clear that they would be unwilling to raise their voices without concrete assurances that their voices would be valued. Therefore, administrators and policymakers must begin to reconceptualize the discourse they use to communicate with teachers, and they must be willing to offer assurances to teachers that will convince them that their professional input will be valued.

Implications for Leadership Education

When I began this project, I had little knowledge about the language school administrators use to communicate policies in their schools. My frame of reference was limited to my experiences teaching in a small town, which was a place that in many ways reinforced the homey stereotypes of small town life. The administrators in my county were easy to talk with, and they preferred to keep the discourse civil and free of a lot of jargon, buzzwords, and sweeping directives. The big business model that seems to permeate the counties where my participants are working is very different from what I had experienced. If I were to extend this business model metaphor to the county where I taught, I would characterize the school system in that county as a family business—one where you can walk into the office, put your feet on the coffee table, and have a chat with your grandparents, who are the folks making the decisions. The conversations were friendly, and I felt like my input was valued.

The literature discussing the policy mandates of the standards period, which I discussed in chapter two, foreshadowed the differences my participants would share with me during the interviews I conducted in this study. However, I did not really begin to understand the strikingly different kinds of discourse that these teachers were experiencing until I had conducted and reflected upon the interviews. I have come to realize that the problematic discourse employed by administrators has significant implications. When administrators talk to teachers in ways that inhibit dialogue and prohibit teachers from engaging in transactions with policy, the discourse often becomes uncivil and unproductive. School administrators are leaders, and being a good leader requires the ability to talk to people in ways that are civil and productive. Administrators can have objectives and goals that teachers might not be enthusiastic about—they can even have goals that teachers fundamentally disagree with. However, a leader cannot expect to accomplish

his or her objectives if they are conveyed in ways that create adversarial relationships with the people charged with doing the work necessary to achieve those objectives.

One way to ameliorate the problems that arise when teachers and administrators have differences of opinion about how schools should function would be to educate administrators about how to be aware of the implications of the discourse they employ as they communicate with teachers. An advanced degree is required to hold the position of school administrator, and I believe that a focus on the discourse used to convey policies should be included in degree programs for school administrators. If administrators were given the opportunity to consider the implications of communicating policies through Power Point presentations laden with words like “non-negotiables” they might begin to realize that they are not leading in productive ways.

Admittedly, *might* is the operative word in the previous sentence. Not all administrators will be amenable to the idea that an authoritarian, prescriptive leadership style is not the most effective means of accomplishing the goals they set for their schools. Moreover, individual school leaders must find the leadership style that works for them just as individual teachers must find and develop their own teaching styles. The key, then, is for school administration degree programs to include coursework that will make it possible for administrators to find leadership styles that suit their personalities while still including possibilities for dialogue between administrators and teachers.

In order to make it possible for administrators to strike a balance between their personal leadership styles and the need for dialogue with their teachers, administrators must have the opportunity to learn *with* teachers. Collaboration between teacher education and school administration programs is a vital step in this process. This collaboration could help future administrators see how the discourse employed in policy communication influences teachers’

experiences as professionals. If they are given the opportunity to interrogate their leadership styles and consider how it influences the teachers they lead, they might even begin to see how counterproductive authoritative discourse can be. Students in teacher educational programs would learn from this process as well. Teachers would have the opportunity to develop an understanding of the pressures facing their administrators. Fostering dialogue between teachers and administrators within degree programs would help blur the lines between these two groups and foster an atmosphere of mutual respect and dialogue in schools.

As Hermans (2001) has noted, “an increasingly interconnected world society requires attention to dialogical relationships between cultures” (p. 272). School administrators and teachers represent two distinct cultural groups who are both dedicated to accomplishing the goal of educating students. The individual goals, philosophies, and personalities that members of each of these groups bring with them to their work complicate the relationships that develop between them. However, scaffolding opportunities for these people to enter into dialogue with one another early in their careers would be an effective first step in making the boundaries between these groups more permeable. If the men and women who take on the role of school administrators were able to develop an understanding of how to communicate with teachers through a less prescriptive and authoritative discourse, teachers would have the ability to have input that might make it possible to accomplish the goal of improving schools.

Implications for Teacher Education

The problematic nature of the discourse between teachers and policymakers cannot be addressed without preparing teachers to take on leadership roles in their schools. Both pre-service and in-service teachers need to be educated about the importance of taking on a larger role in the creation and implementation of the policy. If teachers simply continue to acquiesce to

the demands being placed on them, the cultural myth of the self-sacrificing, passive teacher will remain unchallenged. As a result, nothing will change. The tension between the agenda of high stakes testing and the goal of fostering critical thinking in students will only grow stronger and more divisive. Teachers, like Sasha, will only face more scrutiny when they defy policy mandates in isolation. Instead, teachers must be educated about how they might confidently and productively seek a place at the table when policies are being created.

Testing influencing future teachers. The influences of policy mandates that privilege the agenda of high stakes testing reach far beyond the activities that are occurring in classrooms today. The curricula enacted in schools this year will influence the activities that occur in classrooms decades from now. Britzman's (2003) work explored the influences of being a student on those who choose to enter the teaching profession. People who become teachers, Britzman argued, "draw upon their subjective experiences constructed" from the time they have spent sitting in classrooms (p. 27). Each of the teachers who participated in this study told me a story of a teacher who had influenced their concept of what it means to be a teacher. Some of them told me stories about a teacher who had inspired them and provided a model to emulate. Others described things they hated about being in school and told me how they try to be different from the teachers they remember. Regardless of the positive or negative connotations of those experiences, these teachers have been influenced by what they experienced as students, and this has significant implications for future teachers entering the profession.

In the fall of 2009, I experienced these influences while teaching an English education undergraduate course. The students in my class were products of the high stakes testing environment. Each of my students had been conditioned by the focus on preparation for high stakes tests in their high school classes. As I discussed the possibilities of enacting a curriculum

based on a dialogic teaching philosophy, the conversation invariably returned to preparing students to take End-of Course-Tests. These students had internalized the notion that a teacher's chief responsibility is to prepare students to succeed on high stakes tests. They were resistant to the idea that fostering critical thinking skills might be of more importance than preparing students to bubble in answers on tests focused on rote memorization. This is an issue that must be addressed in teacher education courses.

Teacher educators must be prepared to consider the subjective experiences of the students who will populate their classes in the future. Time must be spent considering how to open the minds of pre-service teachers to the possibility that the focus on high stakes tests should not dominate the instructional activities they will enact in their classes once they complete their coursework and enter the classroom. Moreover, these students must be educated about the roles they might play in changing this myopic focus on what counts as teaching and learning.

Preparing teachers for leadership roles. Teachers cannot be expected to participate in the discourse of educational policy without proper preparation. Researchers and teacher educators have a responsibility to seek out ways to prepare pre-service and in-service teachers to take on a role in the creation of policy. Each of the teachers in this study expressed the belief that they were being excluded from policymaking roles in their schools. Franzak's (2008) work exploring how four ninth grade teachers perceived policies in their schools indicated that teachers often fail to "recognize or examine their policymaking roles" (p. 501). Franzak suggested that teachers might have an increased ability to critique policies they view as problematic if they were able to develop an awareness of the roles they can play in the construction and enactment of policy. Teacher educators must begin to seek out ways to prepare

teachers to deal with the reality of teaching in an era dominated by high stakes testing without perpetuating the feeling that teachers have no agency.

If pre-service teacher education courses focus solely on the negative influences of high stakes testing and the problems that arise when the discourse of educational policy functions as authoritative discourse, the students in these courses might reach the conclusion that the situation is hopeless. They might internalize the notion that they have no agency and they must simply acquiesce to the demands being placed on them. However, if discussions of these problems are framed in positive ways, pre-service teachers might enter the field as confident professionals, who are prepared to engage in discussions with policymakers that might lead to change. Teacher educators have responsibility to their students to prepare them to have these conversations.

This preparation could take on many forms. For example, a curriculum development course could include role playing activities in which pre-service teachers prepare and deliver arguments for why they might choose to engage students in instructional activities more focused on critical thinking than rote memorization of literary terms. Programs like the National Writing Project (NWP) can also help prepare teachers to take on the role of competent, confident professionals. Many universities have NWP sites that could run summer institutes and professional development workshops for teachers focused on preparing them to take on increased leadership roles in their schools. Teacher educators might also spend time helping students identify areas of flexibility in policy documents such as the Georgia Performance Standards.

The possibilities become endless if students in teacher preparation courses are given the opportunity to spend time with students in school administration courses to engage in these sorts of discussions. Teachers and administrators are expected to work collaboratively in schools;

however, they cannot be expected to effectively do so if some form of preparation to engage in collaboration is not made a part of their experiences in the university setting.

Implications for Educational Research

One of the most engaging things about learning is that it has the power to engender a thirst for more knowledge. Each text I have read over the last several years has led me to other texts I want to read. Like many other people before me, I have found that I know less the more I learn. Conducting research is no different. I have learned much about how the discourse of educational policy influences teachers' experiences as professionals and instructional decisions by engaging in this research. However, reflecting on this project has helped me see that there is much more to be learned about this topic, and I can see several lines of research that I could develop from this study.

I can envision a longitudinal case study that would focus on how the discourse of policy in a single school influences the teachers' experiences and the instructional decisions they make. This study could include observational data from classroom sessions and meetings with administrators to supplement interviews conducted with the teachers and administrators from that school. A project of this kind would allow me to develop a deeper understanding of policy discourse from the perspectives of teachers *and* administrators. I can also see the value in conducting research focusing on how school administrators are prepared to communicate policies to the teachers who work for them. Collaborating with experts from the field of educational leadership might help me add multiple perspectives to my research. Each of these lines of research might be helpful in addressing the problems that arise when curricula serve a narrow focus on what counts as teaching and learning in the secondary English classroom.

Looking Across the Implications

None of the implications I have discussed in this chapter are easily addressed. They each require educational stakeholders to open their minds to new possibilities and engage in substantive reform efforts. Politicians and administrators must be willing to cast a critical eye on the discourses they employ. Teachers must be willing to consider how they might find time to shoulder some of the burden for creating policies. Researchers and teacher educators must be willing to look for new ways to prepare teachers and administrators for these challenges. Perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of the suggestions my participants have helped me conceptualize is the idea that people must be willing to accept the idea that the perspectives of others should be considered in the decision making processes that define schools. Policymakers, administrators, and teachers must be willing to leave their comfort zones and explore the gray areas that exist between the binaries that can often be comforting. This is, admittedly, a difficult thing to do. However, the experiences conveyed by the participants in this study make it clear that it is time for change in how policies are being discussed and enacted in our schools.

Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983), the federal government has taken on a larger role in dictating the policies being enacted in schools. This increased role has resulted in the presence of an increasingly authoritative discourse in the creation and implementation of policies, which all too often excludes teachers' voices from what counts as teaching and learning. Luke and Woods (2009) have argued that educational stakeholders must enter into "a new dialogic contract" in order repair the damage created by neoliberal policies that have contributed to a narrow view of what counts as teaching and learning (p. 216). I wholeheartedly agree with Luke and Woods, and the data generated in this study support the notion that a new discourse around policy is needed. However, this change in the discourse around policy in schools cannot

occur unless teachers and educational researchers can find ways to educate politicians about the problems that exist when they mandate policies without dialogue. In this chapter, I have made some concrete suggestions for how we might move towards the creation of this new dialogic contract. Moreover, education programs for teachers and school administrators must undergo reform at the fundamental level. An overhaul of the systems in place for educating teachers and administrators must take place.

Cuban's (1993) work chronicled reform efforts in American schools since 1880. As part of his discussion, Cuban made the distinction between incremental reforms, which are meant to improve or repair basic structures while leaving them more or less intact, and fundamental reforms. Incremental reforms are similar to adding new software to an existing computer. The computer may be able to do new things with this new software; however, the hardware may not have the power to effectively run these programs. Unlike the former, fundamental reforms "are those that aim to transform—alter permanently—those very same structures" (p. 3). This type of reform would be akin to upgrading a computer's memory capacity. This change in the hardware of the computer alters it significantly. With more memory power, a computer can run more complex programs efficiently. The current structure of colleges of education includes little room for collaborative learning among future teachers and administrators. I believe that this is a fundamental reform that must take place before it will be possible for educational stakeholders to reconceptualize the discourse of educational policy. If teachers and administrators can begin to learn to communicate at this early stage of their careers, they are more likely to begin to see each other as allies instead of adversaries. Moreover, this experience might make them more willing to engage in dialogue with one another in the future. This is a vital reform because American schools cannot be come places where reason and independent critical thought is fostered unless

teachers' abilities to be creative, independent thinking professionals become viewed as an asset instead of a threat.

Reflections on the Research Process

This project has helped me develop an understanding of the how the discourse of educational policy has influenced the experiences of the teachers who participated in this study. In this chapter, and each of the preceding chapters, I have attempted to clarify the ways in which my experiences and education have shaped my understanding of the data generated through this study. The discussion of the data I presented in chapter four and the implications of this research I have highlighted in this chapter are the product of my transactions with the participants. I have embraced the notion that the interview situation is defined by its collaborative nature (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). As a result, it is important to recognize that I have been active presence in the texts that reflect that transactions that occurred during each interview. Moreover, the subjectivities I discussed in chapter three have influenced my understanding of the experiences shared by each of the participants. As Van Manen (1990) and Peshkin (1998) have argued, it would be counterproductive to attempt to ignore the past experiences that have shaped me as I engaged in this research. I have, however, worked to make these subjectivities explicit. I have also attempted to present the experiences of my participants in ways that are consistent with my understandings of the beliefs they shared with me.

This research project, much like any other, is imperfect. Even history, as Hermans and Hermans-Jansen (1995) have argued, "can only be written on the basis of incomplete data" (p. 9). The meaning we make as we experience the world around us will always be in a perpetual state of development. New contexts will cause us to assign new meaning to our experiences. Therefore, perfection and complete data are both unattainable. There will always be ways to

improve the research process and learn more about a topic if researchers consider their theoretical underpinnings and engage in the process of reflecting upon the effectiveness of the tools they employ to conduct their research. After completing this project, I have reflected upon the work I have done to consider how this study could be improved in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this topic.

This study relied on interview data, and after analyzing and reflecting on the data I generated along with my participants I have realized that this study might be strengthened with the addition of observational data. When I designed this study, I decided against including observational data because it requires researchers to interpret the behavior they are witnessing (Stroud & Lee, 2005). Now, however, I see that observational data might have been useful if that data was generated in concert with interview data. The combination of these two data sources might have offered me the ability to compare the participants' descriptions of their experiences with what I might have seen if I was present in their classrooms or in their meetings with administrators. While this combination might have been helpful, I do not think my focus on interview data distracts from my ability to discuss the experiences of these teachers. In fact, I argue that interview data is the key to understanding these teachers' experiences.

Bakhtin's (1986) belief that the ways words are used in live speech color our understanding of them guided the design and implementation of this project, and I believe that the interviews I have conducted were integral in my ability to develop an understanding of these teachers' contexts. Because this study was focused on the teachers' descriptions of their individual experiences, I believe the interview data provided me with the insight I required to develop a deep understanding of the topic. Moreover, as Hermans and Hermans-Jansen (1995) have argued, individuals are agents of meaning who interpret their experiences their own ways,

and these interpretations “may coincide or contrast with any collective meaning” (p. 9). Observational data might have offered me another lens through which to view these experiences; however, only interview data could provide me with the ability to explore the meanings created by my participants and develop an understanding of how these experiences shaped their worldviews.

Focusing on interview data also facilitated my goal of bringing the voices of individual teachers to the foreground. The data presented in chapter four indicated that these teachers are creative and reflective individuals who have much to offer in discussions of educational policy. Patton’s (1990) work has demonstrated the value of creating spaces for teachers’ voices to be heard, and this study has created a place for seven individual teachers to share their experiences. While it would be irresponsible and inconsistent with my theoretical framework to make the claim that the experiences of these teachers is representative of all secondary English teachers in the state of Georgia, the stories told by these teachers are important. They can be used to generate conceptual inferences (Riessman, 2008) about the implications of the authoritative discourse of educational policy. Readers interested in this topic can learn from the experiences of these teachers and, perhaps, use these experiences as a basis for further research.

Conclusion

In this study, I have used the theories of Bakhtin (1981, 1986) and Rosenblatt (1995, 2005) to ground my understanding of how the discourse of educational policy influences teachers’ experiences and abilities to engage in dialogue with policy mandates. These theoretical lenses also played an integral role in the methodology and methods I employed to explore the influences of the discourse of educational policy on the experiences of teachers in an era dominated by high stakes testing. In this chapter, I have drawn upon those theoretical

perspectives to discuss the implications of the authoritative discourse employed by policymakers for educational stakeholders, researchers, and teacher educators. I have also engaged in a reflection on this research and offered some directions for future research that I could develop from this work.

Through this study, I explored the experiences shared by seven teachers from the state of Georgia. This project provided me with the opportunity to develop an understanding of how the discourse of educational policy has influenced the instructional decisions made by these teachers and their experiences as professionals. Data were generated through interviews and personal email communications from August-December, 2009. Transactional Analysis was the main form of data analysis. Drawing on the theories of Bakhtin (1981, 1986) and Rosenblatt (1995, 2005), I combined elements of narrative analysis (Mishler, 1986, 1999; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 2008) and thematic analysis (Maxwell, 2005; Riessman, 2008; Rossman & Rallis, 2003) to craft this data analysis method, which enabled me to focus on the processes of mutual shaping that occurred as teachers read and sought to engage in dialogue with the discourse of educational policy.

In chapter four, I discussed the perspectives shared with me by the participants in order to foreground the participants' experiences with policy mandates in the contexts of their schools. As part of that discussion, I highlighted the ways my participants have shaped my thinking about the topic of the flawed discourse that is currently dominating the creation and implementation of educational policy. The findings of this study suggest the need for educational stakeholders to reconceptualize the discourse of policy and the importance of preparing pre-service and in-service teachers to take on a role in the creation and implementation of policy. The implications of this study extend beyond teacher education. Education programs for school administrators

must also be adjusted to include a focus on the importance of finding ways for administrators to create spaces for teachers to participate in discussions of policy. This study also indicates that the increasing focus on high stakes tests has exerted an unhealthy tension on the curricula being enacted in the secondary English classroom.

In closing I return to Sasha's story, which I introduced as chapter one began, to illustrate the need to address the unhealthy tension created by the authoritative discourse of educational policy. Like a team being pulled passively towards the mud pit in a tug-of-war game, teachers are, too often, forced into passive roles by the discourse of educational policy. This unhealthy tension has resulted in a dearth of dialogue and the exclusion of teachers' voices from discussions of what counts as teaching and learning in our schools. Sasha's experience with attempting to engage in dialogue with the policies being implemented in her county could serve as a cautionary tale for other teachers who might be considering following her example: those teachers could internalize the message that acquiescence is the key to survival. This message dooms their students to being on the receiving end of curricula that position them as rememberers, not independent human beings with the *ability* to engage in critical thinking. Alternatively, Sasha's narrative could serve as a cautionary tale to politicians, administrators, teacher educators, and researchers; these educational stakeholders could read Sasha's story and begin to see that something must change.

Sasha's experience needs to function as a cautionary tale to educational stakeholders—not to teachers who doubt that the curricula they are being forced to enact is going to help their students succeed. Where do we want our teachers like Sasha? Do we want them to continue to leave the regular public school classroom because they are unwilling to acquiesce to policy mandates that they believe are counterproductive? Do we want to relegate our creative teachers

like Caroline, John, Walter, and Jenny to the role of teaching machines who are being told not to draw upon their professional expertise to design creative, engaging lessons that will help their students develop the independent thinking skills necessary to lead productive lives after high school? Can we afford to continue to ignore young teachers, like Klaus, and experienced teachers, like Maggie, who want to play a role in the creation of policies that will meet the needs of their students? Is it in the best interests of our students to allow the notion that the truly able teacher is a threat to go unquestioned? Politicians, policymakers, administrators, and all educational stakeholders must be willing to engage in dialogue about these questions if there is any hope of creating a school environment that will empower both teachers and students and position them as truly able people who will have the critical thinking and reasoning abilities necessary to lead our society in the future.

REFERENCES

- Alvermann, D. E., Phelps, S. F., & Ridgeway, V. G. (2007). *Content area reading and literacy: Succeeding in today's diverse classrooms* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Applebee, A. N. (1996). *Curriculum as conversation: Transforming traditions of teaching and learning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Archakis, A. & Tzanne, A. (2005). Narrative positioning and the construction of situated identities: Evidence from conversations of a group of young people in Greece. *Narrative Inquiry*, 15(2), 267-291.
- Baker, C. (2004). Membership categorization and interview accounts. In D. Silverman (Ed.), *Qualitative research: Theory, method and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 162-176). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). Discourse in the novel. (C. Emerson & M Holquist, Trans.), In M. Holquist (Ed.), *The dialogic imagination: Four essays by M. M. Bakhtin* (pp. 259-422). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1986a). The problem of speech genres. (V. McGee, Trans.), In C. Emerson & M. Holquist, (Eds.), *Speech genres and other late essays* (pp. 60-102). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1986b). From notes made in 1970-71. (V. McGee, Trans.). In C. Emerson & M. Holquist, (Eds.), *Speech genres and other late essays* (pp. 132-158). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Beach, R., Appleman, D., Hynds, & S., Wilhelm, J. (2006). *Teaching literature to*

- adolescents*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Beach, R. & Myers, J. (2001). *Inquiry-based English instruction: Engaging students in life and literature*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Becker, H. S. (2007). *Telling about society*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Berliner, D. C. & Biddle, B. J. (1995). *The manufactured crisis: Myths, fraud, and the attack on America's public schools*. Addison-Wesley: New York.
- Britzman, D. P. (2003). *Practice makes practice: A critical study of learning to teach* (Rev. Ed.). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Brown, R. (1991) Policy and the rationalization of schooling. In. E. H. Hiebert (Ed.), *Literacy for a diverse society: Perspectives, practices, and policies*. (pp. 217-227). New York:
- Cuban, L. (1993). *How teachers taught: Constancy and change in American classrooms 1880-1990* (2nd Edition). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Cuban, L. (2009). *Hugging the middle: How teachers teach in an era of testing and accountability*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1998). Teachers and teaching: Testing policy hypotheses from a National Commission Report. *Educational Researcher*, 27(1), 5-15.
- Delpit, L. (2006). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. (Rev ed.). New York: The New Press.
- Dewey, J. (1902). *The child and the curriculum*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Dewey, J. (1988). *The quest for certainty: The later works 1925-1953, Vol. 4: 1929*.
- J.A. Boydston & H. F. Simon (Eds.), Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Edmondson, J. (2000). *America reads: A crucial policy analysis*. Newark, DE: International

Reading Association.

Fecho, B. (2004). *Is this English?: Race, language, and culture in the classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Fecho, B., & Botzakis, S. (2007). Feasts of becoming: Imagining a literacy classroom based on dialogic beliefs. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 50(7), 548-558.

Fecho, B., Graham, P., & Hudson-Ross, S. (2005). Appreciating the wobble: Teacher research, professional development, and figured worlds. *English Education*, 37(3), 174-199.

Fecho, B., & Meacham, S. (2007). Learning to play and playing to learn: Research sites as transactional spaces. In C. Lewis, P. Enciso, & E. B. Moje (Eds.), *Identity, agency, and power: Reframing sociocultural research on literacy* (pp. 164-187). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Fecho, B., Mallozzi, C. A., & Schultz, K. (2007). Policy and adolescent literacy. In B. Guzzetti (Ed.), *Literacy for the new millennium: Vol. 3. Adolescent Literacy* (pp. 37-52). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Franciosi, R. J. (2004). *The rise and fall of American public schools: The political economy of public education in the twentieth century*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Franzak, J. K. (2008). On the margins in a high-performing school: Policy and the struggling reader. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 42(4), p. 466-505.

Freeman, M., deMarrais, K., Preissle, J., Roulston, K., & St. Pierre, E. A. (2007) Standards of evidence in qualitative research: An incitement to discourse, *Educational Researcher*, 36(1), 25-32.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). New York: Continuum International.

- Freire, P. (2005). *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare to teach* (Rev. ed.). Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Gallaher, K. (2009). *Readicide: How schools are killing reading and what you can do about it*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Georgia Department of Education. Grade 9 English Language Arts Standards. Retrieved from: <http://www.georgiastandards.org/english.aspx>.
- Gee, J. P. (2008). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses* (3rd edition). London: Routledge.
- Giordano, G. (2005). *How testing came to dominate American schools*. New York: Peterlang.
- Gonzalez, N., Moll, L., & Amanti, C. (Eds.). (2005). *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practices in household, communities, and classrooms*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Graves, D. H. (2002). *Testing is not teaching: What should count in education*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Greene, M. (1978). *Landscapes of learning*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hargreaves, A. (2003) *Teaching in the knowledge society: Education in the age of insecurity*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Harste, J. C. (2001). What education as inquiry is and isn't. In S. Boran & B. Comber (Eds.), *Critiquing whole language and classroom inquiry*. (pp. 1-17). Urbana, IL: NCTE
- Heath, S. B. & Street, B. V. (Mills, M.). (2008). *Ethnography: Approaches to language and literacy research*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hermans, H. J. M. (2001). The dialogical self: Toward a theory of personal and cultural positioning. *Cultural Psychology*, 7(3), 243-281. doi: 10.1177/1354067X0173001

- Hermans, H. J. M. & Hermans- Jansen, E. (1995). *Self-narratives: The construction of meaning in psychotherapy*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Hillocks, G. (1982). Inquiry and the composing process: Theory and research. *College English*, 44(7), 659-673.
- Hillocks, G. (2002). *The testing trap: How state writing assessments control learning*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Holland, D., Lachiotte, W., Skinner, D. Cain, C. (1998). *Identity and agency in cultural worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Holstein, J. A. & Gubrium, J. F. (1995). *The active interview*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- House, E. R. (1998). *Schools for Sale: Why free market policies won't improve America's schools and what will*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Husserl, E. (1970). *The idea of phenomenology*. The Hague. Martinus Nijhoff.
- Kohn, A. (2000). *The schools our children deserve: Moving beyond traditional classrooms and "tougher standards."* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lagemann, E. C. (2000). *An elusive science: The troubling history of education research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lensmire, T. J. (2000). *Powerful writing: Responsible teaching*. Columbia: Teachers College Press.
- Lipman, P. (2004). *High stakes education: Inequality, globalization, and urban school reform*. New York: Routledge.
- Lortie, D. C. (2002). *Schoolteacher*. (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Luke, A. (2004). "Teaching after the market: From commodity to cosmopolitan" *Teachers College Record*, 106, 1422- 1433.
- Luke, A. & Woods, A. (2009). Policy and adolescent literacy. In L. Christenbury, R. Bomer, & P. Smagorinsky (Eds.), *Handbook of adolescent literacy research* (pp.197-219). New York: Guildford.
- Maeroff, G. I. (1988). *The empowerment of teachers: Overcoming the crisis of confidence*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Marshall, J. (2009). Divided against ourselves: Standards, assessments, and adolescent literacy. In L. Christenbury, R. Bomer, & P. Smagorinsky (Eds.), *Handbook of adolescent literacy research* (pp. 113-125). New York: Guildford.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- McQuillan, J. (1998). *The literacy crisis: False claims, real solutions*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Mehan, H. (1979). *Learning lessons*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Meier, D., Kohn, A., Darling-Hammond, L.,Sizer, T. R., & Wood, G. (2004). *Many children left behind: How the No Child Left Behind Act is damaging our children and our schools*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Mishler, E. G. (1986). *Research interviewing: Context and narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mishler, E. G. (1999). *Storylines: Craftartists' narratives of identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Myers, M. (1996). *Changing our minds: Negotiating English and literacy*. Urbana, IL: NCTE

- National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperatives for educational reform*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) (2002). Unraveling the "teacher shortage" problem: Teacher retention is the key. A symposium of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future and NCTAF State Partners, Washington, D.C., August 22, 2002. Retrieved from http://www.ncsu.edu/mentorjunction/text_files/teacher_retentionsymposium.pdf
- North Carolina Local Education Associations. (n.d.). Drop Out Rates. Retrieved from <http://001ncd.beza.hostingrails.com/public/show/102>.
- Nichols, S. L. & Berliner, D. C. (2007). *Collateral damage: How high stakes testing corrupts America's schools*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard.
- Nystrand, M. (with Gamoran, A., Kachur, R., & Prendergast, C.). (1997). *Opening dialogue: Understanding the dynamics of language and learning in the English classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- O'Connor, K. E. (2007). Reflection, interpretation and scholarly roletaking: Affirming the self in educational research. *Reflective Practice*, 8(2), 255-286.
- Olsen, B. & Sexton, D. (2009). Threat rigidity, school reform, and how teachers view their work inside current education policy contexts. *American Education Research Journal* 46, 9-44.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Peshkin, A. (1988). In search of subjectivity – One's own. *Educational Researcher*, 17(7), 17 – 22.

- Pirsig, R. M. (2005). *Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance: An inquiry into values*. (25th anniversary ed.). New York: Harper.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 8(1), 5-23.
- Postal, L. (2009, February 9). Orlando-area students learn to escape the FCAT writing “cage.” *Orlando Sentinel.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.orlando-sentinel.com/news/education/orl-fcat0909feb09,0,6440957.story>
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1995). *Literature as exploration* (5th ed.). New York: Modern Language Association.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (2005a). The transactional theory of reading and writing. In *Making meaning with texts* (pp. 1-36). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (2005b). Viewpoints: Transaction versus interaction—A terminological rescue operation. In *Making meaning with texts* (pp. 38-49). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (2005c). The acid test for literature teaching. In *Making meaning with texts* (pp. 62-71). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (2005d). The literary transaction: Evocation and Response. In *Making meaning with texts* (pp. 72-88). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Rossmann, G. B. & Rallis, S. F. (2003). *Learning in the field: An introduction to qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ruth, L. P. (2003). Who has the power? Policymaking and politics in the English language arts. In J. Food, D. Lapp, J. R. Squire & J. M. Jensen (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching the English language arts* (pp. 87-113). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

- Schultz K., & Fecho, B. (2005). Literacies in adolescence: An analysis of policies from the United States and Queensland, Australia. In N. Bascia, A. Cumming, A. Datnow, K. Leithwood, & D. Livingstone (Eds.), *International handbook of educational policy* (pp. 677-694). London: Springer.
- Seashore Louis, K., Febey, K. Schroeder, R. (2005). State-Mandated accountability in high schools: Teachers' interpretations of a new era. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 27(2), 177-204.
- Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Shor, I. (1992). *Empowering education: Critical teaching for social change*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Short, K. G., & Burke, C. L. (2001). Curriculum as inquiry. In S. Boran & B. Comber (Eds.), *Critiquing whole language and classroom inquiry*. (pp. 18- 41). Urbana, IL: NCTE
- Sipe, R. B. (2009). *Adolescent literacy at risk: The impact of standards*. Urbana, IL: NCTE
- Smith, Frank. (1998). *The book of learning and forgetting*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Stroud, C. & Wee, L. (2005). Style, identity, and English language literacy. *Linguistics and Education* 16, 319-337.
- Toll, C. A. (2001). Can teachers and policy makers learn talk to one another? *The Reading Teacher*, 55(4), 318-325).
- U.S. Department of Education. (2001). No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg1.html#sec101>.
- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics. (2009). The condition of education 2009 (NCES 2009-081), Indicator 20. Retrieved from

<http://nces.ed.gov/FastFacts/display.asp?id=16>.

Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

APPENDIX I

PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTION FORM

In each of the sections below, please tell me a little bit about how you would describe your teaching. You can type your descriptions directly in each section. Write as much or as little as you wish to write.

Name:

1) **School Context:** Describe, as best as you can, the school where you are teaching. What kind of community is the school in? Rural, urban, suburban? How many students (roughly)?

Demographics of the student population? How many English teachers are in your department?

All numbers can be estimates:

2) **Classroom Context:** What grades are you teaching right now? Do you have to prepare kids for an EOCT or Graduation test? What does your classroom look like? What kind of atmosphere do you try to create? Are there things about your school that make this difficult? What kinds of activities do you prefer to offer kids? Do you get to choose what texts you teach?

3) **Philosophy:** Describe the ideas that you base your teaching on. You don't need to drop theory or names—unless that just makes it easier for you. I'm looking for a description of how you approach teaching. What do you think it's important for kids to learn in your classes? What kind of feeling or atmosphere do you try to create?

APPENDIX II

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview 1: Background, Teaching Story, and Teaching Goals

- Can you tell me about how you became a teacher?
 - Why you entered the profession?
 - Can you tell me about an experience as a student that shaped the way you became a teacher?
- What is different about teaching from your original expectations?
 - Can you give me an example to help me understand the transition?
- What do you want your students to be able to say and do as a result of being in class with you? (Goals)
- What theories and assumptions about teaching form the foundation for the instructional decisions you make?
 - Can you give me an example of an instructional decision you make that worked well or didn't work well?

Interview 2: Dialogue with Policy

- How would you describe the thing you're "supposed to teach" from the perspectives of administrators or policymakers? How does that fit with what you see as the most important things you can teach your students?
- What policies influence your teaching?
 - Can you give me a specific example of that?

- Tell me a little bit about how these policy mandates are discussed in your school.
- Talk a little bit about how you read/understand policy.
- Can you define what policy means to you and how does it influence your daily life?
 - Are there any tacit or interpersonal policies that influence the teaching culture of the school?
 - Can you say more about that?
- Can you tell me about a time when you resisted an administrator's policy mandate?
- It can be difficult to judge teachers based on test scores for obvious reasons, so how can you tell if a teacher is doing a good job? What are things an administrator might do to evaluate a teacher?
 - What would you want to see going on if you walked into my classroom?
- How would your ideas or concepts about policy be different if you had some input in the creation of policy? What about teachers, parents, students?
 - If you built time into your workday to have input, would you do it? Why or why not?

Interview 3: Follow-up and discussion of Dialogic Teaching

- What kinds of things have you been thinking about since our last discussion?
- This interview session will open with a discussion of follow-up questions I identify in the previous interviews.
- We will also discuss the participant's impression of the Fecho and Botzakis (2007) article
 - What questions did the article raise for you?
 - Connections to your teaching?

- How does this sort of teaching fit with the policy mandates that you are experiencing in your school?
- Tell me about a time when you experienced or tried to enact this sort of teaching.
- What is your impression of the concept of a classroom based on dialogic beliefs?
 - What do you see as the affordances and constraints of this sort of teaching?
- What roles do you think teachers can play in shaping policy in the future?