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What happens when veteran and beginner teachers' life histories intersect with high-stakes testing and what does it mean for learners and teaching practice: The making of a culture of fear

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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN VETERAN AND BEGINNER TEACHERS' LIFE

HISTORIES INTERSECT WITH HIGH-STAKES TESTING AND WHAT DOES IT

MEAN FOR LEARNERS AND TEACHING PRACTICE:

THE MAKING OF A CULTURE OF FEAR

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the phenomenon of what happened as Florida's high-stakes accountability system intersected with a beginning and veteran teachers' life histories and different stocks of lifeworldly knowledge at demographically different lifeworld communities. Habermas' (1987) theory of communicative action was used as the theoretical framework to explore what the teachers' responses meant for learners and teaching practice. The research purpose of this study (emphasizing an interpretive approach) sought to gain insights and understandings regarding the phenomenon specifically. The practical purpose (according to critical theory) was to then use the insights gained (enlightenment) in order to contemplate the kinds of steering media and mechanisms needed to support teaching practice (emancipation) that can best satisfy the system (accountability) rationale to increase educational opportunities for all learners regardless of need. Three overarching themes central to learners and teaching practice emerged from the data obtained from interviews, classroom observations, and student products: (a) the greater the lifeworld needs of the school community (e.g., high mobility rate, low socio-economic status) the greater the response in terms of instructional and curricular accommodations designed to increase FCAT test scores; (b) the greater the colonization of the lifeworld perspective by Florida's accountability system rationale, the greater the likelihood that various social actors experienced fear in relation to FCAT; and (c) school reform efforts both past and present (including Florida's high-stakes accountability system) have consistently resulted in less educational opportunity for those learners who need it the most.

DEDICATION

This work stands as a tribute to the unrelenting love and support of my husband, Ron Counsell, whose belief in me has been unfailing; the personal sacrifices made by my family, and the relentless source of unconditional love and inspiration provided by my daughters, Kimberly and Kristen, throughout the course of this journey; and my own unwavering faith in God that has compelled me to continue forward. It has been my sheer determination to fulfill His plan in order to glorify Him as I pursue social justice for all learners within public education today that has been my greatest source of courage, strength, and conviction needed to finish in spite of the obstacles and struggles I have faced. This journey and quest for social justice was only made possible due to the willingness of courageous men, women, and children who participated in this study, placing their own lifeworld experiences in plain view for all to see in order that their voices can be heard and their firsthand experiences shared so that others can know and understand what Florida's high-stakes testing culture has meant for them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would begin by expressing my most sincere appreciation for the hard work and dedication of my entire dissertation committee under the leadership of my co-chairs, Dr. Robert Boody and Dr. Christopher Kliewer. Both co-chairs have afforded me a great deal of their time, energy, and talents needed to guide and facilitate the successful completion of my dissertation.

Dr. Robert Boody has been a constant source of inspiration and encouragement even from the earliest origins of my dissertation, beginning with my pilot study in 2004. He has patiently nurtured my professional growth and the scholarship needed for me to challenge my theoretical and philosophical thinking and understanding about learners and instruction, throughout the course of this journey. His contributions to my understanding of qualitative research and methodology as well as his own command of educational theory and philosophy have been crucial in assisting me in my interpretation and application of Habermas' theory of communicative action as the theoretical framework for my study. His overall contributions have been immense and his support and belief in my potential as a researcher and scholar has meant everything.

Dr. Christopher Kliewer joined my committee at a critical time, generously agreeing to collaborate as my co-chair. His own extensive background as a qualitative researcher has added great depth and expertise to my increased understanding and application of qualitative research and methodology. He has been a continuous source of encouragement and support that has contributed a great deal to my confidence as a researcher and scholar. Together with Dr. Boody, both co-chairs have generously allowed

me the intellectual freedom needed to construct new meanings and understandings in the design, implementation, and interpretations of this study.

Dr. Rheta DeVries has been an ongoing source of comfort and strength throughout my doctoral experience. While many have guided my professional growth and scholarship, none has made me think more directly, deeply, or meaningfully about the very act of thinking itself than Dr. DeVries. Conceptualizing what it means to not only "think," but to think deeply has proven critical and essential to my own understanding and interpretation of the data in this study, as I drew additional insights regarding learners and instruction within high-stakes testing cultures. Her relentless faith in me has meant more than I can say.

Dr. Amy Staples has been a constant source of common sense wisdom and advice on many fronts and has kept me grounded in my own efforts to grow in my understanding of research and scholarship. She exemplifies collegiality in her willingness to collaborate, partner, and support the growth and development of others. Her practicality is matched only by her genuine sincerity in her relationships with others and the important contributions she has made to help me to think thoughtfully about my study.

Dr. John Smith has been source of inspiration since the earliest beginnings in my doctoral experience. Dr. Smith is a kindred spirit to my quest to advance democratic ideals in public education needed to achieve social justice for all learners. Dr. Smith provided the essential philosophical and theoretical foundation related to hermeneutics and critical theory that has become central to this study.

Dr. Martha Reineke has also made important contributions toward my philosophical understanding of the human experience and relevance to public education. She has been a source of encouragement and has been willing to support my efforts in any way possible. Dr. Reineke's equal competence in qualitative research and scholarship has proven helpful as an important resource for added insights and expertise.

I have been most fortunate to have been supported by a committee who individually are equal in their personal abilities, skills, expertise, and competence as researchers and scholars. Regardless of how many times I attempt to thank each member for the contributions each has made, a mere thank you does not seem to suffice. Additionally, I have benefited from the many contributions, mentorship, and support from others within the education community at UNI who are not on my committee. It has now become evident that the best tribute I can make to the many individuals who have mentored me, past and present, is to go out and mentor others as I have fortunately been mentored at UNI.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

At the national level, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 is considered

a landmark in education reform (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). This legislation

was an attempt to improve student achievement and change the culture of America's

schools. President George W. Bush described this legislation as "the cornerstone of my

administration" (as quoted in the U.S. Department of Education, p. 1). The intent of this

legislation is to develop challenging academic content standards, use assessments that

measure those standards, and, consequently, set challenging student achievement

standards in order to ensure that no child will be left behind academically. Under this act,

schools are required to demonstrate incremental, linear progress toward the eventual

achievement of academic proficiency by the year 2014 (NCLB, 2001).

The study described here is rooted in the author's experiences as a teacher in

Florida when Governor Jeb Bush and Lt. Governor Frank Brogan's ambitious A+ Plan

for school reform package was implemented for the first time during the 1999-2000

school year. The intent of this legislation was to increase academic achievement by

holding students, teachers, and schools accountable for student performance (Governor's

Office, n.d.).

At the time that Florida's A+ Plan for school reform was passed, I was teaching in

a pre-k classroom at a public elementary school in Orlando. My colleagues, students, and

I quickly felt the impact of this legislation. The goal that all learners would eventually

score at grade level (or above) on norm-referenced, standardized tests reached an

unprecedented high at every grade level. This expectation is a statistical impossibility. As noted by Brantlinger (2004), "desiring a pie-in-the-sky average…is ultimately unobtainable because averages are by definition unstable" (p. 491). Even if children happen to improve academically, the average will subsequently get pushed up, and as averages rise, some children must, by definition, fall below the newly assigned average.

At the same time that this legislation was passed, rumors began to circulate that mandatory retention was under consideration for as early as the third- or fourth-grade level, based exclusively on test scores rather than using the criteria that had been previously employed for retention decisions (e.g., age of student, classroom performance, social-emotional maturity, developmental needs). Smith and Shepard (1989) state that whenever "narrow tests of competence" are used "as the sole arbiter of accountability, there will be retentions" (p. 232). The fear was that an emphasis on test scores could lead to narrowly defining academic success at the expense of a broader conception of accountability that included observations and anecdotal records, teacher judgments about accomplishments of pupils, portfolios of students' work, interviews with students after significant learning events, reading inventories, running records, and miscue analyses.

During the same school year that Florida's A+ Plan was first implemented, I attended a kindergarten and first-grade team meeting with the school principal to discuss the need to document reading performance for first graders on their report cards. Given that they had no choice concerning the state mandate to hold students accountable for learning based on test scores, the kindergarten and first-grade teachers expressed concern that more written documentation on report cards would be required to demonstrate that

students were making the necessary academic progress needed to ensure future grade-level performance on standardized tests. Therefore, on all subsequent first-grade report cards, leveled books (leveled by the first-grade team using a readability formula based only on the difficulty of vocabulary and sentence length) were ranked and designated as "at grade-level, below grade-level, and above grade-level," to indicate current student reading performance.

The kindergarten and first-grade teachers seemed to be feeling additional pressure as they were increasingly held accountable for student performance. I understood that they did not want teachers and parents in later grades coming to them asking why students were not identified as having potential learning problems while in first grade. However, I felt uncomfortable with this new policy and I raised the concern with regard to labeling young readers who are only six and seven years old according to their differences in readiness and rate of learning. Could this kind of policy in effect punish children unfairly for not performing at an inappropriate level of expectation (i.e., grade-level performance)? Would the use of standardized test scores now subvert the implementation of student portfolios and running records that had been previously employed to assess individual reading skills?

Young learners progress at varying rates of development due to individual developmental patterns in growth and unique personality, learning style, and family background (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). My observations convinced me that the practices that label and grade learners for not meeting expectations could potentially limit allowances for individual differences and varying developmental

progression. This kind of practice would then appear to be more hurtful than helpful in ensuring that every learner is allowed to progress at his or her own rate of development and that individual instructional needs will be met satisfactorily (Katz, 1995; Mallory, 1992, 1994; National Education Goals Panel, 1991; Stroufe, Cooper, & DeHart, 1992).

I shared with colleagues the concern that once the school began sorting learners according to reading levels on student report cards, parents would increasingly react (demand this information without questioning the fairness of this kind of practice). I also suggested that parents might now expect teachers to predict future school performance. This might, in turn, result in the teachers' tendency to retain or diagnose and place more students in special education programs. Despite these kinds of concerns shared by many teachers, the policy went into effect, and children's reading performance was reported according to leveled-readers.

The fears expressed by the first-grade teachers toward accountability based on standardized test scores have since come to pass through state legislation. The Florida legislature recently took an assertive step in an attempt to increase reading proficiency for all students at the third-grade level beginning with the 2002-03 school year. Section 1008.25, Florida Statute [public schools' student progression; remedial instruction; reporting requirements], prohibits social promotion. Social promotion refers to the policy of promoting students without demonstrating achievement (Governor's Office, n.d.). It requires districts to set standards that students must achieve to be advanced to a higher grade.

The law specifically targets accountability on reading proficiency at the end of the third grade. Reading achievement is determined by a minimum Level 2 reading score or higher on the FCAT, with six exceptions of good cause for promotion that can be applied to avoid retention: (a) Limited English proficient students who have had less than two years of instruction in an ESOL program; (b) students with disabilities whose IEP indicates that participation in statewide assessment is not appropriate; (c) students who demonstrate an acceptable level of performance on an alternative standardized reading assessment approved by the State Board of Education; (d) students who demonstrate, through a student portfolio, that they are reading on grade level as evidenced by demonstration of mastery of the Sunshine State Standards in reading equal to at least a Level 2 performance on the FCAT; (e) students with disabilities who participate in FCAT and who have an IEP or a 504 Plan that reflects that they have received intensive remediation in reading for more than two years but still demonstrate a deficiency in reading and were previously retained in grades k-2; and (f) any third-grade student receiving intensive remediation in reading two or more years but still has deficiency in reading and previously retained k-2 for a total of two years. If promoted under this exemption, intensive reading instruction must include an altered instructional day based on an AIP that includes specialized diagnostic information and specific reading strategies [1008.25(6)(b)2, Florida Statutes].

Out of 188,107 third graders who took the FCAT during the 2002-03 school year, 33,000 or 20% of students scored below the Level 2 requirement in reading that is needed for promotion (*Associated Press*, 2003). As noted by Brantlinger (2004), this legislation

resulted in five times more third-graders retained throughout the state than during the previous year.

Furthermore, the Florida Board of Education has now asked the state legislature to mandate grade-level retention in every grade for students with low test scores. The proposed retention policy would become the most extensive in the country. According to the *FairTest Examiner* (2004-05), that would have resulted in more than 400,000 Florida children, disproportionately minority and low-income, held back during the 2003-04 school year if the proposal had been in effect.

Those who oppose social promotion suggest that it increases dropout rates, fails to increase student achievement, and creates high school graduates who lack the necessary skills for employment (e.g., Denton, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 1999). They argue that when learning deficits occur early for young learners, those students fall farther behind with each consecutive school year (Governor's Office, n.d.). From this perspective, many educators and parents justify retention, insisting that children who are behind their age-mates socially or cognitively simply require additional time to mature before progressing to the next grade and should therefore be retained (Reynolds, 1992; Shepard & Smith, 1985).

The opposing view argues that retention practices generally fail to demonstrate a positive effect on student achievement, increase drop-out rate among students retained, and increase discipline problems in school (Goodlad, 1954; Holmes, 1989; Owings & Kaplan, 2001). Although the argument is made that academic gains are experienced during the first year after retention (Baener & Holly, 1982; Elligett & Tocco, 1983;

Greene & Winters, 2004), these gains are generally small and diminish within three years (Hauser, 1999; Holmes, 1989; Karweit, 1991; Roderick, 1995; Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005; Thompson & Cunningham, 2000). Some developmental psychologists express concerns that grade-level retention stifles young children's cognitive and social development (Morrison, Griffith, & Alberts, 1997), with stigmatizing effects that result in lowered expectations by teachers and parents as well as lowered self-expectations by the child (Shepard,1989; Smith & Shepard,1988).

Still others (Allensworth, 2005; Hong & Raudenbush, 2005; Johnson, 2001; Karweit, 1992; Leinhardt, 1980; Peterson, 1989; Reynolds, 1992; Smink, 2001; Smith & Shepard, 1987; Tanner & Galis, 1997; Wheelock, 1998) insist that both social promotion and retention are equally inadequate responses to low student achievement simply because both fail to prevent learning difficulties experienced by students. Karweit (1991) concludes, "Neither retention nor social promotion are [sic] satisfactory responses to the need to provide appropriate instruction for low-performing [below grade-level] students." Both policies result in unacceptably high dropout rates, particularly for learners who are poor, male, and belong to minority groups (iii). The U.S. Department of Education (1999) adds that both policies lead to inadequate knowledge and skill gains for low-performing students.

In response to this debate over social promotion vs. retention, many researchers and scholars (American Federation of Teachers, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 1998; 2004; Karweit, 1992; McCollum, Cortez, Maroney, & Montes, 1999; Owings & Kaplan, 2001; Peterson, 1989) advocate for the development of alternative approaches that emphasize

reforming instruction in order to allow all learners to succeed in school. Peterson (1989) suggests this would require teachers to explore and possibly challenge their beliefs about learners and learning (e.g., traditional transmission model, direct instruction) that may, support retention and social promotion practices. This would further enable educators to question alternative perspectives and approaches to learning and instruction needed to ensure all learners succeed. Because Florida's recently enacted legislation mandating in-grade retention at the third-grade level resulted in a shocking one-fifth of the third-grade student population retained an investigation is important to understand the actual consequences of this retention policy for learners and instructional practices.

Purpose of the Study

The intent of this study was to increase our understanding of what happened to learners and teaching practices when state mandates that include high-stakes consequences are employed. This kind of examination can best be accomplished through a qualitative case study that searches for deeper meanings according to the key players at the center of this debate – the classroom teachers. Classroom teachers are strategically positioned within the school community to witness and experience first-hand the effects of testing policies on classroom instruction and curriculum (Clark, Shore, Rhoades, Abrams, Miao, & Li., 2003; Olson, 2002). Teachers work at the precise intersection at which policy and practice merge (e.g., how the alignment of Florida Sunshine Standards and test-items on the FCAT influence educational practice), providing them with insights and perspectives that are critical to this dialogue and should therefore play a key role in this debate. Two pilot studies provided the basis for this study.

Study 1

In April 2004, a pilot study examined the perspectives of three third-grade teachers (within the context of one elementary school in Florida) on the ramifications of high-stakes testing with regard to learning and instruction (Counsell, 2004). This examination included teacher attitudes toward, and assumptions about, Florida's A+ Plan for Education, Sunshine State Standards, mandatory retention, and the FCAT. Teacher interviews revealed specific trends and patterns of institutionalization [and colonization] that placed an emphasis on certain kinds of learning or knowledge at the expense of other content areas (e.g., social studies and science) that resulted from pressures to increase test scores in reading. The institutionalization of knowledge through subject matter (due to an overemphasis on basic reading skills) in turn, placed extreme limits on the freedom and autonomy of teachers in making curricular decisions while limiting students' opportunities to participate in a variety of learning experiences. These limitations further hinder opportunities for educators and learners to form meaningful connections across curriculum and schooling (MacDonald, 2003).

Interview data collected during the pilot study indicated that Florida's A+ Plan and third-grade mandatory retention increased the emphasis placed on test scores used to measure student, teacher, and school performance and accountability. Changes in the school culture resulted in the following outcomes according to teachers: (a) narrowing of the curriculum; (b) difficulties meeting individual needs of students due to a strict timeline; (c) redefinitions of success and the learning experience for third-graders; (d) an emphasis on passing the FCAT rather than on meaningful and purposeful learning; and

(e) added stress and anxiety for students, parents, and teachers. At this particular elementary school, the emergent themes of conflict for these teachers seemed to stem from the direct struggle for control between (a) the prior worldview of increasing individual learning and achievement by teaching to the whole child and (b) the new worldview of increasing academic achievement (particularly in reading) according to standardized test scores within the school community.

Sergiovanni (2000) insists that bureaucratic procedural mandates and policies used to standardize learning and instruction in order to increase performance and accountability within the school culture become a hindrance to the individual teacher's ability to meet the unique needs of every student. For him, a standardized approach tends to discourage or inhibit individualized instruction (according to each students' learning rate, style, and needs) required to ensure an equitable education for all learners.

In the pilot study, I concluded that standardization, combined with high-stakes consequences, levies a heavy cost on the teachers' ability to decide what subjects will be taught as well as which activities and materials will be used to enhance instruction and learning. Tragically, struggling learners, for whom the Standards Movement claims to assist, are the very students who in actuality, are subjected to larger increments of test-prep and skill-drill activities. These in turn diminish students' exposure to non-tested subjects such as social studies and science and instructional practices like class projects that are viewed by their teachers as important, meaningful learning experiences.

Study 2

A follow-up qualitative case study completed in April 2005 was designed to compare and contrast Florida's state accountability system with the state accountability system found in Iowa. The views and beliefs of one third-grade constructivist teacher in Iowa toward high-stakes testing were explored as he responded to the reported attitudes and assumptions of the three third-grade teachers in Florida toward their state's accountability system and the potential consequences for learners and teaching practices. The same emergent categories and themes from the 2004 pilot study (i.e., using standards as a guide for learning and instruction, meeting the instructional needs of all learners, narrowing the curriculum, increased anxiety for learners and educators, mandatory retention based on test scores, and using standardized test scores as a measurement of learning) provided the discussion format for this study.

The participant in this study believed in constructivist education based on Piaget's research with young children, and his theory of intellectual and moral development. According to DeVries, Zan, Hildebrandt, Edmiaston, & Sales (2002), this approach reflects Piaget's work showing that children actively interpret their experiences in the physical and social worlds. In other words, children construct their own knowledge, intelligence, and morality (pp. 4-5). Hence, the constructivist educator strives to facilitate the child's active construction of knowledge within a dialectic or interactionist process of learning and development (p. 5).

Although Iowa, unlike Florida, does not presently mandate statewide standards and benchmarks aligned officially with a state exam, local districts have created their

own benchmarks and many, including the Iowa constructivist teacher's school district, have begun to align their benchmarks with the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). To avoid being designated as a "school or district in need of assistance," schools and districts in Iowa must satisfy NCLB's requirement of adequate yearly progress at the elementary level by demonstrating academic proficiency (scoring above the 40th percentile on the ITBS based on Iowa's proficiency levels in 2000) for all students, including subgroups, and achieve a 95% average daily attendance rate (Iowa Department of Education, 2004; Quality Counts, 2006).

From the perspective of the Iowa teacher, under increased pressures to perform well on the ITBS and to teach and satisfy all district-level benchmarks within a strict timeline, he felt the need to compromise his teaching philosophy and beliefs about learning and instruction. According to this Iowa third-grade teacher, the need to satisfy district-level benchmarks has resulted in the following: (a) an instructional shift in focus from a student-centered to a curriculum-centered emphasis, (b) increased levels of stress and anxiety toward completing the benchmarks and ITBS, and (c) increased struggles to meet the learning needs of all students within the required timeline. The Iowa teacher also stated that the state's accountability system forced him to compromise his constructivist approach in favor of a direct-teach approach that made it easier for him to cover the required district-level benchmarks in a shorter amount of time, but at a considerable cost to learning and instruction. This outcome supports the need, as noted by Peterson (1989) to examine teacher's beliefs and views of learners and learning in order to understand whether different philosophical views and instructional approaches

(including instructional compromises made by teachers) may actually support and encourage retention practices.

<div align="center">Researcher's Beliefs and Assumptions</div>

In retrospect, the researcher's beliefs, assumptions, and intentions in Pilot Studies 1 and 2 limited the approach to a critical perspective only. The chosen line of inquiry deliberately sought to engage in an intentional discourse to initiate social change. Central to critical theory is advocacy and activism, which required that I, as the researcher, voice the needs of exploited or oppressed individuals (particularly learners, teachers, or parents at the third-grade level in Florida), according to the researcher's bias from a particular ideological or political position (using Habermas' theory of communicative action from a lifeworld and system perspective) rather than simply describe the phenomena of interest (Appadurai, 1988).

This critical stance encouraged me to probe the potentially negative effects of high-stakes testing in both studies by challenging the status quo; directly asking the question, "Whose interests were served?" as well as "Whose interests were ignored?" (Bushnell, 2001; Magolda, 2000). This basic premise of the critical paradigm invariably places the researcher in the role of instigator and facilitator for social change (Wolcott, 1999, p. 68). With preconceived notions of what changes were needed, the task of understanding was consequently situated within a "prejudgmental framework" (p. 181). Thus, the interview protocol was designed specifically to increase awareness of the interviewee and create opportunity to actively challenge the application of high-stakes

consequences in order to attain the researcher's idea of social justice for the key players involved.

Unfortunately, a too-strict adherence to the semi-structured interview questions in the April 2004 pilot study was ultimately flawed, preventing an examination and exploration of the deeper meanings of the teachers' lived experiences within their individual life stories. The varying backgrounds of the Florida teachers with regard to age, teaching experience, philosophical views about learners and teaching practices, and how these variables may have interacted with and informed their perspectives, were completely ignored or disregarded as extraneous information. For example, I do not know how the life experiences of the oldest teacher participant (who was 72 years old at the time of the study, had previously taught in Catholic schools for 14 years, and taught the highest third-grade instructional reading group in the school) interacted together to inform and shape her views, perspectives, observations, and teaching experiences in the context of Florida's state mandates. In other words, the question that could not ultimately be answered was, how did her beliefs about learners and teaching practices support or conflict with the instructional and curricular choices she made within the high-stakes testing culture in Florida?

Study 2, intended to examine an Iowa third-grade teacher's perspective toward high-stakes testing in Florida, in contrast to the state accountability system in Iowa, utilized the same interview protocol and teacher response data from the Florida pilot study (Counsell, 2005). Unlike the Florida pilot study, the follow-up study explored the philosophical views of the Iowa third-grade teacher as a constructivist educator and

provided greater insights and deeper meanings about his personal beliefs about learners and teaching practices. This proved helpful in questioning how certain philosophies and approaches may potentially encourage and even support accountability practices such as the need to complete predetermined benchmarks according to designated instructional timelines.

The relevance of the Iowa teacher's lived experiences was also overlooked. For example, as a veteran teacher (with more than 17 years experience at the third-grade level) and the only male third-grade teacher at his school, who has spent the majority of his career teaching at the same elementary school in a small rural northeastern town in Iowa, the possible relevance of these factors was not considered. Failure to examine these variables as they intersect within his life experiences also meant the loss of deeper meanings and understandings that could provide additional insights and further inform the high-stakes accountability debate. Interesting questions arise in retrospect. For example, how do these variables interact to create very different life experiences and subsequent perspectives, and what does this interaction mean as these characteristics intersect with varying bureaucratic policies and procedures at the local, state, and federal levels? What will these different perspectives mean for learners and instruction?

Janesick (1994) discusses the importance of identifying the researcher's own biases and ideology and willingness to deal with ethical issues: •

> Qualitative researchers accept the fact that research is ideologically driven. There is no value-free or bias-free design. By identifying one's biases, one can see easily where the questions that guide the study are crafted. This is a big difference among paradigms. (p. 212)

This view is not meant to oversimplify the complexities of qualitative research but rather is intended as an important reminder that researchers must be ever-mindful of the theoretical and philosophical perspectives from which the study's questions originate. As we assign meanings to the things we do as researchers, it is imperative throughout our ongoing struggle with our biases, that we continually raise awareness and how those biases can potentially affect the results.

In an attempt to avoid the "slippery slope" of the critical paradigm that limited the achievement of deeper meanings and understandings during Pilot Studies 1 and 2, an interpretivist approach with the current study allowed for the examination of thick descriptions provided by the life stories told by the veteran and beginning third-grade teachers. Thick descriptions, as described by Geertz (1973), enable the researcher to "probe the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations, and circumstances of action... described by the participants well beyond the bare reporting of events at a surface-level found in thin descriptions" (cited in Denzin, 1988, p. 39) like those that dominated the pilot studies' data. In this instance, the goal of theorizing will be to increase understanding of directly lived experiences rather than formulate abstract generalizations. Hence, each life history will be viewed as novel, emergent, and filled with multiple, and frequently conflicting, meanings and interpretations, as recommended by Denzin in order to reveal whatever significance each life history holds for learners and instruction across the teacher participants (one veteran and one beginning third-grade teacher).

<u>Significance of the Study</u>

The significance of the study reported here can be viewed from the perspective of students who have experienced retention or standardized tests. Yamamoto (1979) found that students rank "grade retention" just below "losing a parent" and "going blind" as the three most stressful life events (p. 582). Likewise, Hardy (2003) reports that on exam days at elementary and middle schools in Rockingham County, N.C., a rural district north of Greensboro, as many as 20 test booklets have to be discarded because students vomit on them. The potential for stress and anxiety that result when promotion decisions are based on test scores has led the National Association of School Psychologists and test development experts to agree that "it is not appropriate to use performance on a single test (or composite test battery) for making high-stakes decisions for individuals" (NASP, 2003, p. 2). The association warns that failure can lead to "long-term anxiety, low self esteem, depression, etc." (p. 3). Furthermore, these high-stakes consequences can negatively impact not only test-taking but learning and motivation as well.

Whether retention decisions were based on test scores or other variables, the National Center for Education Statistics (1997) study documented that approximately 17 percent of high school seniors had repeated at least one grade since kindergarten. Of those students retained, the highest incidence of retention occurred between grades kindergarten through second. Another study reported by Heubert and Hauser (1999) tracked six- to eight-year-old students during the 1980s and early 1990s and revealed that by the time the students were 12 to 14 years old, 31 percent were not in the appropriate grades for their age group. Regardless of the criteria used to base retention decisions,

overall retention rates since the 1980s have increased by 40 percent, resulting in approximately 30-50 percent of America's children being retained at least once prior to ninth grade (e.g., NASP, 1998; Thompson & Cunningham, 2000).

In spite of the research, eight states now employ grade-level promotion policies contingent on statewide exams: Louisiana, Florida, Delaware, Georgia, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Texas, and Missouri (Quality Counts, 2005). In Florida alone, 33,000 out of 188,107 third graders who took the FCAT scored below the Level 2 requirement in reading that is needed for promotion. Another 400,000 students (disproportionately minority and low-income) would have been held back had the proposal for retention in every grade been implemented during the 2003-04 school year (*FairTest Examiner*, 2004-05) suggesting the potential outcome if mandatory k-12 retention were enforced.

Neither retention nor social promotion practices effectively address the learning needs of low-performing students because both fail to prevent learning difficulties experienced by students (e.g., Hong & Raudenbush, 2005; Johnson, 2001; Karweit, 1992; Peterson, 1989; Wheelock, 1998). Both policies result in unacceptably high dropout rates, particularly for learners who are poor, male, and belong to minority groups (e.g., Grissom & Shepard, 1989; Meisels & Liaw, 1993; Owings & Magliaro, 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 1999). Likewise, neither policy achieves adequate knowledge and skill gains for low-performing students (U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

Rather than choose sides or simply continue to fuel the debate concerning grade-level retention versus social promotion, it appears to be far more instructive to increase our understanding as to how the life experiences of teachers inform their beliefs about

learning. After all, teachers are the primary frontline defense to ensure that students have the opportunity to experience authentic learning and instruction. Therefore, it is the classroom teachers' day-to-day decisions that must be considered. As noted by Olson (2002), classroom teachers are the professionals who have the most intimate knowledge of what happens when grand schemes of reform are implemented. Consequently, educational research cannot adequately examine, analyze, or depict the impact of school reform on learning and instruction without soliciting the thoughts and opinions of teachers.

Since the installment of Florida's A+ Plan for school reform, the majority of studies have contributed important insights concerning the viewpoints of principals and teachers on issues related to empowerment, autonomy, and consequences of labeling (e.g., Acker-Hocever & Touchton, 2001; Reed, McDonough, Ross, & Robichaux, 2001). However, the viewpoints and experiences of parents and students are needed to fully understand the consequences of high-stakes testing for various social actors at different school communities. Of those studies designed to explore the attitudes and assumptions of teachers, none of the studies focused on the life histories of teachers (such as veteran and beginning teachers specifically) and how their individual life-histories might provide deeper meanings concerning beliefs about high-stakes testing and retention practices and what this means for learners and teaching practice.

<u>Research Question</u>

This study sought to gain deeper understanding of how the high-stakes testing culture in Florida was perceived according to the lived experiences of veteran and

beginning third-grade teachers at two demographically different elementary schools in the same school district in Florida. The veteran third-grade teacher was encouraged to reflect on her experiences as both a parent and teacher over the course of her career. Both beginning and veteran teachers were encouraged to reflect on their current teaching practices in relation to the instructional practices that they encountered as learners during their own formal education in Florida public schools.

This examination ultimately questioned the persistent employment of tracking practices such as grade level retention in spite of research that has consistently demonstrated retention's overall failure to increase student achievement. If alternative practices that will potentially benefit all learners are to be considered and attempted, as noted earlier by Peterson, (1989) it will then be necessary to contemplate the conditions needed to support instructional changes. This required a critical analysis of possible educational policies and procedures that best support teaching practice that can increase access to learning opportunities for all learners within individual school communities. The life histories of a beginning and veteran teacher at two demographically diverse elementary schools in this case study revealed how each teacher viewed her school community as well as each teacher's subsequent attitudes and assumptions toward Florida's high-stakes accountability system and what this meant for learners and teaching practice.

According to Eisner (1998), qualitative inquiry in education is about "trying to understand what teachers and children do in the settings in which they work" (p. 11). Eisner explains that by studying schools or classrooms not only can we "learn about

schools and classrooms that are useful for understanding other schools and classrooms," but we can also "learn about individual classrooms and particular teachers in ways that are useful to them" (p. 12). Peterson (1989) also recognized the value of exploring teacher beliefs about learning and what happens when they specifically intersect with retention practices. Do certain philosophies and approaches actually encourage and support retention practices? What conditions are needed to encourage non-retention practices? What new insights can be gained across different teachers?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to gain deeper understanding of what happens when the life histories of one beginning and one veteran third grade teacher at two different school communities intersect with Florida's A+ Plan (high-stakes accountability system) and third grade mandatory retention and what this will mean for learners and teaching practice. Whether knowledge and truth claims can be examined and explored satisfactorily apart from historical conditioning (Guess, 1987), important insights can arguably be gained whenever historical perspectives are considered. A review of the Efficiency Movement, the Equity Movement, and the Excellence Movement in American public education was completed to reveal important insights and understandings concerning the social structures and beliefs of the Standards Movement (ideology and subsequent policies and procedures) in relation to historical reform efforts in the 20th Century.

Habermas' (1987) theory of communicative action provided a useful theoretical framework needed to examine and critique the social practice of public education within each historical reform movement according to (a) the system rationale, media, and mechanisms employed; (b) the possible colonization of the lifeworld rationale for public education; and (c) the consequences for learners and teaching practice. This analysis revealed that historically: (a) the functional paradigm has consistently dominated the system rationale (and subsequent colonization of the lifeworld rationale) for public education based on meritocracy; (b) scientifically-based standardized tests have been

employed as the powerful steering media used to support and advance the functional paradigm through meritocratic utilitarian selection mechanisms; and (c) subsequent learning opportunities and eventual economic rewards have been distributed in accordance (commensurate) to students' assumed merit (ability).

The historical insights gained were then used in combination with Habermas' theory of communicative action to further examine the Standards Movement in general and Florida's high-stakes accountability system specifically. Florida's public education system employs ranking and sorting practices (meritocratic utilitarian selection mechanisms) to increase student, teacher, and school performance and achievement (i.e., performance grading of schools; mandatory retention; high school graduation exam requirements; student opportunity grants; and teacher merit pay) according to standardized test scores. Current literature and research examining Florida's high-stakes accountability system and mechanisms have suggested familiar consequences for learners and teaching practice consistent with historical school reform movements. Additional research must then be completed to determine the kinds of educational policy (system rationale) and procedures (steering mechanisms and media) needed to increase educational experiences and economic opportunities for all learners regardless of need.

<u>Historical Origin of the Standards Movement in Education</u>

Urban school systems have sporadically applied the use of rewards and sanctions toward schools, teachers, and children based on test scores since our public schools' earliest beginnings in the mid-1800s (Darling-Hammond, 2004). The rapid growth, development, and acceptance of systematic measures of ability within mainstream

American society in the first half of the 20th Century resulted from the beliefs that differences in intelligence and other abilities not only existed among individuals (Goslin, 1963) but could be biologically determined according to genes, race, and ethnicity and objectively quantified using scientific measurements of intelligence and achievement (e.g., Fancher, 1985; Gould, 1981, 1995; Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Howe, 1997; Jensen, 1969; Marks, 1975; Oakes, 1993; Ravitch, 2000; Selden, 2000; Singham, 1995). Historically, various mandates, policies, and procedures have been employed specifically to direct social systems in ways that are potentially inconsistent with personal priorities, beliefs, and values of the various participants. It may be difficult to find a more apparent example of the conflicting views that can result between lifeworld and system perspectives found in modern society (and American culture, specifically) than public education, past and present.

The Efficiency Movement

The industrialization of America's workforce and economy at the turn of the century placed a new scrutiny on the effectiveness and productivity of the nation's public schools. According to Oakes (1993), the essence of the factory was efficiency. In comparison to this new scientific management approach that standardized and controlled the process of mass production, schools were viewed as inefficient and unsuccessful. It was then believed that the system used to increase productivity in factories could also be applied to increase the efficiency and productivity (in terms of learning and instruction) in public schools.

Scientific management. Frederick Taylor, one of the best known and ardent supporters of applying scientific management to business and industry, published his work, *The Principles of Scientific Management* in 1911 (Bracey, 1995; 2003). His approach to management and productivity, referred to as the Taylor System, explained how to apply scientific method to the management of workers to improve productivity ((NetMBA, 2005).

Like Taylor, Franklin Bobbitt was immensely influential within the Efficiency Movement (Kliebard, 1995, 1999). The application of real-life knowledge and skills needed to increase eventual assimilation and success in the adult world became central to this movement. In his own landmark article, *The Elimination of Waste in Education*, Bobbitt (1912) used the Gary, Indiana school system to exemplify the utility of Taylor's System within education. Published just one year after Taylor's *Scientific Management*, this article expressed the growing interest in the efficient design and implementation of curriculum. School buildings were intended to be operated for maximum efficiency like "school plants," and the role of superintendent was considered synonymous to "educational engineer."

As noted by Bracey (1995), Bobbitt argued for the establishment of standards in school similar to standards in industry in which factory or industrial production served as the foundation for all school curricula. From this perspective, education was viewed as a preparation for adult life, without consideration of the quality of life of the child, and as such, the curriculum consisted of the kinds of knowledge and skills required in adult pursuits (Kliebard, 1995, 1999; Marsh & Willis, 2003; Shepard, 2000). Hence, this

movement argued for the goal of schools as the preparation of children for adult life (functional paradigm) and for policy and practice that would best achieve that goal (meritocratic selection).

Meritocratic utilitarian approach. It was during this time period that Ravitch (2000) insisted that a paradigm was shifting based on the ideals espoused by sociologist Lester Frank Ward and philosopher Herbert Spencer that represented opposing views in the education debate. Lester Frank Ward favored access to knowledge through universal education to achieve equality for all classes. In contrast to this view, Herbert Spencer adopted a utilitarian approach that was embraced by the Social Efficiency Movement (Karier, 1986; Ravitch, 2000).

According to Ravitch, the Efficiency Movement was an effort to redefine a democratic education as the need to provide a different kind of curriculum that would be commensurate with the individual needs of learners. The social efficiency experts believed that it was anti-democratic, elitist, and aristocratic to expect all students to be able to participate in the academic curriculum, suggesting the need for alternatives such as vocational training (Kliebard, 1995, 1999; Ravitch, 2000; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Standardized testing. Providing an equitable means for determining curriculum and instructional tracking (i.e., academic or vocational) that appeared to be fair and unbiased, however, was problematic. The need for objective placement of learners ushered in the application of scientifically-based methods (IQ tests) that could efficiently determine specifiable and measurable differences in abilities and probable outcomes (Ravitch, 2000). Providing educational opportunities based on merit warranted the need

for a new approach that would be a "fair and neutral means of providing access to economic rewards" (Oakes, 1993, p. 90). Thorndike (1906) argued for the distribution of educational opportunity based on assumed ability in order to advance the most able, talented learners who could better serve and support a growing capitalistic society. Hence, the development of a systematic way for measuring differences (standardized testing) served the traditional American values of achievement and mobility based on performance and aptitude (meritocractic) rather than social status such as family background, race, and so forth (Goslin, 1963).

The perceived need to sort students by aptitude helped to launch the "group testing movement," which began with the Army Alpha and Beta (IQ) tests developed during World War I and later mass-marketed to American schools in the 1920s (Goslin, 1963). These tests were used to address the dual concerns of humanity and efficiency by assigning different individuals to different instruction according to presumed abilities (meritocratic utilitarian selection). Edward L. Thorndike's quest to persuade the American public and educational institutions of what he believed was an essential need to objectify, standardize, and classify the individual, and society positioned him as a significant player in the Efficiency Movement (Karier, 1986).

Thorndike's emphasis on scientifically measuring and quantifying learning enabled schools to "efficiently" identify and advance the most capable and talented students (based on perceived deviations in intellectual aptitude) for the betterment of society (Thorndike, 1920). As a form of human engineering, Thorndike believed that measurements of human nature and achievement, from a meritocratic utilitarian

perspective, would ultimately place students with the highest aptitude into instructional tracks that provided the greatest learning opportunities. Inversely, placement of students with lower aptitudes into the same high-performance tracks would subsequently be limited and discouraged due to lower students' assumed ability (or inability).

Standardization of learning and instruction. Thorndike's (1920) view of learning, as measured according to behavioral objectives using the new science of psychology, provided the basis for determining the most effective methods and strategies needed to further enhance and standardize learning and instruction. Differentiated curriculum based on assumed individual abilities and needs was not only an essential product of the Efficiency Movement, but was quite possibly one of the greatest educational myths of the 20th Century educational practices (Karier, 1986). Differentiated curriculum was believed to contribute to democratic schooling by offering both academic and vocational courses based on merit (Kiebard, 1995; Ravitch, 2000; Tozer, Violas, & Senese, 1998). According to Karier (1975), differentiated curriculum claimed to increase choice on the part of the individual, when in fact, it only served to "channel, control, and limit the choice of individuals" (p. 233).

It should be noted however, that the differentiated curriculum based on static ability grouping advanced by Thorndike was very different from how "differentiated instruction" is employed today. Differentiated instruction is conceived and implemented according to individual student's learning styles, interests, and needs (skills or concepts) in which instructional groups are continuously intermixing in order to maximize access to learning (Pierce & Adams, 2004; Tomlinson, 1999).

The Equity Movement

The twenty-five years following World War II marked unprecedented economic growth and material gain. Although this prosperity did not eliminate poverty, it generated a widespread optimism about prosperity that brought new hope to the poorest members of society (Oakes, 1993). By the latter part of the 20th Century, critics began to scrutinize the criteria used to assess whether equality of educational opportunity existed for all learners (within the functional paradigm). It was during this era that conflict theory emerged to challenge the popular American belief that public schools operate in fair and impartial ways to provide children with equal learning opportunities regardless of social class. According to this perspective, public schools, in actuality, serve to reproduce the stratified class structure of American society by socializing children for predetermined class-related adult roles and circumstances (Bell, 1973; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Collins, 1979; Kozol, 1967, 1991; Sexton, 1961).

The decades of the 1960s and 1970s witnessed increasing public concern regarding the educational opportunities and outcomes for students from varying socio-economic and racial backgrounds as well as special needs (Berube, 1994; Howe, 1997; Rawls, 1971). These public concerns ushered in the Equity Movement, resulting in initiatives such as Head Start, Upward Bound, and Chapter I to bolster educational advantages for those thought to be at-risk of failure or developmentally behind (Coleman, 1966; Evans, 1975; Greenburg, 1969/1990; Horowitz & Paden, 1973; Hurn, 1993; Zigler & Anderson, 1979).

The Equity Movement was largely a response to social issues. As such, was a "central part of the ferment for social justice that defined the political and cultural climate of that decade" (Bastian, Fruchter, Gittell, Greer, & Haskins, 1993, p. 72). This movement, according to Bastian, et al., was grounded in the activism of youth, minorities, women, and the urban and rural poor that opposed various forms of oppression that included the Jim Crow South and the Vietnam War, on the one hand, while supporting Third World Independence and women's liberation on the other.

On the basis of this new emphasis on students perceived to be educationally disadvantaged, schools were held accountable for ensuring that Blacks, women, and other minorities achieve equal access to a whole range of educational outcomes (Hacker, 1989). Policymakers and federal government officials believed that it was necessary to provide intervention to those students thought to arrive at school unequally prepared and unable to take advantage of equal educational opportunity (liberal egalitarian perspective) (Howe, 1997).

Libertarianism. Howe (1997) explains how equality of educational opportunity in our public schools is largely influenced by school purpose and the underlying assumptions about justice. He describes three theories of justice: (a) libertarianism, (b) liberal egalitarianism, and (c) utilitarianism. The libertarian theory frames equal educational opportunity around the premise that all individuals should have the right to pursue education in the way that they so choose. Libertarians base their view of education on free market principles, individual educational merit (meritocracy) and give no thought

to the possibility of equal results for all. There is no sympathy for the unfortunate, but proponents of this view accept poverty as a condition that can be overcome by hard work.

Liberal egalitarianism. On the other hand, Howe describes liberal egalitarians as individuals who sympathize with those considered least advantaged and believe that strong educational policy should be in place that will compensate individuals considered to be less fortunate so that they may excel and take equal advantage of the American dream. Government officials held a strong compensatory view of equality during the Civil rights movement as was demonstrated in multiple government entitlement programs that were put in place to fight poverty, such as Head Start and Chapter I. In actuality, egalitarian ideology, according to Boudon (1994), was essentially a myth that at best, only "comforts American middle classes while offering hope to the poor" (p. 180).

The different compensatory educational programs of the 1960s and 1970s were created to increase educational opportunities (such as Head Start, compensatory education funding in Title I, Bilingual Education Act of 1968 and the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975) for a wide assortment of learners who had previously been denied access to learning and instruction (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). Sadly, deficit hypotheses undergirded the beliefs and assumptions about underachieving students and subsequent remedies (such as program interventions) were designed to improve or eradicate their assumed inadequacies (Bogden & Taylor, 1994; Brantlinger, 2003; Danforth & Rhodes, 1997; Foucault, 1983; Reiter, 2000; Skrtic, 1991; Sleeter, 1996).

These same programs, according to Oakes (1993) were later scrutinized for using unfair practices based on the assessments that invariably resulted in ability tracking. This

became particularly true for Blacks and Hispanics, who were overrepresented in lower tracks due to test discrimination based on cultural differences (Barton & Oliver, 1997; Connor & Boskin, 2001; Oakes, 1993; Oswald, Coutinho, Best, & Singh, 1999; Patton, 1998; Singham, 1995).

In their final analysis, Bastian, et al. (1993) suggested that what was essentially gained from this time period of activism has simply been, "a shift from exclusive meritocracy to inclusive meritocracy" (p. 76). Inclusion is not nothing, but it is not enough to achieve complete equity and social justice for all learners. Even with intervention programs designed for compensation, in today's increasingly competitive job market, even inclusive meritocracy designed to increase access to educational and economic opportunity is eroding. This erosion is further witnessed with the reemergence of the utilitarian (exclusive meritocratic) perspective in the current Standards Movement.

Excellence Movement

Post-industrial economic difficulties (i.e., economic stagnation; recurring recession; and the loss of international predominance), and the United States' struggle to lead the world technologically in the 1980s, gave birth to the excellence movement and the belief that schools were once again to blame for our country's social and economic problems (Oakes, 1993). The early part of this decade witnessed expressed concerns by business leaders that the American economy was losing its competitive edge. Economic analysts (such as the Committee for Economic Development, 1983) began to fear that the U.S. was losing its global advantage in labor-intensive industries, resulting in the "deindustrialization of America" (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 141).

A Nation at Risk. A report entitled, *A Nation at Risk* (1983) was published by the

Office of Education to assess the quality of American high school education. The report

was prepared by Terrell Bell, the Secretary of Education, and the newly chartered

National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE). The NCEE members were

specifically selected by Bell according to their (a) knowledge about educational programs

at various levels; and (b) familiarity with the various views of the public, employers,

educators, and leaders from a wide range of professions. The purpose of the commission

was to help define the problems afflicting American education and to offer solutions

(NCEE, 1983).

This report triggered the excellence movement with a renewed emphasis on

raising the standards and performance of public school children in the United States,

particularly promoting the best and the brightest to compete in the global market using a

meritocratic utilitarian perspective (much like the Efficiency Movement at the turn of the

century). The national criticism that was advanced when Sputnik satellite was launched

by the Soviet Union in October 1957 was that American school curricula had grown

"soft" in the hard sciences and mathematics in comparison to the Soviet Union (Kliebard,

1995). Similarly, the assumption advanced by *A Nation At Risk* was that American

public schools were no longer rigorous, failing to raise achievement, social promotion

had gained a wide-spread acceptance as an alternative to retention (Owings & Kaplan,

2001), and the only solution was to respond with a comprehensive systemic reform

movement (Berube, 1994).

In a tone that focused on fear and a national crisis, as is evidenced in the term "at

risk," the commission warned of an increasing trend toward mediocrity among American

high schools and a loss in international, political, and economic standing. Even though

there has long been a history of criticizing public education, Berliner and Biddle (1995)

describe this report as, "the mother of all critiques" of American education (p. 139). At

the very outset of the report, the commission warned the American public of a growing

national crisis:

> Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. This report is concerned with only one of the many causes and dimensions of the problem, but it is the one that under girds American prosperity, security, and civility. We report to the American people that while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the Unites States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur...others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments. (NCEE, 1983, p. 5)

According to this report, American high school standardized test scores revealed

the following: (a) international comparisons of student achievement completed a decade

ago (in the 1970s) revealed that on nineteen academic tests, American students were

never first or second and, in comparison with students from other industrialized nations,

were last seven times; (b) the College Board's scholastic aptitude tests (SAT)

demonstrated a virtually continuous decline from 1963 to 1980, with average verbal

scores declining over 50 points and average mathematics scores declining nearly 40

points; and (c) many 17-year-olds did not possess the higher order intellectual skills

expected (e.g., nearly 40% of this population exhibited difficulties drawing inferences

from written material; only 20% could write a persuasive essay; and only 33% could

solve a mathematical problem involving several steps). Furthermore, the report indicated

that there was a steady decline in science achievement scores for 17-year-olds (as

measured by national assessments of science in 1969, 1973, and 1977 while public four-

year colleges experienced a 72% increase in remedial mathematics courses (NCEE,

1983).

Marsh and Willis (2003) noted that in the final analysis, "The report told the U.S.

exactly what it was ready to hear, for public approval was instantaneous and

overwhelming" (p. 56). The report called for a strengthening of high school graduation

requirements based on the Five New Basics (English, math, science, social studies, and

computer science) in curriculum that must be completed within the four years of high

school and for improved standards across the nation's schools, colleges and universities

(NCEE, 1983).

Oakes (1993) draws attention to the familiar meritocratic selection of educational

programming within schools (tracking) that is recommended by the NCEE for students

who perform poorly on tests. *A Nation at Risk* suggested that "placement and

grouping...should be guided by the academic progress of students" (NCEE, 1983, p. 30)

and recommended "alternative classrooms, programs, and schools" for those students

who are unable to meet the required standards of behavior (p. 29). Rather than focus on

access to equal educational opportunity, this report suggested the need to once again

differentiate learners according to ability and distribute rewards that will not only

promote high-achievers for the greatest advancement but supply a diversified workforce

needed to satisfy labor demands at all levels within a capitalistic economy (Berube, 1994). Hence, there is less concern for classroom instruction or school organization that would promote the achievement of at-risk students of poverty or those with learning needs (Oakes, 1993).

According to Howe (1997), the meritocratic assumption that social distinctions should be made in order to best serve the economic productivity of the whole of the country for the common good is a utilitarian theory of justice. From the meritocratic utilitarian perspective, it is the responsibility of the government to distribute resources in such a way that will best achieve desirable results...and access to educational opportunity is simply one potential device for promoting this aim" (p. 25). This same perspective served as the rationale used to justify the employment of high-stakes accountability systems to increase achievement within the Standards Movement (Berliner & Biddle, 1995) as well as the high-stakes accountability system found in Florida.

Sandia National Laboratories statistical analysis. In opposition to the interpretations of the data presented in *A Nation at Risk* (1983), a statistical analysis was completed by scientists and statisticians at the Sandia National Laboratories, a branch of the Department of Energy. This group of researchers examined whether or not America's public education was failing as badly as the report, *A Nation at Risk*, first proclaimed (Frase & Streshly, 2000, p. ix). The group's statistical analysis in 1990 revealed that racial group scores on the SAT had actually increased during the time period in question. The fact that scores appeared to be down in the *Nation at Risk* report was misleading because more individuals from low-achievement groups and women took the test which

resulted in lowered overall mean scores. On the other hand, performance for each

demographic group was actually higher, creating a simple case of statistical regression

(Carson, Huelskamp, and Woodall, 1993).

This report examined actual statistical evidence, contradicting the erroneous

claims that were being made by education critics in the Bush administration, and as a

result, the report was suppressed from publication until after George H. Bush left office

(Berliner & Biddle, 1995). Unfortunately, the Sandia Report was never widely

publicized, and the Sandia Group was, in effect, threatened with economic sanctions

(Frase & Streshly, 2000, p. ix).

The eventual shift from the Equity (compensatory) Movement to the Standards

(Excellence) Movement resulted in a change in the intended benefactors of school

reform. Berube (1994) argues that in contrast to the Equity Movement's emphasis on the

placement of the poor and minorities at the core of a social and civil rights movement, the

Excellence Movement has "shifted the reform focus from educating the poor to educating

the best and the brightest" (p. 132) as an economic movement. Furthermore, high-stakes

testing is now viewed as synonymous with the core policies of excellence, and as a result,

is conceived by advocates as the means with which to ensure accountability, the

implementation of standards, and improved results (Finn & Rebarber, 1992; Greene &

Winters, 2004; Hirsch, 1996; Paige, 2005; Ravitch, 1995).

Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action

Habermas' theory of communicative action as the theoretical framework with a

lifeworld and systems perspective proved helpful in the effort to examine and discuss the

potential consequences that high-stakes testing holds for various participants within school communities today. Few argue that student achievement is generally accepted as a rational goal or outcome of education. However, when an intense emphasis is placed on limited measures of achievement based on test scores according to the system perspective, at the expense of the intersubjective lifeworld of school cultures (symbolic meanings, goals, values, beliefs and reasons), an increase in the potential for disconnect, conflict, and opposing views can result.

Using Durkheim's (1938) social theory, Habermas (1987) explained how social solidarity is achieved cooperatively by virtue of individual efforts through the medium of language. In place of social integration through "belief consensus" found in early religious cultures, social integration in modern society is now achieved through cooperation. Expanding on Mead's (1934) communication theory, Habermas not only envisioned communicative action as the "acts of reaching understanding," (thus, achieving cooperation) but also included, "the linguistic symbols and language-like symbols...insofar as they mediate interactions, modes of behavior, and actions of more than one individual" (p. 5) needed to ensure consensus and understanding.

Lifeworld Perspective

Habermas formulated the concept of normative consensus of beliefs and values of any social group in modern society as the "lifeworld" expressed and interpreted by actors through communicative action that forms the contextual background or horizon from which mutual understanding is achieved. For all practical purposes, the lifeworld is essentially the "reservoir of taken-for-granteds" and "unshaken convictions" that

participants in communication draw upon in "collective processes of interpretation" (p. 124). In the case of my study, an examination of the lifeworlds at two demographically different elementary schools provided the framework needed to gain insights as to how different school communities drew upon collective processes of interpretation needed to make learning and instructional decisions in light of Florida's high-stakes accountability system.

In the school community, the taken-for-granteds and unshaken convictions form the networks of interpersonal life experiences and beliefs (that include unique traditions, rituals, and norms) of the various community members. The life experiences and beliefs of teachers, parents, and students together mold both individual and group identities; guide attitudes, behavior, and action; and contribute content, meaning, and character to the school community and culture. As such, the lifeworld reflects the individual needs of the school population served as well as the purposes (educational goals and learning outcomes) identified by those charged with meeting those needs (Myers & Young, 1997; Sergiovanni, 2000).

<u>System Perspective</u>

In the course of social evolution, Habermas noted that modern society, as an entity, becomes differentiated as both a lifeworld and system in response to increasing demands for economic markets within a capitalist society (p. 153). As modern economies emerged, the need for systems with steering capacities that could regulate and manage the new economies resulted (p. 152). Habermas identified the system as the social mechanisms that operate according to instrumental, functional reasoning needed to

achieve specific goals and outcomes such as school mandates, policies, and procedures (according to Weber's theory of rationalization). For instance, Florida's high-stakes accountability system has employed steering media (e.g., the Florida statute to mandate retention in third grade) in order to satisfy the system rationale for increased student achievement and accountability based on FCAT reading scores.

In contrast to the lifeworld, systems tend to be highly rationalized and associated with social organizations that are comprised of management designs and protocols, strategic and tactical actions, policies and procedures, as well as efficiency and accountability assurances (Sergiovanni, 2000). Steering media, such as money, data, or political influence are the different means by which the rationalized system exercises direction and ultimate control of lifeworlds (Gotz, 1997).

Lifeworld Colonization

Habermas speculated that when "media-controlled subsystems of the economy and the state intervene with monetary and bureaucratic means in the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld, a colonization of the lifeworld can result" (p. 356). In this colonization of the lifeworld, systems are no longer designed to support and advance the lifeworld beliefs, values, or traditions of the institution or organization.

In the case of mandatory retention based on FCAT reading scores, the system's colonization of the lifeworld according to this steering mechanism could potentially create a newly organized whole by diminishing the lifeworld's relevance and making the lifeworld subservient to the system. As a high-stakes steering media, retention mandates can then be used to overwhelm the lifeworld values and beliefs about learners. No longer

used to support, but instead employed to subvert the lifeworld, this media can steer curricular and instructional decisions in ways that will most likely satisfy the new system rationale of increasing achievement according to the steering media, FCAT reading scores.

Thus, Habermas' theoretical framework enables us to further examine, understand, and explain how the lifeworld rationale of local schools can be colonized by rational systems and steering mechanisms. The insights gained can then be used to reveal and further understand what this means for learners and teaching practice. The following critique of the three major education reform movements using Habermas' theoretical framework not only illustrates this point, but the insights gained can then be further applied to increase our understanding of the Standards Movement and Florida's high-stakes accountability system.

Historical School Reform Critique Using Habermas' Theoretical Framework

A review of the three reform movements (Efficiency Movement, Equity Movement, and Excellence Movement) demonstrated that each movement occurred in response to specific socio-economic factors within each historical time period. While both the Efficiency Movement and Excellence Movement were reform efforts intended to address demands for a skilled labor force, the Efficiency Movement responded specifically to growing demands for a trained labor force needed to support the new industrialized economies. The Excellence Movement, on the other hand, was a response to the post-industrial economy that demanded higher standards for a labor force needed to

maintain the United States' continued world leadership and domination within the global

market.

In contrast to these movements, the Equity Movement occurred at a time of

economic prosperity in which many groups of people experienced unprecedented socio-

economic mobility. As more Americans prospered, a heightened awareness of the

individual rights and educational opportunities afforded minorities, lower socio-economic

groups, and individuals diagnosed with disabilities gained momentum within the Civil

Rights Movement.

<u>System Rationale: Functional Paradigm Domination Based on Meritocracy</u>

Using Habermas' lifeworld and system perspective, it can be argued that the key

players in both the Efficiency Movement and the Excellence Movement embraced a

system rationale that advocated for public schools to efficiently prepare students with the

necessary skills needed to satisfy the labor demands of industry. Known as the functional

paradigm, this view of public education incorporates the ideas and values of a

meritocratic society in its optimistic interpretation in which schools were perceived as

"agencies" whose main purpose was to sort and select the most talented individuals.

These individuals in turn, were believed to be the most capable of performing at "high

status levels" both in school, and later, in the work place (Hurn, 1993).

Both movements capitalized on the meritocratic belief that the advancement of

the brightest and most talented labor was for the betterment of society. To achieve this

educational goal as the system rationale, it became necessary to create steering

mechanisms designed to [provide different learners with differentiated market skills that

were commensurate to individual learning needs or assumed ability]. Scientifically measured standardized test scores became the powerful steering media needed to rank and sort learners according to ability for meritocratic utilitarian selection purposes. Other steering media and mechanisms in the form of economic rewards and educational opportunities were then distributed to further support and advance the system rationale within each movement.

In opposition to the functional paradigm rationale for public schools, the Equity Movement embraced a counter viewpoint advanced by the conflict paradigm. From this perspective, the system rationale and steering mechanisms (including meritocratic utilitarian selection and ability tracking) of the functional paradigm were viewed as the perpetuation of inequality that served to convince groups of people, such as minorities, people with disabilities, and lower social classes of their inferiority (Brantlinger, 2003; Danziger, 1990; Howe, 1997; Hurn, 1993; Oakes, 1993).

Functional theorists claimed that their focus (system rationale) was based on critical, higher-order cognitive skills (scientifically measured and assessed by steering media such as standardized achievement tests) needed in the workplace. Conflict theorists, on the other hand, argued that, in actuality, few jobs required complex cognitive skills and, in actuality, promoted class-related values and attitudes instead. Furthermore, conflict theorists believed that the functional paradigm's actual system rationale promoted a future workforce that emulated obedience, passivity, and compliance while groups of unequal influence competed for control of an education system that favored socio-economic elites (Ayers, 2001; Brantlinger, 2003; Delpit, 1995/2006; Freire,

1970/2003; 1998; Greene, 1993; Howe, 1997; Karier, 1986; Kohn, 2000; Meier, 1995; Oakes, 1993; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

The Equity Movement rejected the functional paradigm's belief that social justice was best achieved through meritocratic utilitarian selection of learners for future labor roles commensurate to ability. Instead, this movement offered the liberal egalitarian perspective as a way to achieve social justice. Striving toward Lester Frank Ward's goal of attaining equality for all classes (particularly groups deemed disadvantaged) the system rationale of liberal egalitarianism advanced the notion of compensation in order to increase access to education advancement and economic opportunity.

Unfortunately, steering media in the form of standardized diagnostic tests and assessments were once again used to employ the steering mechanism of meritocratic utilitarian selection for program intervention (ability tracking) purposes. This only served to further perpetuate inequality by continuing to convince the same groups of learners (belonging to minorities, people with disabilities, and lower social classes) of their inferiority. Although the intent was to achieve social justice through more inclusive rather than exclusive practices based on merit, in actuality, meritocratic utilitarian selection within the functional paradigm prevailed.

As noted by Brantlinger (2003), the American dream of social mobility combined with tales of school as a meritocracy "cause a range of students to believe that the playing field is level and those who excel do so by virtue of natural talents while those who fail are lacking" (p. 7). Convincing lower class students that their place in life is not actually determined arbitrarily by privilege, status, wealth, and power but, in fact, is a natural

consequence of merit, fairly and justly derived, serves to stabilize the social class system and status quo in public education. If enough individuals embrace the system based on merit and, therefore, the idea that all who participated had an equal opportunity to demonstrate their merit, the end result would invariably be their determined social and economic position (Apple, 1990; Bell, 1973; Bernstein, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Collins, 1979; Danziger, 1990; Karier, 1975, 1986; Kozol, 1967, 1991; Sexton, 1961).

At the same time, working-class and poor youth and their parents have revealed lifeworld perspectives that indicate particular bitterness toward low-track and special education placement (as steering mechanisms) since the Equity Movement and are equally aware that upward social mobility depends on school success (Brantlinger 1986, 1993; Delpit, 1995; Dibos, 2002). For Karier (1975), the ideology of equal opportunity commensurate to merit translates into a credibility valve (if not a safety valve) used to maintain the social class system (as a steering mechanism) under the mantle of meritocracy.

Likewise, "no black constituency demanded compensatory education during the Equity Movement; nor did any organized black group participate in the formulation of federal legislation that endorsed compensatory practices" (Kantor & Lowe, 1995, p. 9). While black leaders (e.g., W.E.B Dubois, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcom X) historically agreed on the need for increased educational opportunities (as the lifeworld rationale for public education) they unfortunately diverged and ultimately failed to reach

consensus on which approach or strategy (steering media and mechanisms) could best achieve that aim (Berube, 1994).

Steering Media: Scientifically-based Standardized Testing

As witnessed in all three movements, scientifically-based standardized tests became the ultimate steering media needed to advance and support each movement's version of its system rationale. Each movement used various formats to promote the functional paradigm and meritocratic utilitarian selection based on assumed ability as the central steering mechanism. Within each movement, the use of meritocratic utilitarian selection included differentiated instruction and program tracking in which educational opportunities and rewards increased proportionately as assumed ability increased.

During the Equity and Excellence Movements, the steering media of law and money were also used to further support each system's rationale and steering mechanism for meritocratic utilitarian selection purposes. Liberal egalitarians employed legal steering media in the form of educational policy and entitlement programs intended to increase access to equal educational opportunity and advancement. Unfortunately, these mechanisms only managed to support the liberal egalitarian's version of inclusive meritocratic utilitarian selection for those considered to be disadvantaged. The power and influence of this steering media gained further momentum when the steering media of money was used to further strengthen the mechanisms for diagnosis and placement (based on the steering media, standardized test scores) by allocating local, state, and federal funds for these programs.

Likewise, the Excellence Movement also used the steering media of standardized test scores to support and advance the legal steering media (i.e., graduation requirements and standards for curriculum and instruction) needed to satisfy the exclusive meritocratic utilitarian selection of learners based on ability. Graduation requirements were believed to be a fair and equitable (although exclusive meritocratic) steering mechanism for determining future economic and educational opportunity for the best and the brightest learners. This mechanism would then promote the creation of a highly effective workforce (system rationale) needed to secure the United States' competitive edge internationally, politically, and economically.

Within the Equity and Excellence Movements, the state and federal governments overtly declared the government's role and responsibility (if not, obligation) to ascertain economic rewards, opportunities, and advantages (steering media) for distribution toward groups of learners and subsequent programs. Regardless of whether the intent of the meritocratic utilitarian selection practices varied from inclusive purposes (as in the Equity Movement) to exclusive purposes (as with both the Efficiency and Excellence Movements) the outcome for economic and educational opportunities were nonetheless the same for low-achievers.

Consequences for Learners and Teaching Practice

The employment of meritocratic utilitarian selection according to assumed ability (as measured by scientific standardized assessments) whether for inclusive or exclusive purposes, throughout the three reform movements, always resulted in academic tracking in which curriculum and instruction were designed and standardized to address perceived

learning needs of different groups of students. This translated into the distribution of learning opportunities and eventual economic rewards according to assumed merit (ability) with the greatest opportunities and rewards afforded to the perceived high-achievers and the least opportunities and rewards extended to the low-achievers.

Even in the case of the Equity Movement, a plethora of diagnostic tools continued as the steering media used to determine placement (and design) in Chapter I and special education programs (particularly after PL 94-142 Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975). This media maintained the continued employment of differentiated curriculum and tracking (meritocratic utilitarian selection) as the steering mechanism used to advance and support the system rationale for increasing opportunity and advancement through instructional intervention and compensation (liberal egalitarian perspective) for those perceived as disadvantaged.

Although this system rationale claimed to increase educational opportunity for learners considered disadvantaged, learning stereotypes and ability assumptions about learners continued to translate into ranking and sorting practices that at best, achieved only an inclusive meritocratic perspective. The assumptions and stereotypes about ability and learning that inevitably resulted in intervention and placement (steering mechanisms) according to assigned (or perceived) disadvantage, once again influenced and standardized instructional strategies and methodology (steering media) for entire groups of learners.

Colonized or Supported Lifeworld Rationale

The traditional American values of achievement and mobility based on performance and aptitude (according to merit) rather than social status (such as family background, race, and so forth) has been advanced and supported throughout all three reform movements. System rationale reflecting the functional paradigm that capitalized on meritocratic utilitarian selection as the central steering mechanism was consistently employed to advance learners for the betterment of a capitalistic society. Unfortunately, democratic ideals of equal educational opportunity and economic mobility were compromised (colonized) according to assumed measurements of merit or ability.

In actuality, equal opportunity in education during the 20th Century has never meant same or equal across different groups of learners. Instead, opportunity has always been distributed and operationalized as commensurate to measured ability according to standardized test scores. This powerful scientifically-based steering media was subsequently used to steer and validate the standardization of learning, curriculum, and teaching practice according to ability assumptions assigned to different groups of learners regardless of whether the intent was to achieve inclusive or exclusive meritocratic selection. Particularly during the Equity and Excellence Movements, fulfillment of the meritocratic utilitarian perspective and the subsequent disbursement of educational opportunity and economic rewards were openly accepted as the ultimate responsibility of the government to ensure continued growth and development of the capitalist society.

While social reformers like Lester Frank Ward favored access to knowledge through universal education to achieve equality for all classes, this review and analysis of

three major reform movements in education suggest that this lifeworld rationale for a democratic education system has never been widely accepted nor embraced. As Oakes (1993) pointed out, it was the traditional American values of achievement and mobility based on performance and aptitude (merit) rather than social status that was eagerly embraced and effectively promoted by business leaders, politicians, and educational elites. Once this worldview was immersed (colonized) into the public mainstream's lifeworld rationale for public education, competition among individuals and groups through meritocratic utilitarian selection became the "natural order" for determining both academic and future economic success. It has thus been shown historically that the steering media of money, law, and scientific test scores have been used effectively to support the mechanism of meritocratic utilitarian selection needed to fulfill the system rationale (and arguably, the colonized lifeworld rationale) for American public education.

Historical Implications for the Current Standards Movement

A review of the three previous reform movements (Efficiency Movement, Equity Movement, and Excellence Movement) revealed the continuous application of the functional paradigm (whether arguably intended or not) as the dominant worldview for American public education. Equally important was the implementation of standardized tests as the powerful steering media essential to the promotion and advancement of meritocratic utilitarian selection deemed necessary to support a capitalistic economy.

Habermas' theory of communicative action provided an important framework for needed discourse to further examine the communicative media and mechanisms used to advance ideologies and perspectives in relation to learners, learning, instruction, goals,

and outcomes. This exploration increased our understanding of the functional paradigm supported by meritocratic utilitarian selection as the dominant approach and subsequent worldview of public education within each movement.

Additionally, this examination served to increase our understanding of the origin, historical use, and current application of standardized (achievement and intelligence) tests as the ultimate steering media designed and employed exclusively for meritocratic utilitarian selection purposes according to assumed ability. Whenever and wherever these tests are used, ranking and sorting human beings according to arbitrarily assigned measurements of ability will invariably result.

The use of standardized achievement and intelligence tests as scientific measurements of human worth has consistently proven invaluable as powerful tools (or weapons) needed to colonize the traditional American lifeworld rationale for public education. The achievement of democratic beliefs and values regarding education and economic opportunity and mobility, when based on test scores, unequivocally has less to do with guaranteeing equal access.

Now, more than ever, educational and economic prosperity is distributed differentially among individuals determined to be most deserving according to assumed ability and academic performance. Therefore, the need for meritocratic utilitarian selection and subsequent governmental distribution of resources based on achievement (as measured by standardized test scores) has continued as the system rationale and subsequent steering mechanisms central to the Standards Movement today.

The Current Standards Movement

In the years following the National Commission on Excellence in Education's (1983) release of *A Nation at Risk*, the Standards Movement began to take shape and emerge as a prominent model for educational reform, with steering media and mechanisms that comprised three key policy components: (a) rigorous standards in core subject areas; (b) tests aligned with these standards; and (c) accountability for results. Standards-based reform (system rationale) results in state-approved documents and legislation (steering media and mechanisms) designed to specify what levels and skills will be taught for each subject area.

The intended goal of the Standards Movement is to provide steering guidelines (media and mechanisms) that teachers can use to create challenging and high-quality curricula for all children regardless of where they attend school (Clarke et al., 2003). This sentiment echoes the ideology of Lester Frank Ward, the sociologist who favored access to knowledge through universal education in order to achieve equality for all social classes.

No Child Left Behind Act (2001)

The Standards Movement received great momentum with the enactment of the NCLB Act (2001) which amends Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and has proven to be the single-most influential legislation within this movement. This federal legislation emulates the meritocratic utilitarian perspective held by governmental leaders' that it is the government's responsibility to distribute resources in such a way that will achieve desirable results.

NCLB was drafted specifically as a major source of federal funding (steering media) targeted to support the Standard Movement's system rationale for school improvement by increasing academic achievement among disadvantaged students. States receiving Title I funds (steering media) are now required to develop steering mechanisms in the form of challenging academic content standards and use standardized assessments to (scientifically) measure those standards. Furthermore, schools are now required to demonstrate they have satisfied the system rationale for achievement and accountability based on steering mechanisms of incremental, linear progress toward eventual academic proficiency by the year 2014.

For the 2004-05 school year, 46 states reported having standards-based tests in place for reading and math at the elementary, middle, and high school levels and of those states, 22 states have standards-based science tests for all three grade level spans in comparison to just 12 states implementing social studies tests for all three levels. While 36 states indicate that they provide access to technical assistance for low-performing schools, 29 states now sanction such schools using punitive steering media and mechanisms in the form of school closings, reconstituting schools as charter schools, or withholding funds (Quality Counts, 2005).

By the year 2008, high school students in twenty-eight states will be required to pass a state administered exam in order to graduate and another seven states may note the student's test performance on the student's diploma or transcript (Goertz & Duffy, 2003). These kinds of coercive steering media and mechanisms (referred to as high-stakes consequences) illustrate how the government continues to use meritocratic utilitarian

selection to distribute access to future educational opportunity and economic mobility to deserving high school graduates based on merit (achievement).

Grade-level Retention: Past and Present

Within the Standards Movement, grade-level retention has become a powerful steering mechanism used to advance the system rationale to end social promotion in order to increase accountability and achievement, especially for struggling learners. This is particularly evident when powerful steering media such as standardized test scores are employed to justify or support the mechanism of retention to further advance the system rationale of increasing accountability and academic achievement by ending social promotion (particularly for struggling learners).

From a meritocratic utilitarian perspective, U.S. schools view children as either students who "can learn or as others who cannot or will not" (Oakes, 1993, p. 98). Therefore, promotion, program assignment, graduation, and diplomas earned are steering media and mechanisms governed by merit (assumed ability) according to scientific objective measures (standardized test scores) of student learning. Heubert & Hauser (1999), like Oakes, argue that using meritocratic utilitarian selection mechanisms like retention and low-track placement invariably serve to deny students considered not worthy of advancement and equal access to educational opportunity or economic mobility. The overall failure of punitive steering mechanisms like retention and low-track placement based on student merit, to increase student learning (educational opportunity) is therefore considered irrelevant from a meritocratic utilitarian perspective (Labaree, 1987).

Seventy-five years of retention research. Research studies have consistently

demonstrated retention's negative effects on students. Goodlad's (1954) review of

retention research from 1924 to 1948 as well as Otto's (1951) study demonstrated that

retained students' academic gain was smaller than that of their matched counterparts of

promoted students. In fact, Otto found that struggling students made more progress if

they were promoted on to the next grade than if they were held back to gain the

knowledge and skills that were previously taught.

In a review of 66 articles on retention research from 1990 to 2000, Owings and

Kaplan (2001) demonstrated that 65 of those articles failed to support retention practice

and only one study even remotely supported retention, but even those results were refuted

two years later in a follow-up study. Consistently, retention research for the past 75 years

has failed to prove the academic advantages for students who are subjected to grade-level

retention (Owings & Kaplan, 2001).

Owings and Kaplan's review of retention research suggested the following: (a)

retention did not have a positive effect on student achievement; (b) matched counterparts

of retained and promoted students showed higher achievement gains for promoted

students; (c) retained students were significantly more likely to drop out of school; and

(d) retained students experienced more discipline problems in school than those who had

not been retained. Byrnes (1989) noted additional consequences of retention that

included: (a) the threat of non-promotion failed to motivate students (Bossing & Brien,

1979); (b) grade retention did not improve adjustment for developmentally immature

students (May & Welch, 1985; Shepard & Smith, 1985); and (c) grade retention

increased the cost of education (the retained child spends an additional year in the public school system; Haddad, 1979).

Retention vs. social promotion. Reynolds (1992) described the system rationale used to justify the use of retention as a steering mechanism intended to increase student accountability and achievement by, "allowing children who were unready for promotion an extra year to develop adequate academic skills" (p. 101). However well-meaning the intent may be, research studies demonstrated that the effects were still harmful (e.g., Bracey, 1999; Byrnes & Yamamoto, 1986; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 1998; Holmes, 1989; Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland, & Sroufe, 1997; Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005; Shepard & Smith, 1989; Yamamoto, 1979; Yamamoto & Byrnes, 1984). Although some studies showed academic gains during the first year after retention supported the system rationale for increased achievement (e.g., Baener & Holly, 1982; Elligett & Tocco, 1983) other studies demonstrated that the gains were generally small and diminished within three years (Hauser, 1999; Holmes, 1989; Karweit 1991; National Association of School Psychologists, 1998; Roderick, 1995; Thompson & Cunningham, 2000).

Inversely, Roderick, Bryk, Jacob, Easton, and Allensworth (1999) found there was no singularly agreed upon definition of social promotion. These researchers chose to describe this steering mechanism not according to academic achievement or progress, but rather, "as the decision to promote a student on the basis of their social development" (p. 173). In other words, students were promoted even when minimum grade-level academic standards (steering media) have not been successfully met.

The majority of employers, politicians, educators, parents, and even students continue to believe that retention is justified if a student has failed to demonstrate mastery of grade-level content (Public Agenda, 2000). The prevailing argument (and system rationale) in support of retention has been positioned consistently as an opposing view to social promotion. Likewise, retention practice has become a central mechanism used to advance the system rationale to increase achievement and accountability within the Standards Movement (Greene & Winters, 2004; Morris, 2000; Smith & Shepard, 1989).

This broad approval may be in response to the traditional American lifeworld rationale for public education based on democratic values that include access to education opportunity and economic mobility. Some parents and educators may support retention because they continue to believe that holding a child back may be academically and instructionally beneficial, from a liberal egalitarian perspective, by providing intervention needed to compensate for academic and learning disadvantages.

Reported trends in retention and dropout rates. Unfortunately, accurate depictions of retention trends and patterns in the U.S. have been difficult to complete due largely to disparities in reported data at the state, district, and local levels. As Shepard and Smith (1989) have noted: (a) only occasional data have traditionally been made available by some states and localities; (b) coverage has been sparse; and (c) not enough is known about the comparability of the available data. Additional inconsistencies and discrepancies in reports include the following: (a) the denominators of retention rates may be based on beginning- or end-of-year enrollment; (b) numerators may include retention as of the end of an academic year or as of the end of the following summer

session; (c) some states include special education students while others exclude them; and (d) in the primary grades, retention generally an all-or-nothing matter whereas in high school, it might be a matter of incomplete requirements (Heubert & Hauser, 1999). Likewise, retention rates can be highly variable across states, districts, schools, and even grade levels as in the case of Florida.

According to Heubert and Hauser (1999), the most uniform, long-term data on retention rates, trends, and differentials have been collected by the U.S. Bureau of the Census in connection with its Current Population Survey (CPS). Using this census data, the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2006) reported that the total percentage of students (ages 16-19) who have been retained in a grade within their school careers have demonstrated overall declining trends in total retention. Since the enactment of NCLB (2001), total number of students retained for this age group has declined, as demonstrated by 16.1% in 1995, 11.6% in 1999, and 9.6% in 2004. In grades K-5, the percentage of students retained ranged from 11.3% in 1995, 7.7% in 1999, and 5.2% in 2004. In grades 6-12, the percentage of students retained ranged from 7.1% in 1995, 5.3% in 1999, and 5.1% in 2004, demonstrating a retention trend that no longer favors the primary grades.

In regard to other groups, such as ethnicity, retention trends among black students continued to be the highest (22% in 1995, 16.3% in 1999, and 16.1% in 2004) in contrast to Hispanics (18% in 1995, 13.2% in 1999, and 9.2% in 2004) while retention trends among whites continued to be the lowest (14.9% in 1995, 10.5% in 1999, and 8.1% in 2004). In relation to socio-economic status, students in the lowest quartile continued to

experience the highest retention rates (25.5% in 1995, 18.9% in 1999, and 16.9% in 2004) in stark contrast to students in the highest quartile (9.1% in 1995, 7.1% in 1999, and 3.9% in 2004). Regionally, the data suggested that the total number of students retained in the South (20.6% in 1995, 14.8% in 1999, and 14.0% in 2004) and Northeast (14.9% in 1995, 11.9% in 1999, and 8.9% in 2004) witnessed the highest retention trends in comparison to the Midwest (13.6% in 1995, 9.2% in 1999, and 7.3% in 2004) and West 12.8% in 1995, 9.0% in 1999, and 5.4% in 2004) who had statistically similar retention rates.

The data in this report also suggested similar declining trends in the dropout rate among these groups during the same time period. Dropout rates reported across these groups for students 16-19 years of age who had been retained were also the highest in 1995, ranging as high as 41.6% among black students and as low as 20% among students in the highest socio-economic quartile. While most groups also experienced declining trends in the dropout rate across the three years reported, almost equal or increasing trends from 1999 to 2004 were reported for the following groups: (a) students retained during the upper grades (14.1% in 1999 to 16.5% in 2004); (b) whites (25.1% in 1999 to 26.3% in 2004); (c) blacks (30% in 1999 to 30.9% in 2004); (d) lowest socio-economic quartile (27.5% in 1999 to 28.3% in 2004); and (e) South (14.1% in 1999 to 16.5% in 2004).

Although declining trends in retention rates were also reported for both genders of 16-19 year olds, male students were consistently twice or almost twice the percentage as female students retained for each of the three years reported. Youth who had dropped out

of high school in each of the years observed were more likely to have ever been retained than youth who had not been retained. It is equally important to note that the national trends in retention rates may be very different from those that are reported in individual states, districts, and schools. Again, this data was based exclusively on the subgroup of students, ages 16-19 (who had been retained at some point during their school careers) for the years 1995, 1999, and 2004. Whether similar or conflicting trends would be found among other age groups such as third graders who are subjected to state and local retention policies based on standardized test scores is not known based on this data.

The practice of retaining students in a grade has also been far more prevalent in U.S. public schools than in most European and Asian countries (Holmes, 2006). For example, a 0% retention rate was reported in 2000 in countries like Japan, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. While Austria, Ireland, Switzerland, and Germany all reported retention rates of less than 2%, Italy and Finland reported retention rates of less that 1% with France reporting the highest European retention rate of 4.8% of their student population (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2003-04).

Seminal retention research study. A seminal study by Byrnes and Yamamoto (1986) examined the attitudes of students, parents, and educators toward repeating a grade. This has been one of the few, if not the only study in retention literature where actual retained students were interviewed (Shepard & Smith, 1989). Interviews were conducted with retained children in grades 1, 3, and 6 using structured personal interviews. Particular attention was given to retained children in first grade since younger

children were more likely to be retained due to parent and teacher beliefs that retention was less socially stigmatizing for younger children. The personal accounts by students toward being held back revealed deeper meanings and understandings in relation to the potential emotional and social consequences of this steering mechanism for learners

Overall, findings from this study indicated that retained students felt anxious about the reactions of their peers and others toward their assigned status as "school failures." Non-promotion was generally perceived as a testimony to a child's presumed inability to succeed in school. Teachers, although sensitive and supportive of the feelings of individual children toward repeating a grade within their class, generally provided little more than a repeat of the previous year's curriculum. Yet, the vast majority of teachers viewed the retention experience as effective in helping low students. While principals, teachers, and parents indicated in-grade retention was accepted as a popular means of improving poor school achievement, retained children perceived retention as a punishment and a stigma, not as a positive event designed to help them.

Retention in high-stakes accountability systems. In spite of the research, the use of grade-level retention as an accepted steering mechanism to increase accountability and achievement within high-stakes accountability systems has continued to increase nationwide. According to Quality Counts (2005), the following eight states employed grade-level promotion policies contingent on statewide exams: Louisiana, Florida, Delaware, Georgia, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Texas, and Missouri. Texas, like Florida, requires third-grade students to pass the reading portion of the state's standardized test for promotion to the fourth grade. Cities like New York City, Chicago, and Philadelphia

have also adopted similar retention policies at various grade levels (Greene & Winters, 2004). As pressures mount at the state and national level to meet AYP (annual yearly progress) and eventual proficiency for all students by 2014 as mandated by NCLB, the trend to use retention steering mechanisms and testing media to increase achievement and accountability may continue to increase.

The demographics of students sorted by retention steering mechanisms consistently revealed controversial equity issues with significant social implications for students. Studies designed specifically to examine these issues controlled for prior achievement, race, sex, and socioeconomic status (Meisels & Law, 1993; Thomas et al., 1992). This research has demonstrated that minority males from the lowest SES quartile rank tended to be disproportionately represented among students retained (Kaplan & Owings, 2002).

Retention mechanisms, like other intervention mechanisms, are inherently based on meritocratic utilitarian selection. Regardless of intent, this mechanism has continually failed to demonstrate significant increases educational opportunities and learning outcomes for all learners. Instead, research has indicated this mechanism has the inverse effect of increasing the drop-out rate (as noted by Owings & Kaplan, 2001). This could potential result in leaving "more children behind" by limiting or discouraging rather than increasing educational and economic opportunity and mobility, as witnessed throughout the history of American education whenever meritocratic utilitarian selection mechanisms have been employed.

Florida's record on retention. From 1978 to 1990, a strong Back-to-Basics reform movement was prominent in Florida, with tests administered in third, fifth, eighth, and tenth grades (Morris, 2000). By 1990, a Florida state commission report revealed that the educational objectives (steering media) had not been met either at the district or state level. The statewide retention policies and practice failed the system rationale to remediate at-risk students through increased academic achievement. That same year, the Florida state legislature acknowledged the reform movement's failure, ending the basic skills testing program.

In the last 20 years, there has essentially been two high-stakes reform movements that have resulted in elevated retention rates in Florida and nationwide. The first occurred in the 1980s during the Excellence Movement and the second retention trend can be found within the Standards Movement today. Karweit (1992) has also noted a circular relationship between the steering media and mechanisms of retention and social promotion policies and practice and the various political and socio-economic pressures levied to increase accountability and achievement for economic gain. Currently, demands for increasing academic achievement have resulted in the increased use of grade-level retention.

Florida's A+ Plan Accountability System

Governors and state legislators implemented educational state policies (steering media) in an aggressive effort to support and advance the Excellence Movement in the 1980s and 1990s that has continued within the Standards Movement. School-based accountability systems (steering media and mechanisms) supported by standardized test

scores (steering media) became the central driving force in systemic education reform in Florida.

Since 1991, Florida's educational trends in school reform efforts ran parallel with those found at the national level. Consequently, a variety of education initiatives (steering media and mechanisms) have been employed over the last 10 to 15 years that include: (a) higher academic standards; (b) criterion-referenced testing; (c) increased awareness of parental and community involvement and support; and (d) the local publication of individual school performance ratings (Florida Department of Education, 1999).

Governor Jeb Bush and Lt. Governor Frank Brogan's (1999) A+ Plan for Education (the Florida Accountability Act) was considered by some as perhaps, "the most aggressive and controversial education reform measure currently in the country" (Greene, 2003, p. 1). Although FCAT results (grades 4, 5, 8 and 10) were not used for accountability purposes in 1998, school results were reported. Officially implemented for accountability purposes in 1999, this education reform package embraced a system rationale to increase achievement and accountability for teachers, educators, administrators, and schools. The notion of accountability was viewed as essential to the system rationale that can best be achieved (and supported) through the implementation of steering mechanisms and media such as school level-grading based on academic performance according to FCAT scores.

Florida's grading system promoted the use of meritocratic utilitarian selection to determine the highest performing schools according to the most powerful steering media known to educational leaders – scientifically measured standardized test scores. The

Florida governor and state legislators further embraced the meritocratic utilitarian assumption that it was the government's responsibility to distribute resources (steering media and mechanisms) in such a way that will satisfy the system rationale for increased achievement and accountability according to test scores. This translates into schools with · the highest merit, ranked as "A" schools, receiving monetary steering media designed to reward high performance based on academic achievement ($100 per pupil and greater autonomy for spending). Schools with less merit, "B" and "C" schools received no additional monetary rewards.

Steering media and mechanisms applied to the "D and F schools" were punitive in nature, in the form of one-year probations and recertification for teachers and possible removal of school administrators. State-funded opportunity scholarships or vouchers were steering media designed to increase individual funding for students at "D" and "F" graded schools needed to attend higher performing schools, therefore, increasing educational opportunities (Kleindienst, 1999). Principals at "D" and "F" graded schools have the added responsibility of distributing additional monetary rewards (steering media) to veteran teachers intended to recruit and retain teachers at low-performing schools (Governor's Office, n.d.).

In 1999, the first year that school performance grades were issued, 78 schools were designated as "F" schools. Students in two schools that were designated critically low performing in 1998 and received "F" performance grades in 1999 were eligible for and some students received opportunity scholarships. One year later, all 78 "F" schools in 2000 moved up at least one grade level while four schools were issued "F" performance

grades for the first time. The third year of issuing grades observed the number of "A" and

"B" schools increased from 21% in 1999 to 41% in 2001. In the same period, "D" and

"F" schools decreased from 28% to 12%. In 2003, the introduction of the developmental

scale score (DSS) was first used to provide parents and educators with a measure of

student learning gains over a year's time. Using this new grading system for grades 3-10,

1,311 schools earned school recognition awards for achieving an "A" performance grade

(or improving a letter grade) while 64 schools received "F" grades (Florida Department

of Education, 2004).

Florida Statute for Third-Grade Mandatory Retention

To further support the system rationale of "leaving no child behind" (as

determined by steering mechanisms for achievement and accountability), the Florida

legislature enacted steering mechanisms designed to prohibit social promotion. FCAT

reading scores were used as steering media to support the steering mechanism of grade

level retention in third grade beginning with the 2002-03 school year. This new retention

mandate specifically targeted accountability for reading performance at the end of the

third grade, requiring a minimum Level 2 score in reading on the FCAT for promotion to

fourth grade. Any student who did not meet the reading proficiency requirement or did

not qualify for one of the six exceptions of "good cause" for promotion [1008.25(6)(b)2,

Florida Statutes] faced mandatory retention.

Jay Greene, Senior Fellow at the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research in New

York, has conducted several studies and written papers in support of Florida's A+ Plan

for Education, the use of vouchers, and high-stakes testing (including the application of

mandatory retention). Greene's views on retention and social promotion and subsequent

use of test scores support utilitarian meritocratic selection and subsequent distribution of

economic rewards and education opportunity based on assumed merit (ability). In the

same tradition as Thorndike, Greene expressed the same attitudes and assumptions about

learning, achievement, and accountability as indicated in his summation of America's

public schools over the past three decades:

> Any system, any set of requirements are [sic] going to create some sad outcome
> for somebody. Imagine if we said, well, you know, it doesn't really matter
> whether students have acquired the skills that we expect of a high school student
> in Florida. We should give them diplomas anyway. While you might help some
> students, you would hurt many more and that kind of system is rotten and it's
> produced the stagnation that we've had over the last three decades....What we did
> before accountability systems were in place, is that we trusted education
> professionals to do the best they could and that whatever they produced we
> assumed was the best they could. The problem with that approach was that it
> didn't produce good results. It produced really lousy results... (Greene, 2005)

The impact of the Florida retention mandate was swift, as Brantlinger (2004)

noted that the implementation of this steering media designed to end social promotion

resulted in five times more third-graders retained throughout the state during the 2002-03

school year than during the previous year. This meant that 33,000 out of 188,107 third

graders who took the FCAT scored below the Level 2 requirement in reading that is

needed for promotion (*Associated Press*, 2003).

In 2005, Orange County Public School District (OCPS) in Orlando witnessed a

rate of 22% of third graders (2,900 students) who failed the FCAT reading and were

retained as a result. This decrease in the third grade retention rate in OCPS was declared

as an indicator of increased success by the media in comparison to 34% of third graders

who failed the FCAT reading and were consequently retained in 2002. However, the

percentage of total sophomores in Orange County who failed the FCAT reading was much higher, at 44% in 2005, including three "F" high schools whose sophomores actually did worse, with failure rates at 83%, 76%, and 70% respectively. In cases where retention trends declined, the accountability system and the use of FCAT scores as a steering mechanism were interpreted as increasing academic achievement (*WESH.com*, 2005). From a meritocratic utilitarian perspective, students who made the necessary academic gains (assumed merit) as measured by the FCAT were rewarded grade level promotion. From this point of view, on the other hand, students who failed to measure up did not make the necessary gains and therefore, did not deserve to advance.

Greene and Winters (2004) further reasoned that the potentially harmful stigma associated with retention when only a few students were retained under the old system may not hold true under the new system. These researchers suggested that while only a few students were retained when the steering media were not rigorous, a system rationale designed to end social promotion supported by rigorous steering media that included standardized test scores, might result in thousands of students retained. They believed that thousands retained would be less traumatic than if there were only a few as reflected in the following statement:

> If, as several of the researchers who have found retention to be harmful have hypothesized, a retained student performs worse because he feels excluded and thus inferior, then a policy that holds back thousands of students might dilute this sense of being singled out, limiting the psychological harm associated with retention. (p. 4)

In this instance, Greene and Winters appeared to be drawing a correlation between the stigmatization of retention and being singled out. This statement suggested

that the consequence of failure was somehow diminished if the child was a failure among many. Whether this was an erroneous claim or not, they did not offer any data or literature to support such a claim.

Florida Teacher Merit Pay

In February 2006, the Florida legislature passed a new "pay-for-performance program," Florida statute [§1012.225] for Florida teachers, intended to tie salary raises and bonuses directly to pupils' standardized test scores. The program was scheduled to begin during the 2006-07 school year. In the same spirit of meritocratic utilitarian selection, this work incentive program, otherwise known as STAR (Special Teachers Are Rewarded) ranked and sorted teachers' performance according to student standardized test scores. Just as the title overtly suggested, teachers were literally rewarded with raises and bonuses according to assumed merit (increased student test scores) in order to achieve desirable results. This landmark legislation marked the first attempt by a state to link teacher wages so closely to student exam results (Florida Department of Education, 2007).

Governor Jeb Bush argued that basing teachers' pay according to improvements in test scores is simply a matter of common sense. From Governor Bush's viewpoint, he queried, "What's wrong about paying good teachers more for doing a better job?" (*Washington Post*, 2006). His sentiment revealed an exclusive meritocratic view of rewarding the best and the brightest according to assumed merit (in this case, teacher performance based on students' standardized test scores).

However, opponents of this steering mechanism, (e.g., Florida Teachers' Union) have argued that while legislators claimed this program was designed to raise teacher standards for performance and quality teaching based on test scores, "schools are not factories and their output is not so easily measured." The president of the Florida Education Association, Andy Ford insisted, "Standardized tests don't measure everything in a child's life in school" (*Washington Post*, 2006). His expressed worldview clearly opposed the system rationale of increasing teacher performance through the steering mechanism of meritocratic utilitarian selection based on merit and the subsequent distribution of money media in the form of merit pay.

The STAR program was actually scrapped when Governor Charlie Crist signed a new state bill [SB 1226] referred to as the Merit Award Program. The STAR program has allowed districts greater flexibility in determining the steering mechanisms needed to direct how many teachers will be rewarded and how they will be evaluated. All instructional personnel and school-based administrators, with the exception of paraprofessionals and substitute teachers, were included. Districts were not required to participate in the program.

Rewards were based on each school district's average teacher salary, ranging from 5-10% of the salary. The personnel assessment rating score must reflect at least 60% calculated according to student achievement (gains in learning based on a pretest and posttest). Up to 40% of the assessment was based on professional practice that included: the ability to maintain discipline, outstanding knowledge of subject matter, and

the ability to use diagnostic data to design and implement differentiated instruction

(Florida Department of Education, 2007).

Research on merit pay has indicated that educators have generally been non-

receptive to work incentive programs based on raises and bonuses. Lortie (1975) found

that in Dade County, Florida, 37% of teachers reported that the greatest extrinsic reward

they received was "respect from others" and the biggest psychic reward (for 86% of the

teachers polled) was knowing that, "I have reached students and that they have learned."

According to Johnson (1984), teachers generally resisted such reforms because

they do not trust the ability and fairness of administrators charged with assessing merit.

From the view point of teachers, merit pay was not an incentive but a "bother" and a

"threat" to professional comradery. Ultimately, from teachers' lifeworld rationale, merit

pay was irrelevant to what teachers intrinsically value most: "seeing their pupils grow

intellectually and socially."

Research Findings on Florida's High-Stakes Accountability System

Historically, mandated standardized testing has been used to rank and sort

learners for curricular and instructional purposes, whether from a meritocratic utilitarian

or liberal egalitarian perspective with subsequent distribution of economic rewards and

education opportunity based on assumed merit (ability). There are those who believe that

accountability systems are as imperative to school productivity in the same tradition that

some business leaders believed Taylor's scientific management was essential to improve

business or industry productivity (e.g., Finn, & Rebarber, 1992; Greene & Winters, 2004;

Hirsch, 1996; Paige, 2005; Ravitch, 1995).

Proponents of the Standards Movement support a system rationale based on the assumption that to increase accountability and achievement in public education, test scores are the powerful media needed to scientifically measure and evaluate the steering mechanisms of productivity and efficiency. These mechanisms are then further reinforced by rewarding high-performing schools with another powerful steering media in capitalistic society, monetary resources, according to measured performance. These sentiments are quite evident in the following statement by the former Secretary of Education, Rod Paige (2005):

> We know how to make organizations work and the same thing is true for schools. The idea is to link performance and contribution and incentives. What enterprise in the world can you name that's growing and prospering where there are no standards? Why should in 2005, we have to defend the use of standards in education? And the NCLB Act and accountability that is a part of federal policy now is the right thing to do. And the nay-sayers will continue to be nay-sayers. So be it. They've always been there, they will continue to be there, but the work must continue because the work is too great.

Counter to the beliefs that accountability systems are a critical part of school improvement, opponents to the Standards Movement (e.g., Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Groves, 2002; Kohn, 2000; Madaus & Clarke, 2001; McNeil, 2000a; Natriello & Pallas, 2001; Sacks, 1999; Sergiovanni, 2000; Wood, 2004) cite the unforeseen consequences, particularly when high-stakes mechanisms are employed to increase student and teacher accountability and performance. Most noteworthy have been the potential negative impact of high-stakes testing and consequences for: teaching and learning, democratic decision-making, institutionalizing hegemonies, and the academic performance of minorities.

An increasing multitude of research studies have specifically investigated the effects of state-mandated testing programs, especially those attaching high-stakes consequences (steering mechanisms such as mandatory retention) to standardized test results. Research has revealed emerging concerns regarding the potential impact that ranking and sorting mechanisms (meritocratic utilitarian selection) have on schools, learning, classroom practice, teachers, and students (e.g., Clarke et al., 2003; Cunningham & Sanzo, 2002; Groves, 2002). Of those studies, the majority of research examining state testing programs have focused on the potential effects on teaching practice, documenting changes in focus, content, and pedagogy and the impact on learning and educational opportunity for students.

Unforeseen consequences of Florida's high-stakes testing. Since the enactment of Florida's A+ Plan in 1999 and the Florida statute mandating third-grade retention was first implemented during the 2002-03 school year, qualitative case studies to examine the consequences of these high-stakes initiatives (steering media and mechanisms) in Florida have been limited to the viewpoints of teachers and principals on issues related to empowerment, autonomy, and consequences of school labeling (e.g., Acker-Hocever & Touchton, 2001; Reed et al., 2001) while largely excluding the view points of parents and students.

Research designed to examine teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding Florida's high-stakes practices revealed the following: (a) teachers believed Florida's Accountability System has not improved the quality of education; (b) teachers felt less job satisfaction from teaching; (c) increasing numbers of teachers wanted to change grade

levels due to high-stakes testing pressures; (d) teachers increased their use of direct instruction and traditional skill and drill strategies; and (e) teachers felt compelled to narrow the curriculum (Behrman, 2003; Counsell, 2004; Schmudde, 2001). One additional unforeseen consequence revealed in my Florida pilot study pertained to second graders' potential fears toward entering third-grade, failing the FCAT, and being retained (Counsell, 2004).

The consequences described by the teacher participants were consistent with teacher perceptions and experiences revealed by high-stakes testing research nationwide (e.g., Acker-Hocever & Touchton, 2001; Berliner & Biddle, 1997; Clarke et al., 2003; Cunningham & Sanzo, 2002; Groves, 2002; Madaus & Clarke, 2001; McNeil, 2000b; Murillo & Flores, 2002; Pedulla, et al., 2003; Reed et al., 2001; Taylor, Shepard, Kinner, & Rosenthal 2002). These results, when combined with previous studies, further supported the notion that highly consequential testing contributed to low morale, increased frustration, diminished student learning experiences, and restricted curricular options, from a lifeworld perspective, resulting in the inequality of educational opportunity that runs counter to traditional democratic values and beliefs about public education.

A study designed to examine the use of retention and referral practices employed in special education, Buslinger-Clifford (2004) found significant effects for retention and referral for services over a five-year period. The results suggested that schools changed their use of referral and retention policies (steering media and mechanisms) in response

to the implementation of the FCAT with high-stakes consequences (system rationale for accountability and performance).

This study revealed that the application of rewards and punishments (steering media) in relation to standardized test scores can potentially encourage educators to participate in unethical practices that will ensure the elimination of low test scores from the testing pool. This kind of elimination can inadvertently satisfy the system rationale for increased achievement by increasing the statistical average of test scores within the testing pool. Likewise, retention practice, as a steering mechanism for meritocratic utilitarian selection, can also satisfy this mechanism for elimination by inadvertently increasing the drop out rate (Haney, 2000).

Research supporting Florida's high-stakes testing. Greene and his cohorts at the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research have examined the consequences of Florida's high-stakes accountability system through statistical analyses. Two quantitative studies in particular have attempted to investigate the validity of high-stakes testing and the efficacy of retention policies to end social promotion in Florida (Greene & Winters, 2004; Greene, Winters, & Forster, 2003). Greene, Winters, and Forrester claimed that the high correlation between test scores (FCAT and Stanford-9) as observed in Florida meant that the effects of high-stakes consequences did not distort or influence the test outcomes. Likewise, Greene and Winters claimed that after the first year that the retention policy was employed, the performance of third graders who were subjected to the retention policy, or were actually retained, exceeded the performance of students who were not subjected to the policy or who were not retained.

These studies, however, were not without methodological problems related to the researchers' interpretations as follows: (a) the researchers experienced difficulties ascertaining the validity of the test score comparisons due to differences in family backgrounds and demographics between the two fourth-grade populations; (b) the researchers discounted much of their own data in other states and school districts, in favor of the high correlations achieved in Florida; and (c) although short-term effects of retention showed academic gains for the first year, whether students initial gains will continue to grow, recede, or remain constant over time were left unanswered.

Yet, Greene's own (2001) critique of retention research asserted that the very nature of the subjective (immeasurable, unscientific) criteria that have been used to determine retention has created methodological problems for scientific researchers attempting to evaluate these policies (using scientific steering mechanisms). Likewise, Greene, Winters, and Forster (2003) criticized retention research based largely on theoretical or anecdotal analysis that failed, in their opinion, to withstand (scientific) scrutiny. Consequently, Greene has rejected 75 years of retention research that has relied on qualitative data to reveal the harmful academic and emotional effects of in-grade retention or claims that retained students were more likely to drop out than similar counterparts who were socially promoted.

In opposition to Greene' research, policy advocate Gerald Bracey (2004) has condemned Greene's use of the working paper to quickly publish the results of his studies without a peer review process. According to Bracey, Greene's papers and reports were often offensive and unprofessional in both content and interpretation, frequently: (a)

attacking other researchers; (b) insulting real researchers' intelligence and training, making unsubstantiated claims and false statements; (c) failing to provide sufficient data needed for researchers to satisfactorily evaluate the research; and (d) dismissing entire bodies of research such as the literature that demonstrates the negative effects of grade-level retention. Unfortunately for the lay public, it can be difficult to judge these criticisms or even to be aware of them. Therefore, researchers and scholars must provide the information needed to accurately interpret and understand these studies and their "not-so-hidden-agenda."

Clearly, Greene and his cohorts have actively embraced and promoted Thorndike's belief in the utility of standardized test scores to scientifically measure merit (academic achievement and ability) for meritocratic utilitarian selection and subsequent distribution of resources. Proving the validity of high-stakes tests (as true and accurate measurements of achievement and ability) has been an essential argument to the overall system rationale for increasing achievement based on test scores. This steering media can then be used as the scientific data needed to guide and direct subsequent curriculum standards and instruction.

The very learners that the Standards Movement claims to assist, the struggling learners, are the students who have historically experienced fewer learning opportunities in comparison to their high-achieving counterparts. Although the teacher participants in the various Florida case studies, as noted earlier, reflected on many of their observations and experiences with these issues and their perceived consequences for parents and

students, their worldviews cannot be further corroborated because there were no actual parent and student participants.

Schools are essentially a product of their community and as such, are greatly influenced by local values, resources, and opportunities (Sergiovanni, 2000). As complex institutions, their complexities can best be revealed, addressed, and understood by those closest to the situation (Fullan, 1998). By exploring and examining the attitudes and assumptions of the key players (third-grade teachers) the social inquirer can search for instructive, explanatory frameworks that reflect the educational situation and educators' understanding and meanings (Farrell, 2000).

To understand the consequences of various system rationale, media, and mechanisms for various communicative actors or participants, it is imperative to explore what individual actors know of themselves and experience in their world according to their life histories (Habermas, 1987, p. 328). Yet, no qualitative case study (including my own Florida pilot study) has attempted to specifically examine the life histories of teachers. Therefore, research thus far has failed to demonstrate why different teachers, in different school communities, respond differently to Florida's high-stakes accountability system. Likewise, it is necessary to examine the potential consequences for learning and teaching practice among different teachers in different school communities.

Summary

According to Habermas, Weber's (1968) theory of modernity is instrumental in demonstrating how bureaucratization, a new form of organization, developed out of the increasing need in modern society for economic systems found in two dominant forms

(private enterprises and public bureaucracies). The increased appearance, complexity, and subsequent influence of these bureaucracies during the industrial revolution and Efficiency Movement now serve to define modern society as a "society of organizations."

From Weber's perspective, the bureaucratization of society as a whole placed societal rationality and acting subjects under an objective force in the form of an acting apparatus that works autonomously over their heads. Like the system rationales, steering media and mechanisms were advanced within each education reform movement for the betterment of society. Rationalization then shifted unnoticeably from action (lifeworld) rationality to system rationality. In the image of a rationally operating machine, Weber equates it to an inanimate machine that is the mind objectified (cited by Habermas, 1987, p. 307). The system rationality has the power and influence needed to force actors into its service and to dominate their everyday working life (e.g., industrialized factories).

Sacks (2003) warned the American public that when corporations were allowed to influence schools, the result often mirrored an image of the factory. Under the corporate model of education, schools become businesses and children become products, as former Chrysler Chairman Lee Iococca once called schoolchildren while speaking to a group of educators. Sadly, children in this corporate vision of public education are measured, sorted, and processed on the basis of standardized-test results.

When test scores become the coin of the realm, the market value of individual schools will be determined by those test scores (as witnessed by the school grading component of Florida's A+ Plan for school reform). As noted by Aper (2002), mass testing satisfies the desire for efficiency, using rational-technical solutions to address

concerns about student achievement and results in accountability efforts that regard the measurement of facts and skills as a kind of "gold standard" of educational outcomes.

The functional paradigm, based on meritocratic beliefs and assumptions about learning and instruction, has historically dominated the purpose and outcome for public education, as demonstrated within the three major education reform movements: Efficiency, Equity, and Excellence Movements. This same ideology remains central within the current Standards Movement. The employment of meritocratic utilitarian selection to rank and sort learners according to merit (ability) has remained constant. Although the intent for selection may arguably vary, whether from an exclusive meritocratic perspective or from a liberal egalitarian perspective of inclusive meritocracy, (as some may suggest is the educational intent of NCLB) the outcome of distributing educational and economic opportunity commensurate with ability remains the same.

Standardized test scores have consistently demonstrated their utility and worth as scientific steering media needed to support and advance each movement's technical progress and rational administration of public schools for the betterment of capital growth in society. However, the most definitive difference between the Standards Movement today and reform movements in the past has been the increasingly coercive and punitive use of standardized tests within local, state, and national accountability systems.

As the defining scientific measurement for achievement, standardized test scores are the powerful high-stakes media used to support Florida's high-stakes meritocratic utilitarian selection to: rank schools and assign grade-level performance; rank students and determine in-grade retention or promotion; determine high school graduation; and

rank and sort teacher performance. The power media of money in the form of rewards for schools, opportunity grants (vouchers) for students, and merit pay for teachers is then used concurrently. Florida's accountability system rationale relies heavily on scientific assumptions that uniform measures can be developed and applied in order to substantiate direct evidence of student learning, teacher effectiveness, and school quality (Stone, 1999).

Although few would argue that student achievement is generally accepted as a rational goal or outcome of education, when an intense emphasis is placed on limited measures of this objective at the expense of intersubjective lifeworlds (culture, values, beliefs, traditions) of schools, the argument is made that serious distortion and disconnection of the system and lifeworld occur. Habermas referred to this disconnection as the "colonization" of the lifeworld by the system – that is, the functional rationality of the system forcefully imposes itself by overwhelming the intersubjective, interpersonal world of shared meaning that is characteristic of the lifeworld.

This review of research demonstrated that current studies have examined the potential unforeseen consequences of Florida's A+ Plan and mandatory retention for learners and teaching practice according to the perspectives of teachers and administrators. However, no research studies reviewed examined the phenomenon of what happens specifically according to the lived experiences of beginning and veteran teachers. The emphasis that is now placed on test data in the high-stakes testing culture exemplifies the colonization of the lifeworlds of teachers that result from these hyper-

rational steering systems, pressing teachers and students to internalize the values of the test and subsequently, the authority of the state and its ever-present surveillance.

Teachers must now confront the illusion of professional autonomy that is narrowly circumscribed and the requirements of the state for uniform data. To achieve this inquiry, this current study attempted to understand and learn from the different life stories told by a veteran and beginning teacher participants. This approach allowed the teachers to challenge their own initial interpretations of what high-stakes testing means for learners and teaching practice, so that new understandings could be gained. In this exploration of lived experiences, participants must be provided with the opportunity to risk their own prejudgments, and ultimately, believe that they have something important to say.

Consequently, Habermas' theory of communicative action was employed in Chapter 4 to further reveal the underlying meanings and insights regarding the phenomenon of what happens as each teacher's life history, subsequent stock of lifeworldly knowledge, and individual school community's lifeworld intersected with Florida's high-stakes accountability system and what this meant for learners and teaching practice. Educators and researchers can then use the newly gained insights and meanings to critically contemplate potential system steering media and mechanisms (educational policies and procedures) that can best support learning and teaching practice (from a lifeworld perspective). Teaching practice that ensures student access to educational experiences within individual school communities can further satisfy the lifeworld rationale to increase learning opportunities for all learners regardless of need.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In Chapter 2, Habermas' (1987) theory of communicative action as the theoretical

framework revealed how the functional paradigm based on meritocratic beliefs and

assumptions about learning and instruction has traditionally dominated the purpose and

outcome for public education. The historical insights gained from the review and analysis

of three major education reform movements (Efficiency, Equity, and Excellence

Movements) were then used to further examine the current literature and research in

relation to the Standards Movement. This examination revealed how the power media of

(a) law (in the form of legislation such as NCLB), (b) money (subsequent funding to

meeting AYP), and (c) scientific measurements (standardized test scores) has been used

concurrently to define, steer, and drive the system rationale to increase teacher and

student achievement and accountability based on test scores.

Florida's A+ Plan and Retention Statute (intended to end social promotion in third

grade) were designed specifically to advance the Standard Movement's system rationale

for public education. As the defining scientific measurement for achievement, FCAT

reading and math scores have become the essential criteria for high-stakes meritocratic

utilitarian selection that (a) ranks schools and assigns subsequent grade-level

performance; (b) ranks students and determines in-grade retention or promotion; (c)

determines high school graduation; and (d) ranks and sorts teacher performance. The

power media of money in the form of (a) monetary rewards for schools, (b) opportunity

grants (vouchers) for students (families), and (c) merit pay for teachers is then used to

further support the system rationale and steering mechanisms. Florida's accountability system rationale (like the Standards Movement) relies heavily on scientific assumptions that uniform measures can be developed and applied in order to substantiate direct evidence of student learning, teacher effectiveness, and school quality (Stone, 1999).

Research related to Florida's A+ Plan and mandatory retention for learners and teaching practice demonstrated that current studies have examined the potential unforeseen consequences according to the perspectives of teachers and administrators. However, no research studies reviewed examined the phenomenon of what happens specifically according to the lived experiences of beginning and veteran teachers. The emphasis that is now placed on test data in the high-stakes testing culture exemplifies the colonization of the lifeworlds of teachers that result from these hyper-rational steering systems, pressing teachers and students to internalize the values of the test, and subsequently, the authority of the state and its ever-present surveillance.

As stated in Chapters 1 and 2, the purpose of this qualitative case study is to gain deeper understanding of the phenomenon of what happened when the life histories of one beginning and one veteran third grade teacher at two different school communities intersect with Florida's A+ Plan (high-stakes accountability system) and third grade mandatory retention and what this will mean for learners and teaching practice. Using Habermas' (1987) theory of communicative action as the theoretical framework, this qualitative study specifically explored the phenomenon of what happened as Florida's high-stakes system rationale, steering media, and mechanisms intersected with different teachers' (a) life histories, (b) subsequent stock of lifeworldly knowledge, and (c) school

community lifeworlds to reveal what this meant for learners and teaching practice. This required teacher participants to risk their own prejudgments and bias in order to contemplate their ongoing beliefs about learners and teaching practice, both past and present.

<div align="center">A Phenomenological Case Study</div>

Phenomenological studies, according to Schram (2003) investigate the meaning of the lived experiences of small groups of individuals in relation to a specific concept or phenomenon of interest. The underlying assumption of phenomenological research is that "dialogue and reflection can reveal the *essence* – the essential, invariant structure or underlying meaning – of some aspect of shared experience" (p. 71, italics in original).

Using Habermas' theory of communicative action, this qualitative case study sought to reveal the underlying meanings for learners and teaching practice within high-stakes testing according to different teachers at different schools. Hence, the kind of dialogue and reflections based on the beginning and veteran teachers' lived experiences with Florida's high-stakes accountability system should allow the reader, as noted by Polkinghorne (1989), to develop a sense of "what it is like to experience that" (p. 46). In other words, this qualitative case study must enable the social inquirer to describe "what schools are like, their strengths and weaknesses" by allowing others to "*see* what occurs in them" and to be able to tell others "what we have seen in ways that are vivid and insightful" (Eisner, 1991, p. 23, italics in original).

Schwandt (1997) insisted that the exploration of the phenomenon revealed by individual's lived experiences must describe the concepts and structures of the experience

specifically according to the practical reasoning and common sense knowledge used by the individuals and the subsequent rationality that results. For social inquirers, rationality has less to do with the possession of knowledge and much more to do with how communicative actors acquire and use knowledge (the individual's stock of lifeworldly knowledge) within different lifeworld school communities. Hence, the participation of key individuals who have lived experiences with the phenomenon of interest is central to this kind of qualitative research. This exploration must therefore consider the following assumptions: (a) human behavior is best observed and understood conceptually in relation to things, people, events, and situations; (b) perceptions provide evidence of the world, not as it is necessarily believed to be but as it is lived; (c) the reality of anything is not "out there" in an objective or detached sense, but is inextricably attached or intertwined with one's consciousness of it (understanding phenomenon relies on experience with the phenomenon); (d) language is the central medium through which meaning is constructed and conveyed (using various means such as dialogue and reflections); and (e) understanding underlying meanings of phenomenon can be increased by exploring different individuals lived experiences (Schram, 2003, p. 71).

Interpretive Inquiry vs. Critical Inquiry

Each research method, from Habermas' (1984) perspective, is a rational and valid process for knowing within its respective domain of knowledge. Just as the kind of research question (human interest) determines the kind of methodology to be used, the chosen methodology likewise attends to certain kinds of knowledge to be gained. For example, (a) scientific (technical) research investigates technical-instrumental knowledge

focused on causal explanations; (b) interpretive (hermeneutic) research explores practical knowledge that emphasizes understanding meaning and action; and (c) critical theory examines emancipatory knowledge needed for enlightenment (insights and understanding) and emancipation (freedom from institutional domination).

Habermas' (1984) criticism of scientific and interpretive research is not a matter of validity, but rather, it is the application of each as an exclusive criterion for determining the validity of all forms of knowledge. In other words, it is not a question of legitimacy of methodology but one of perceived incompleteness, that each alone, is unable to construct the full realization of human potential. Critical theorists acknowledge that scientific research can describe phenomenon based on observation but lacks the capacity to understand or explain it. Interpretive research, on the other hand, has the capacity to understand the meanings of the phenomenon experienced but according to Habermas, is too dependent on the subjective understandings of the individuals involved. While the interpretive approach attends to the meaningfulness of social activity that includes understanding conflicting interpretations of social action (such as misunderstandings) interpretive inquirer tends to reconcile actors to their "existing social reality" rather than transform that social reality through coordinated social action (Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

In contrast to scientific (technical) and interpretive research, critical theory engages in inquiry with the expectation for enacting social change through both the enlightenment and emancipation of communicative actors (Ewert, 1991). Critical social science is conceptualized by Habermas (1984) as a social process that combines

participation in the process of critique with the political determination to act in order to overcome contradictions in the rationality of social actions.

The design and implementation of both pilot studies, as explained in Chapter 1, followed a chosen line of critical inquiry that deliberately sought to engage in an intentional discourse to initiate social change. Approaching these studies as an instigator and facilitator resulted in a strict adherence to a semi-structured interview protocol with a prejudgmental framework. With zealousness for advocacy and activism, the research purpose in both studies actively challenged the application of high-stakes consequences in order to attain social justice for the key players involved. However, this aim was completed at the expense of exploring the deeper meanings of the phenomenon of what was happening as different third grade teachers' lives intersected with Florida and Iowa accountability systems.

In an effort to navigate both the interpretive and critical perspectives, the purpose of this study was subsequently conceptualized as having both a research purpose and a practical purpose (Maxwell, 1996). The research purpose of this study (emphasizing an interpretive approach) sought to gain insights and understandings regarding the phenomenon of what happened in relation to learners and teaching practice as the beginning and veteran teachers' life histories, stock of lifeworldly knowledge, and school lifeworlds intersected with Florida's high-stakes accountability system. Based on the insights gained (enlightenment), the practical purpose (according to critical theory) was to then contemplate the kinds of steering media and mechanisms needed to support

teaching practice (emancipation) that can best satisfy the system (and lifeworld) rationale to increase educational opportunities for all learners regardless of need.

Like critical ethnography, as described by the anthropologist Michael Agar (1996), the critical inquirer continues to examine local context and meaning in the same way but with a dual purpose, that goes beyond the initial interpretation of what is happening to then ask, why are things this way? In this sense, critical inquirers add to the interpretivist's task of not only understanding the phenomenon as it is experienced but now encourage participants to confront and question what could be (Schram, 2003, p. 34).

Having a dual purpose that incorporated both perspectives required a clear distinction between the research purpose and practical purpose, as recommended by Marshall and Rossman (1999) that had to be maintained throughout this study if eventual opportunities to explore social action, change, or advocacy were to be afforded. This meant that the insights and meanings gained in relation to the phenomenon found in this qualitative study (research purpose) were then used to prompt and guide recommendations for social change (practical purpose) rather than intended recommendations for social change according to a prejudgmental framework (practical purpose) were used to prompt and guide the research purpose (as was the case with both pilot studies).

Combining Theory and Practice: Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action

The decision to include two purposes in this study is not altogether surprising from a hermeneutical perspective. As explained by McEwan (1992), a hermeneutical

account of practical reasoning dissolves the dualism between theory and practice. The notion of the "hermeneutical circle" represents knowledge and action as moving in a circular fashion. Any educator who engages in teaching practice should also possess the capacity to speak the language of that practice. Likewise, any changes expressed in the language of teaching practice suggest changes in the practice itself (McEwan & Egan, 1995). Therefore, teachers are uniquely positioned to give an account of their teaching practice in relation to goals and explain the nature of their subsequent social actions that, concurrently, are shared in varying degrees by the school community that engages in the practice.

The aim of theorizing in social research is to give an account of a practice (such as teaching) that extends beyond the personal self-understandings of its practitioners. As Taylor (1985) points out, "theories do not just make our constitutive self-understandings explicit, but extend, or criticize or even challenge them" (p. 94).

Habermas' (1987) theory of communicative action was employed to increase our understanding of the phenomenon of what happened as teachers' lives intersected with high-stakes testing. To do so, this theoretical framework provided the impetus needed to extend, criticize, or challenge the beginning and veteran teachers' self-understanding of the teaching practice they engaged in, how they responded to high-stakes testing, and what this meant for learners and teaching practice. This kind of dynamic interchange between theory and practice can further explore future directions teaching practice may take by providing utterances to new goals, new procedures, and new concepts and the potential new relationships between them (McEwan & Egan, 1995).

As teachers encounter practice in the present, they inform their experiences with past and possible future perspectives that contextualize their understanding of practice as an ongoing process of change. Important insights and meanings can be gained from examining teachers' life histories and stock of lifeworldly knowledge as they reflect, construct, and reconstruct the way they think and act in relation to teaching. These insights, in turn, provide the account needed to talk about the continuity of what teachers experience as a historical process. McEwan and Egan (1995) insist that to understand the nature of practice, "we must trace the history of its constitutive elements: the actions, thoughts, language, and intentions that contribute to it and give it character and direction" (p. 180). When we place what teachers say and do in relation to teaching within a historical context, not only can we examine how practice has emerged, transcended, and evolved over time, but more importantly, we can further explain how teaching practice is known by the knower – the teacher.

<div align="center">Why Study Life Histories?</div>

As explained earlier, Habermas (1987) argued that modern technical science serves to advance the kind of knowledge needed to support systems of technical progress, capitalistic growth, and rational administration but cannot explain or understand the social action or phenomenon experienced by communicative actors. Instead, Habermas insisted that the kind of knowing that is needed to understand the phenomenon of what happens in the lives of communicative actors must begin with what actors know of themselves and experience in their world according to their life histories.

Habermas (1987) utilized Mead's notion of ego-identity (self-realization and self-determination enables an individual to recognize herself as both a "pathic and practical self") as an essential condition in the formation of an individual's "life history" (p. 100). Life history, according to Habermas, "is the fabric of one's interactions as the ego-identity of the adult proves its worth in the ability to build up new identities from shattered or superseded identities and integrate them with old identities into an organized unit or whole" (p. 98). This cannot be achieved without an individual's own self-realization.

By inserting every present experience into the flow of lived experience, Habermas is optimistic that an individual biography will invariably emerge with its own stock of lifeworldly knowledge based on situational experiences. Any responsible ownership of one's own biography requires the individual, "who one wants to be," to become clear about this, and it is from this horizon that the individual can examine the traces of her own interactions as if deposited by a responsible author (Habermas, 1987, p. 99).

Life histories are comprised of "thick descriptions" of lived experiences. Thick descriptions are interpretations of the "small, very densely textured facts" conveyed by social actors that can reveal broad assertions about the role of culture in the construction of collective life (Geertz, 1973, p. 29). For Geertz, to study culture, like Habermas, is to reveal and explore symbolic acts in the process of analyzing social discourse. Scientific research, as noted earlier, may observe and describe behavior as an end product, qualitative inquiry attempts to penetrate below the surface (manifest behavior) in order to reveal "the meaning events have for those who experience them" (Eisner, 1998, p. 35).

Therefore, "a good interpretation of anything," according to Geertz, "takes us into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation" (p. 60).

Habermas (1987) also warns, however, that when we choose to tell stories, the storyteller will invariably imply how the actors involved are faring, and subsequently, the ultimate fate experienced by the collective group to which the subject belongs. In essence, the telling of stories, even when the stories are our own, invariably results in interpretations of interpretations that are continually shattered and superseded in much the same way as our identities and subsequent stock of lifeworldly knowledge. We can never fully detach or isolate ourselves from our stories nor can we share our experiences with absolute neutrality. As Habermas says in a phrase borrowed from Schnapp (1976), all actors are "entangled in their own (hi)stories" from which we can never escape.

While an examination of individual life histories can reveal or suggest reproduction and maintenance processes of lifeworld imperatives, it is equally important to remember that, "they cannot take as their theme the structures of a lifeworld the way they do with what happens in it" (Habermas, 1987, p. 137). To understand how different teachers (such as a beginning and veteran teacher) make instructional decisions for different learners at different schools within a high-stakes testing culture, the researcher must examine teachers' philosophical views of learners and instruction. Teachers' life histories can allow the inquirer to explore how teachers' philosophical views of learners, learning, and subsequent instruction are constructed, modified, and changed (assimilated and accommodated with new and ongoing information) over the course of time.

What Role Do School Community Lifeworlds Play?

According to Schram (2003), qualitative research proceeds from the assumption that, "ideas, people, and events cannot be fully understood if isolated from the circumstances in which and through which they naturally occur" (p.8). The life experiences and beliefs of teachers, parents, and students together constructed both individual and group identities; guide attitudes, behavior, and action; and contribute content, meaning, and character that make up the lifeworld of each school community. To take an event or experience out of its context, warns Patton (2002), would invariably result in a distortion that ultimately changes its meaning or relevance according to its location in time, space, or circumstance in which it occurred. Hence, any exploration of the phenomenon experienced by the beginning and veteran teacher must include an understanding of each school's unique lifeworld as it is depicted according to "the conscious experience of every day life and social action" by the various participants within the school community (Schram, p. 71). The social action used by participants may likewise reveal subconscious beliefs and assumptions as well.

Becker (1970) also insists that life histories are "an important part of a mosaic of community and institutional investigations," as noted by Smith (1994), and serve as, "the touchstones for considering any abstract theory of person and community, and the testing of implicit assumptions about human beings in the larger sociological studies" (p. 298). Schools, as noted earlier in Chapter 2, are complex institutions that reflect implicit assumptions (taken-for-granteds) about human beings, particularly those made by teachers toward learners and subsequent instruction (Fullan, 1998). Life histories are

interwoven with the temporal and spatial contexts or horizons (lifeworld) from which

cultural, societal, and personal communicative action occur and serve to influence and

inform the lived-experiences, reflections and values-laden interpretations that result

within the school community.

For Habermas (1987), culture refers to the stock of knowledge that

communicative actors use to interpret and make sense of their world; society is the

legitimation of orders used by participants to regulate their membership in social groups

needed to secure solidarity; and personality refers to the speaking and acting competences

used by members to reach understanding and assert individual identity. It is through the

"fabric of everyday communicative practice" that culture, society, and personality are

reproduced (p. 138). Together, these individual components, in turn, form a unique

collective community lifeworld response to the rationale, steering media, and

mechanisms of any high-stakes accountability system. Therefore, an examination of the

phenomenon of how different teachers respond to high-stakes testing must

simultaneously include how different community's collective consciousness (lifeworld)

guides, informs, and influences individual teachers' lived experiences and stock of

lifeworldly knowledge.

Spending time with beginning and veteran third-grade teachers in their classrooms

in Florida revealed both common and divergent experiences, expressions, and

interpretations as to what high-stakes testing at the third-grade level meant for learners

and the decisions that teachers consequently made with regard to teaching practices.

Their accounts can then be used to further infer how and why individual veteran and

beginning teachers think or feel or behave as they described their lived experiences, past or present, under the current circumstances of a high-stakes testing culture and what this will mean for learners and teaching practice. This chapter describes the subjects, data collection procedures, and purpose of analysis needed for this study.

<u>Participants</u>

In order to examine the multiple perspectives necessary to understand the lifeworlds of the two school communities, participants included teachers, administrators, parents, and students. By assembling together "a constellation of bits and pieces of evidence," from multiple participant perspectives, as described by Eisner (1998), the resulting combination of information can lead to new insights leading to possible conclusions and interpretations (p. 55). New trends, patterns, themes, and relationships regarding the phenomenon that may not be revealed by teachers' perspectives alone may become apparent when multiple perspectives are considered.

The participants in this study comprised two main groups based on the level of participation and the data that was collected. While teacher participants were recruited on an individual basis at the beginning teacher's school, the curriculum resource teacher at the veteran teacher's school arranged an impromptu meeting with third grade teachers.

The primary participants included one beginning and one veteran third-grade teacher. Teacher participants reported their age, gender, and race on the background questionnaire (see Appendix B) and signed a letter of consent to indicate their willingness to participate in the study during the months of February through May 2006. Teacher

participant identities remained anonymous, with only assigned pseudonyms used throughout this written report.

All videotaped and audio-taped interviews and classroom observations were for data collection purposes only and will not be publicly viewed. Approval to conduct a study to examine teacher perspectives toward Florida's high-stakes accountability system including mandatory retention at the third-grade level in Florida according to teacher interviews, classroom observations, and student products was obtained from both the Institutional Review Board at the University of Northern Iowa and the participating school district in Florida.

Both teacher participants completed their formal education in Florida public schools (during grades kindergarten through high school). Each teacher completed her teaching degree at the same major university in Florida. Both teachers were Florida certified to teach third grade. It was also the third year teaching in third grade for each. The entire time that both teachers have taught in third grade, the Florida third grade retention mandate has been in effect (see Appendix C).

Veteran teacher. At the time of this study, it was the "veteran teacher's" ninth year teaching in Florida public schools. Vicki (pseudonym) is a White female in her 50s. Vicki has a bachelor's degree in liberal studies/health science. Vicki is married, had been a school volunteer when her children were young, and had previously served as a Boy Scout den mother.

After her children were grown, Vicki returned to college to earn her master's degree in elementary education. In addition to teaching third grade, Vicki also taught at

the preschool level and six years in fifth grade. She expressed an interest in looping with her third graders into fourth grade next year due to the academic advantages of having the same teacher for more than one consecutive school year.

Beginning teacher. The "beginning teacher," at the time of this study, was completing her third year teaching in Florida public schools. Including her year of internship, Beth (pseudonym) has only taught third grade. Beth is an African American female in her mid-20s who earned her bachelor's degree in elementary education but did not have a master's degree.

Beth did not have any children of her own. She was single when the study began but surprised her entire school staff when she and her fiancée were married at the courthouse one morning before school started the week that classroom observations were completed in April. After teaching the summer session, Beth and her husband moved to Texas where she planned to continue teaching at the elementary level.

Secondary participants. Secondary participants in this study included school site principals, three veteran third grade teachers (who taught 5 years or more in public education), one curriculum resource teacher, eight third grade parents, one fourth grade parent, and three third graders from the two participating elementary schools. Secondary participants also included a guidance counselor, social worker, reading teacher, kindergarten teacher, and parent at inner-city schools in the same school district. All participants reported their age, gender, and race on the background questionnaire and signed a letter of consent to indicate their willingness to participate in a videotaped

interview sometime during the months of February through April 2006. All participant

identities remain anonymous throughout this written report.

Letters were sent home to all the parents of third graders at both elementary

schools inviting the parents and their third graders to participate in the study. Parents

returned signed permission slips indicating whether they would participate and allow

their third grader to participate as well. Inner-city school personnel were recommended

by school personnel (not in the study) and contacted directly by phone to elicit their

potential interest as participants.

<u>Settings</u>

Because retention research indicates that students who are most likely to be

retained are poor males from minority groups, it was therefore imperative that this study

include teachers from demographically diverse elementary schools (with different

lifeworlds) in which teacher perspectives of all learners, including struggling learners

who may be most vulnerable to retention policies, will be included (see Appendix A).

The two elementary schools, K-5, that were selected included one of this type. The two

schools were from the same Florida school district and were located just 6.3 miles apart.

The differences in the demographics of the student populations at each school also

reflect different lifeworlds, defined by Habermas as the "reservoir of taken-for-granteds"

and "unshaken convictions" that participants in communication draw upon in "collective

processes of interpretation." As previously discussed, the life experiences and beliefs of

teachers, parents, and students together mold both individual and group identities; guide

attitudes, behavior, and action; and contribute content, meaning, and character to the

school community and culture. Hence, any exploration of the phenomenon experienced by the beginning and veteran teacher must include an understanding of each school's unique lifeworld as it is depicted according to "the conscious experience of every day life and social action" (Schram, 2003, p. 71).

Beginning teacher's school. There were seven third grade classes at Beth's elementary school during the 2005-06 school year. One third-grade class was self-contained for English Second Language learners and one third-grade class was self-contained SLD (severe learning disabilities). The total student population enrolled as of October 2005 was 658 students, 319 female and 339 male. The student racial groups at Beth's school were represented as follows: 40.6% White, 31.9% Black, 18.8% Hispanic, 1.7% Asian, and 7% Multiracial. Students receiving special education were reported as 9.9%. Students enrolled in the Limited English Program were 14.9% of the population (see Appendix A). Students reported as economically disadvantaged according to participation in the free or reduced lunch program were 62.8% of the population (No Child Left Behind School Public Accountability Reports, 2006).

Although Beth's school had been ranked as a "B" school during previous school years, it was ranked as an "A" school at the beginning of the 2005-06 school year. The professional qualifications of teachers were reported to have 75% of teachers with a bachelor's degree and 25% of teachers with a master's degree (No Child Left Behind School Public Accountability Reports, 2006).

Veteran teacher's school. There were six third-grade classes at Vicki's elementary school during the 2005-06 school year. All classes were inclusive with a special

education teacher who collaborated with teachers to meet individual student's IEP goals in the classroom setting. The total student population enrolled as of October 2005 was 703 students, 356 female and 347 male. The student racial groups at Vicki's school were represented as follows: 81.4% White, 11.7% Black, 4.4% Hispanic, 1.1% Asian, and 1.4% Multiracial (see Appendix A). Students receiving special education were reported as 15.2% and students enrolled in the Limited English Program were just 4.6% of the population. Students reported as economically disadvantaged according to participation in the free or reduced lunch program were 14.2% of the population (No Child Left Behind School Public Accountability Reports, 2006).

According to FCAT scores, Vicki's school has been ranked consecutively every year since 1999 as an "A" school. The professional qualifications of teachers at Vicki's school reported 58% of the teachers as having a bachelor's degree, 38% of teachers having a master's degree, and 4% of teachers having a doctorate (No Child Left Behind School Public Accountability Reports, 2006).

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

The Florida pilot study showed that the third grade retention mandate resulted in: (a) narrowing the curriculum to emphasize reading, and (b) an increased dependency on classroom reading assessments to predict students' likelihood to pass the FCAT (Counsell, 2005). Data collection (teacher interviews, classroom observations, and collected student products) focused on reading and language arts instruction at the third-grade level.

<u>Interviews</u>

Audiotaped interview data with the beginning and veteran teacher were collected

by telephone in March and April. Videotaped interviews with secondary participants

were completed February through April (see Table 1). This combination of methods was

needed in order to reveal deeper meanings of what happens when different teachers' lived

experiences at school communities (with different lifeworlds) intersect with Florida's

high-stakes accountability system and third grade retention mandate.

Table 1

Data Collection Time Table

Veteran Third-Grade Teacher: "Vicki"	Beginning Third-Grade Teacher: "Beth"
Audio-taped Telephone Interviews: March 26, 2006 April 2, 2006	Audio-taped Telephone Interviews: March 23, 2006 March 31, 2006 April 6, 2006
Videotaped Reading/Lang. Arts Instruction/Field Notes Reading/Lang. Arts Student Products April 17-21, 2006 Week 3	Audiotape Reading/Lang. Arts Instruction/Field Notes Reading/Lang. Arts Student Products April 24-28, 2006 Week 4
Secondary Participants at Vicki's School	Secondary Participants at Beth's School
Videotaped Interviews: February 20-24, 2006: Week 1 February 27-March 3, 2006: Week 2 April 17-21, 2006: Week 3 April 24-28, 2006: Week 4	Videotaped Interviews: February 20-24, 2006: Week 1 February 27-March 3, 2006: Week 2 April 17-21, 2006: Week 3 April 24-28, 2006: Week 4
Student Narratives on Taking the FCAT February 27-March 3, 2006: Week 2	Student Narratives on Taking the FCAT February 27-March 3, 2006: Week 2

Designed to explore the phenomenon of focus in this study requires questions targeted to understand the meaning of lived experience (Schram, 2003). To understand the lived experiences of the different participants (particularly the beginning and veteran teachers) with Florida's high-stakes accountability system and mandatory retention in this case study, all interviews were designed to be open-ended. This allowed the researcher to "see how participants experience, live, and describe the phenomenon" in relation to high-stakes testing in ways that suggest underlying meanings for learners and teaching practice. All participants, with the exception of third grade students, were asked to reflect on their past experiences as third graders in comparison to third graders in Florida today.

Primary participant interviews. Unstructured, open-ended telephone interviews with the beginning and veteran third-grade teachers were audio-taped in March and April. A total of five telephone interviews were completed. Telephone interviews were conducted at a time that was convenient for each teacher during the interval between the on-campus visits in March and April. The telephone interviews allowed the teachers to reflect upon and discuss the decisions concerning teaching practice and student outcomes according to their life histories that now intersect with Florida's high-stakes testing culture (see Table 1).

Individual biographies emerged as each teacher reflected on her lived experiences (past and present) in comparison to current students' third grade experiences with regard to learning and instruction, curriculum, and standardized assessment tests in Florida (see Appendix D). The "grand tour" questions described by Spradley (1979) that enable the participant to "verbally take the interviewer through a place, time period, sequence of

events, or groups of people or objects" were used to initiate each interview with the beginning and veteran teacher. Each teacher was encouraged to begin her dialogue by first "walking through her classroom, noting what she would most want the researcher to observe in terms of the classroom, learners, learning, and instruction" (see Appendix D).

Each teacher's lived experiences with the phenomenon included how her own philosophical views and beliefs about learners and learning (stock of lifeworldly knowledge) were potentially guided, informed, and influenced (possibly colonized) by Florida's high-stakes accountability system. The interview particularly focused on how the teachers felt about the instructional and curricular choices made in relation to reading and language arts before and after FCAT in order to gain a sense of what it is like to experience teaching within a high-stakes testing culture.

The veteran teacher was encouraged to further elaborate on her teaching practices over the course of her extensive career as both a beginner and veteran teacher. The veteran teacher was also asked to reflect on her experiences as a parent when her own children were in third grade in contrast to the experiences of parents of children in her class. Additionally, each teacher was asked whether she would want to be a third grader (past or present), would want to be a parent of third graders (past or present), and whether they would encourage others to teach in third grade.

Secondary participant interviews. Unstructured, open-ended videotaped interviews with secondary participants (other third-grade teachers, third grade parents, third graders, both school principals, and additional inner-city school personnel) were completed in February/March and April on each school campus within the regular school

hours (or during after school hours for some working parents). Interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. Each participant described and discussed his or her experiences, beliefs, and views about learners/learning and teaching practice, according to individual life histories that may have included perspectives and lived experiences as students, educators, and parents (see Appendix E and F).

All secondary participants (except students) were asked what they would want state legislators to know about Florida public education today. Glesne (1999) refers to this type of question as an "advice question" that requires the participant to "imagine a conversation with a hypothetical person" in this case, the participant's Florida legislator. This question was intended to elicit an idealized response from a variety of participants in relation to the phenomenon of what Florida's high-stakes accountability has meant for learners, educators, parents, and entire school communities according to their individual lived experiences.

Student narrative reflections. Nine third-grade teachers at the two participating elementary schools asked their students to briefly write their thoughts to the following question, "How are you feeling about next week (February 27-March 3) at school?" A total of 143 third graders wrote reflections on the Friday (February 24) prior to taking the FCAT (see Table 1). Teachers coded students according to: gender, reading level, ethnicity, and participation in the free/reduced lunch program.

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations and student products can be used specifically to corroborate what teachers "say" about the decisions they make (the phenomenon)

concerning learners and teaching practices with what actually takes place. Likewise, deeper insights can be gained by examining what different participants have to say about their individual experiences with Florida's high-stakes accountability system in relation to what the beginning and veteran teachers say and do.

Classroom reading and language arts instruction (and in some instances, math instruction) were videotaped and informal observation field notes were recorded for approximately 1-3 hours daily during a five-day school week for the participating third-grade veteran teacher in April 2006 (see Table 1). However, the beginning teacher was less comfortable with the notion of being videotaped and would only agree to have her classroom instruction audio-taped for approximately 1-3 hours daily during a five-day school week instead. The beginning teacher also called in a substitute teacher on the fifth day of observation and, consequently, the reading and language arts lessons were planned by the beginning teacher but taught by the substitute teacher.

Videotaped instruction and observation field notes were collected in order to examine the instructional decisions made by the third-grade teachers in light of the Sunshine State Standards for third-grade reading and FCAT Level 2 reading score requirement for promotion to fourth grade. Classroom observations were analyzed for deeper meanings and understanding of the phenomenon of how teachers' beliefs about student learning and teaching practices (stock of lifeworldly knowledge) observed during reading and language arts instruction (e.g., curriculum and materials, teaching strategies, learning arrangements, classroom management, and reading assessments) were

influenced and formed by each teacher's life history, school community, and Florida's high-stakes accountability system.

Student Products

In order to further corroborate what teachers described as the instructional and curricular choices that were made, copies of students' products were collected in April 2006 only after the FCAT (see Table 2). All curriculum, materials, and teaching strategies reflected by the student products related to reading and language arts instruction were noted and analyzed for later meaning and understanding as they pertained to Florida's high-stakes accountability system and mandatory retention based on the FCAT reading score in third grade.

Field Notes

In order to record what the beginning and veteran teacher did in terms of actual teaching practice, field notes focused on the actual instructional and curricular decisions that were made and observed within the classroom setting. Field notes, as defined by Bogdan and Biklen (2003), are the "written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study" (pp. 110-111). The field notebook or field log is the qualitative researcher's primary recording tool. The field notebook is used to record descriptions about people, places, events, activities, and conversations. It can also be used to record the researcher's ideas, reflections, hunches, and notes about patterns that emerge as well as the researcher's own biases (Glesne, 1999).

Field notes were recorded during all audio-taped phone interviews and audio- and videotaped classroom observations with the beginning and veteran teacher participants. Likewise, field notes were also recorded during all videotaped interviews with secondary participants with the exception of the three student participants. It was believed that taking notes while children spoke could be potentially distracting and intimidating and so to maintain a more casual atmosphere, no notes were taken during student interviews.

A total of six steno notebooks constitute a five-color scheme used to organize the field notes according to different participants. Two white notebooks were used exclusively, one notebook each, for recording all phone interview and classroom observation field notes for the beginning and veteran teachers. All other teacher participant interview field notes were recorded in a red steno notebook. Both school site principals, one retired principal and other school personnel interview field notes were recorded in a green steno notebook. Parent interview field notes were recorded in a blue steno notebook, and other school personnel interview field notes were recorded in a black notebook. The date, time, and location were documented for each recorded interview and classroom observation.

An impromptu meeting with four third-grade teachers and the curriculum resource teacher (CRT) at the veteran teacher's school was arranged by the CRT. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the study and recruit participants. Neither audio- nor videotaping was done, and field notes were not recorded during the meeting. Field notes were then recorded after the meeting.

Descriptive notes. Two kinds of field notes were used to record data during this study: descriptive notes and analytic notes. Descriptive field notes were taken during or after all interviews and classroom observations. Descriptive notes, according to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), "represent the researcher's best effort to objectively record the details of what occurred in the field" (p. 112). All descriptive field notes were eventually typed to increase readability and access to information.

Descriptive notes taken were comprised of words and phrases used to express what participants said during interviews as well as noting frequently used words, ideas, and themes that may indicate possible patterns or relationships. Descriptive notes during interviews were also used to capture the mood of the participant according to changes in the rate, volume, tone, pitch, or inflections in their voice as well as emotions expressed as topics changed. For example, during a phone interview with the beginning teacher, as she described how her third graders' parents were worried about whether their children would pass the FCAT, she exclaimed, "I had parents calling me a whole month before FCAT because their kids were like, the FCAT, the FCAT, the FCAT," spoken in a whispered, pulsating fashion (interview field notes).

Descriptive field notes taken during classroom observations also included words and phrases used during conversations between the teacher and students and between different students. Descriptive observation notes provided specific details needed to visualize the physical classroom setting (e.g., arrangement of desks, number of computers, information displayed on the walls and bulletin boards), the class schedule, moods/emotions, facial expressions, gestures, class instruction, activities, groupings, and

movement in the classroom. The large bulletin board on the back wall in the beginning

teacher's classroom, for example, reflected the learning atmosphere and the teacher's

priorities for learning and instruction as well as her philosophy about learning. The

bulletin board was described as follows:

> One large bulletin board mounted on the back wall in the room. Display reads: "(Beginning teacher's name) Bookworms" with a large red apple that has the center cut out. Open books with numbers counting by tens written on each to represent the number of books read (i.e., 10, 20, 30). Green book worms with each child's name are placed on the board according to the number of books each child has read. The majority of worms are clustered between 10-20 books read (15 students) and one student's name is near 60 books (Field Notes).

The books read by the students were part of the commercial reading incentive program,

"Accelerated Reader." A computer-printed score sheet listing the students' names

alphabetically was also posted on the bulletin board with points each student had earned,

used, and were still available next to each child's name. Points earned could be used to

purchase class prizes.

Analytic notes. Analytic notes (also referred to as observer comments) were

written recordings of things (e.g., people, places, activities) that occurred each day (and

later analyzed in a constant comparative manner) after interviews and observations were

completed (Berg, 2004; Glesne, 1999). These notes (or memos) often reflected my own

feelings, problems, concerns, ideas, impressions, and earlier interpretations in response to

what was said during interviews or classroom observations, searching and questioning the

themes, patterns, and relationships that emerged in a constant comparative fashion. These

reflections often took place as I was typing up the descriptive field notes, raising new

questions, issues, or concerns. Analytic field notes or memos were recorded in a separate

memo (composition) notebook. The following memo, for example, was recorded in response to the veteran teachers' discussion of African American students and families at her school during her first telephone interview:

> Most African American parents want a good education for their children. Willing to support any program at school – if there is after school programs, they want it. Less apt to participate. Why? Feel less competent? Expect the school to meet the child's needs. Less interested? Due to bad experiences? (Memo Notebook).

The analytical reflections pertaining to African Americans first appeared in the descriptive notes from the veteran teacher's interview. These memos were noted as they related to social class and racial assumptions about African American students at her school. Her observations in turn, prompted my own questions (in a constant comparative fashion) regarding this group of parents' level of confidence in their ability (competence) to meet their children's academic needs. Was their apparent lack of confidence or even general trust in their children's school due to prior bad experiences in public education as former students?

Analytic notes were not limited to reflections and responses to social action (what actors think, say, and do) during interviews and observations. The physical setting also provided important insights into how (a) individual school cultures were reproduced, (a) students were socialized, and (c) what this meant in terms of the personality traits that were most promoted and revered by each individual teacher. The bookworm bulletin board, as described above in the beginning teacher's classroom, was intended to celebrate and reward students for reading Accelerated Reader books. However, additional analysis through reflective memos (a constant comparative approach) revealed that, more importantly, it could be perceived by students as a visual aid or tool that enabled students

to readily see where they ranked with respect to their classmates based on the number of books read.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was ongoing throughout this project. As suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2003), a constant comparative method involved the combination of data collection with analysis. Therefore, "analysis and data collection [occur] in a pulsating fashion – first the interview, then the analysis and theory development, another interview, and then more analysis, and so on" (p. 66). Hence, teachers' life histories and resulting beliefs about learners/learning and instructional decisions (stock of lifeworldly knowledge) were examined and analyzed for emergent themes and categories early on and were continued throughout the study until the end of data collection.

Adult Interview Summary Sheet

Several approaches were used to organize and later establish its credibility: Summary Sheets for adult interviews, matrices of interpretive categories conceptualized from raw data, and triangulation of data from different sources. Adult Summary Sheets were used specifically as the most efficient way to transcribe audio- and videotaped recordings of teacher interviews. Clarke et al. (2003) developed this data summarizing process to record information. This strategy allows the researcher to review and analyze audio- and videotaped interviews in a fraction of the time that complete transcription of data would otherwise require. The researcher views or listens to the recorded data and extracts chunks of conversation that are then recorded on an Adult Interview Summary Sheet as either a "quotation" or a "point." Quotations were defined as the subjects' own

words in direct statements or replies. Points, on the other hand, were summaries,

transcribed in the researcher's own words, of the subjects' opinions.

This strategy proved equally beneficial in the transcription and analysis of the

extensive data obtained during the various participant interviews in this study. Themes

and patterns could be easily summarized and outlined by making "points" without having

to transcribe actual quotes verbatim. However, once the points were noted, the researcher

could then go back to transcribe specific quotes as needed, making this strategy far more

time efficient.

Table 2

Adult Interview Summary Sheet

Subject Code: Beginning Teacher (Beth) Codes: SA – Stress Anxiety
LA – Loss of Autonomy
NC – Narrowed Curriculum
MLN – Meeting Learning Needs
ST – Strict Timeline

Points and Emergent Themes (Codes)	Quotations
Learning is not fun. A year's worth of learning in a few months. SA, LA, NC, MLN, ST	From the teacher's perspective, the kids don't get to have as much fun. We just really have to make sure we cover all of that material in that time span before March. It is almost like having to cover an entire year of learning in those few months.

The thick descriptions of teachers' intentions, motives, meanings, contexts,

situations, and circumstances of actions/decisions (as both students and educators) as

depicted by their life histories were coded for possible meanings, patterns, and

relationships. Bogden and Biklen (2003) describe coding categories as words and phrases that serve as, "a means of sorting the descriptive data...collected...so that the material bearing on a given topic can be physically separated from other data" (p. 161). Once the interview data was summarized using the Adult Interview Summary Sheet, emergent themes were identified, and repeated meanings, motives, contexts, and phrases were coded (e.g., stress, anxiety, success, failure), the researcher had the option to return to the recorded data to document additional quotations if needed (see Table 2).

Matrix Approach

The process of comparing and separating the data into meaningful categories across different teacher participants was further assisted by using Miles and Huberman's (1994) matrix approach to qualitative research analysis. This analysis involved data reduction through the process of "selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the 'raw' data that appear in written–up field notes" [including Adult Interview Summary Sheets] in order that "final conclusions can be drawn and verified" (p. 21). The researcher had to decide: (a) which data to include and code, (b) which data to discard, (c) how to summarize patterns, and (d) how the different teacher stories emerged in meaningful ways. For example, the teacher interview data (quotes and points recorded on the Adult Interview Summary Sheet in Table 2) from the Florida Pilot Study revealed six overarching emergent themes; of those themes, all but one, "difficulties recruiting teachers," emerged as related themes from the beginning teacher's data as well. A matrix provided a visual format that proved helpful in sorting and categorizing the data across teacher participants (see Table 3).

Table 3

Teacher Quotes Concerning Mandatory Retention at the Third-Grade Level:
Revealed Six Emergent Themes (Florida Pilot Study)

	Narrowed Curriculum	Difficulties Meeting Learners Needs	Student Success Defined by FCAT	Emphasis on passing the FCAT	Added Stress and Anxiety	Difficulties Recruiting Teachers
Teacher 1	*Limited Cooperative learning, art, special projects, Jan. – Mar.; More drill seat work; Analyze the value of everything*	*Not a full year; faster pace; drag kids; kids behind will be behind; pace not natural*	*If I cover it well, they will be successful on the test*	*Take fluency counts every week; constantly assessing; constantly collecting data*	*Students are stressing out; avoid using the name FCAT; use a code, 'meow like a cat'*	*Third grade spends more time trying to help students catch up; not all grades same pressure*
Teacher 2	*Theme Days – gone Every min. instruction - benchmarks; Take time away from reading; SS and Sci. after FCAT*					
Teacher 3	*FCAT - lots remediation; Drill, drill, drill; Practice, practice, practice*					

Quality Control

Schwandt (1997) summarized constant comparative method as a refusal to accept

a report (and more specifically, the data) "at face value." In other words, throughout the

ongoing process of analysis, the interpretive inquirer is not only asking, "What is going

on here?" phenomenologically, but more importantly, "What does it mean?" In the case

of this phenomenological study, the insights that were gained with respect to what

teachers were saying and doing in light of high-stakes testing was then used to examine

and explore deeper understanding as to what this meant for learners and teaching

practice. In this way, the researcher uses data analysis of one set of data to guide and

facilitate the analysis of next set of data (Charmaz, 2002).

Data was collected, analyzed, and interpreted using a constant comparative

approach to inquiry throughout the duration of this study. Initial descriptive field notes,

for example not only prompted additional reflections but further guided and informed

continued analysis while recording memos and analytic notes in a constant comparative

process. The cumulative data from both descriptive and analytic notes helped to further

interpret and analyze the emergent themes and patterns according to the adult interview

summaries. Likewise, the adult interview summaries and classroom observation

summaries also followed a constant comparative analysis used to reveal emergent themes

according to teacher quotes. The emergent themes from teacher quotes placed into

matrixes were then used in a constant comparative process to further analyze and reveal

broader patterns, trends, and relationships across participants, school settings, and

activities.

Likewise, I had to be ever-mindful of the presence of invalidating factors, as described by Guba and Lincoln (1981) that can potentially impede or hinder this study's credibility. These factors included possible distortions that can result from: (a) the researcher's presence at the research site, (b) the field worker's involvement with her subjects, (c) the potential bias of either the field worker or participants, and (d) possible distortions arising from the manner in which data-gathering techniques were employed (pp. 105-106). As a result, as the qualitative researcher, I needed to: (a) closely monitor the responses and possible effects of my presence at the school site; (b) be cognizant of my role as both inquirer and participant as I interpreted the beginning and veteran teacher's and secondary participants' interpretations; (c) guarded against premature first impressions or hastily drawn conclusions; and (d) carefully scrutinize the data obtained by cross-checking inferences that were made (pp. 105-106) through member checks (either by having an outsider read the field notes and transcripts) or audit trails.

Corroboration (or triangulation) as described by Eisner (1998) can be achieved through an examination of the life experiences of veteran and beginner teachers. By assembling together "a constellation of bits and pieces of evidence" from teacher interviews, classroom observations, and student products, the resulting combination of information can lead to possible conclusions and interpretations needed to better understand the phenomenon that has taken place (p. 55).

Structural corroboration, like the process of triangulation, is a "means through which multiple types of data are related to each other to support or contradict the interpretation and evaluation of a state of affairs" (p. 110). Corroborating different data

sources not only increases the opportunity to examine recurrent behaviors or actions across different contexts (settings or activities) it can also inspire confidence that the events interpreted and analyzed are not unusual but rather, characteristic of the situation. For example, the increased likelihood that learners who struggle academically are more likely to experience fear in response to taking the FCAT was supported by data obtained from the beginning teacher's interviews, interviews with parents of struggling learners at the veteran teacher's school, and inner-city school personnel. However, fear that was expressed in written narratives by actual third graders suggested that varying levels of fear were experienced across a full continuum regardless of academic achievement.

Classroom observations (videotape transcriptions and field notes) and student products provided the multi-data sources needed to further corroborate the outcomes of high-stakes testing for learners and instruction as depicted by the classroom teachers. Additional data from videotaped interviews with secondary participants allowed for broader views and emergent patterns and relationships within each school community. Assembling the many pieces together to form a compelling whole is the hallmark of qualitative research. The use of multiple types of data is one way to foster credibility.

Rather than search for "law-like generalizations" concerning retention and social promotion practices and other high-stakes steering media and mechanisms designed to increase accountability and achievement within an experimental design (Smith & Hodkinson, 2002), this qualitative case study enabled the social inquirer to describe "what schools are like, their strengths and weaknesses" by allowing others to "*see* what occurs in them" and to be able to tell others, "what we have seen in ways that are vivid

and insightful" (Eisner, 1991, p. 23, italics in original). With this approach, the goal is not to control or predict the social behavior of learners or teachers. Instead, the goal is to illuminate the circumstances (the phenomenon) that are found within a high-stakes testing culture needed to increase our understanding of what these conditions will mean for learners and teaching practice.

Audit trails were particularly helpful in documenting the conceptual development of the study. The audit trail included six types of documentation: raw data, data reduction and analysis products, data reconstruction and synthesis products, process notes, materials relating to intentions and dispositions, and instrument development information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 319-320). Specific auditing strategies used included memo writing and summarizing, journaling, email correspondences with participants, and participant schedules and in many respects, are inherently constant comparative as well. Attention to these safeguards in combination with triangulating the teacher interview data with classroom observations and student products assembled the various pieces together to form a structural corroboration that greatly enhanced the overall credibility of the study and the interpretations that resulted.

Summary

According to Dewey (1934), "education, experience, and life are inextricably intertwined" (cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). In essence, Clandinin and Connelly suggest that, "the study of experience is the study of life." Therefore, "one learns about education from thinking about life, and one learns about life from thinking about education" (p. 415). As a social inquirer, the point of this study was not to predict or

control social behavior, but rather, to investigate the human experience in such a way that can enlighten and hopefully inform scholars, educators, politicians, and parents of the potential impact of high-stakes consequences on learning and teaching practice.

This qualitative case study sought to gain deeper understanding beyond the "manifest behaviors" described and analyzed in the pilot study. Habermas' theory of communicative action provided a helpful framework needed to reveal the "why" of the phenomenon of what happened as the beginning and veteran teachers' life histories and stock of lifeworldly knowledge intersected with Florida's high-stakes testing culture within the lifeworld of each teacher's lifeworld school community. It is at this intersection using this framework that can potentially inform the phenomenon of what this will mean for learners and teaching practice. Classroom observations, student products, secondary participant interviews, and student narratives were employed to further corroborate what the beginning and veteran teacher said about their lived experiences with Florida's high-stakes accountability system and what it meant for learners and teaching practice according to each teacher's actual curricular and instructional decisions.

The new insights gained from this examination, as noted earlier by Peterson (1989), can then be used to contemplate the conditions that are needed to reform instruction in such a way that will benefit all learners, including those who struggle academically. This will then require a critique of system steering media and mechanisms that can best support all learners' access to learning opportunities within the lifeworld of individual school communities.

CHAPTER 4

DATA FINDINGS

The analysis was based upon two main sources of data, as described in Chapter 3. The primary data was gathered during the phone interviews and classroom observations with the beginning teacher and the veteran teacher. Student products in language arts were also collected. The secondary data was obtained during the videotaped interviews with the secondary participants (school administrators, school personnel, additional teachers, and parents of third graders). Secondary data also included narrative reflections written by third graders (in nine third grade classrooms at the two participating elementary schools) intended to reflect upon their feelings toward taking the FCAT one week prior to the test.

As outlined in Chapter 2, Habermas' theory of communicative action revealed how standardized tests have been used historically in public education as a powerful steering media to colonize the lifeworld rationale, view, and purpose of education within each respective movement. To increase our understanding of the possible consequences of high-stakes accountability systems for learners and teaching practice within the .Standards Movement today, the data has been further organized and interpreted using Habermas' theory of communicative action.

This theoretical framework was applied as the life histories of the beginning and veteran teachers intersected simultaneously with the lifeworld of each teacher's respective school community (as described by both primary and secondary participants) and Florida's A+ Plan (high-stakes accountability system) and third grade retention

mandate. An examination of each school's lifeworld also explored how the two school cultures were reproduced; how students and teachers were socialized; and how personality competences of knowing, speaking, and acting were employed to reach understanding, achieve goals, and assert individual autonomy according to the different participants.

As noted earlier, Habermas believed that any meaningful examination of the potential colonization of the lifeworld of any organized institution can best be achieved by examining what individual actors know of themselves and experience in their world according to their life histories. It is only through introspective self-realization that each actor is empowered to assemble the fabric of one's own life. This kind of life mosaic must include the many interactions with others at various times and places throughout the individual actor's lifetime. This can in turn, enable the actors to construct new identities from shattered or superseded identities and integrate them with old identities into an organized whole that is most representative of the actor's personal biography.

In the case of the beginning teacher, her own reflections as a former third grader in Florida were shattered, superseded, and integrated into her current identity and experience as a beginning teacher in Florida. In the case of the veteran teacher, her own reflections as a beginning teacher and parent of third graders in Florida were shattered, superseded, and integrated into her current identity and experience as a veteran teacher in Florida. While each teacher could never fully escape or completely separate the entanglement of her own life history, past and present, it was from this vantage that each

teacher inserted her past and present experience into the flow of lived experience that allow us to witness the individual biographies that emerged.

It was within their individual biographies that an examination and discernment of each teacher's own stock of lifeworldly knowledge was explored as each used her own knowledge to inform and guide her individual belief and subsequent response simultaneously to the lifeworld of her school community and Florida's high-stakes accountability system. It is at this juncture that we speculate and surmise what these unique intersections between teachers' life histories, school community lifeworlds, and high-stakes testing systems mean for learners and teaching practice.

<u>The Rookie – Life Before and After FCAT</u>

As noted in Chapter 3, the beginning teacher (given the pseudonym, Beth) was a young African American female. At the time of this study, it was her third year teaching third grade at the same elementary school (see Appendix C). She interned in a third-grade classroom during the 2002-03 calendar school year in which the mandate to retain all third-graders based on FCAT reading scores was first implemented statewide. Hence, her third-grade teaching experience has always been held accountable to this mandate for student achievement based on test scores.

> Ever since I've been teaching, FCAT has been in 3rd grade. Even during my internship was obviously the 1st year. Prior school year it was like that too so for at least the past four years it's been like that. (Interview Transcript)

Beth attended public schools in Florida in the 1990s during a decade that witnessed a nationwide trend toward authentic assessment such as student work samples and portfolios used to demonstrate authentic learning and to guide and inform instruction.

After high school, she completed her education degree at a major Florida university. Beth summarized her own school community and public school experience in Florida as generally safe and "stable," growing up in the same neighborhood, walking to and from school, attending the same neighborhood schools until graduation.

> Growing up, I think it was pretty stable at my school. I walked to school. I lived in the same neighborhood. I walked to and from school. The middle school was right beside my elementary school. I had a childhood like that... (Interview Transcript)

While describing her third-grade students' learning and the teaching practices she employed, Beth was encouraged to reflect on her own experiences as a third-grade student to reveal any possible similarities or differences. As a third grade teacher today, her prior experiences as a third grade student, have been shattered, superseded, and integrated with her ongoing beliefs, understanding, and experience as a teacher. Hence, her stock of lifeworldly knowledge of the third grade experience in Florida were no longer based exclusively on her past experience as a student, but were integrated with her ongoing experiences as a beginning teacher working with third graders today.

As Habermas explains, this kind of intermixing (that includes assimilating, accommodating, and synthesizing past and present beliefs) is unavoidable. Individual life histories, like Beth's own biography, is the ongoing process of lived experiences, perceptions, and beliefs that are continuously shattered, superseded, and integrated with new experiences, perceptions, and beliefs that together, construct an organized 'whole." Therefore, not only her past beliefs, understanding, and experiences provide the essential 'taken-for-granteds' that form her stock of lifeworldly knowledge, but her constructed

knowledge and understanding further serve to guide and inform her ongoing beliefs,

understanding, and interpretations as an educator today.

In late March after FCAT, Beth was anxious to share what was immediately on

her mind: the relief that her students felt now that FCAT was over. She declared, "The

kids are very relieved – I think I can use that to describe their behavior – They're very

relieved!" When asked how she felt when taking standardized tests in third grade, she

commented as follows:

> I remember having very strict third-grade teachers. So I would say that the
> curriculum is just as much...But I do remember probably enjoying school more
> because I don't remember having to focus on FCAT. Like I don't remember
> taking a standardized test in third-grade. So the fact that I don't remember it leads
> me to the fact that it must not have had that big of an impact if there were some
> type of tests...But I don't remember having an FCAT. (Interview Transcript)

Without the pressure of a high-stakes test such as FCAT while growing up, Beth

also implied that she experienced a wider assortment of learning activities and

experiences as a third grader than her current third grade students. Beth attributed this to

the time restrictions, suggesting, "You can't do a lot of discovery learning or interactive

activities when you have to make sure you get done in a certain time span." In place of

project-oriented learning that tends to be more time-consuming, she resorted to a more

lecture-practice (transmission model) approach to instruction.

> I don't think they're expected to learn more. I think the expectations have always
> been high, but I think with the test, they're expected to learn more sooner and it
> kind of limits the way or your teaching style. Like, so I think it leads you to...a
> couple of group activities but more lecture – practice the skill, lecture – practice...
> (Interview Transcript)

While Beth insisted that expectations and actual content covered in third grade

both past and present are basically the same, she felt that the pressure of FCAT required

third graders to learn skills and content at a faster pace. This in turn, limited the kinds of instructional choices she felt she could make. Unfortunately, the kinds of activities that Beth enjoyed most as a third grader (like projects) were now the kinds of learning activities that her students encountered the least.

Education in the Fast Lane

Beth planned her lessons in accordance with what would be tested on the FCAT, insisting that as third grade teachers, "We just really have to make sure we cover all of that material in that time span before March." While Beth attempted to vary the strategies she used that students would enjoy, such as allowing her students to pair share rather than always silent read independently, she confessed, "I think that I try to make those things fun but in my mind, I know that we could do so much more." Beth was particularly frustrated with her view that she was unable to freely plan her student's learning activities.

Beth's continuous feelings of remorse over her students' lack of enjoyment in learning, in comparison to when she was a third grader in Florida, permeated throughout her reflections. This was particularly true from her viewpoint as a teacher, insisting, "From the teacher's perspective, the kids don't get to have as much fun." As stated earlier, Beth felt that the emphasis to cover all the material prior to March (before FCAT was administered) compelled her to rob her learners of a variety of activities that otherwise make learning fun.

> It is almost like having to cover an entire year of learning in those few months. I try to have different components. Like when we have reading stories, I try to do things that are fun, like I let them partner read to start with the fluency and let them hear someone else read. Let them correct each other's mistakes and I have

them answer questions in groups for time to take away their written work, I let them have literature discussions. (Interview Transcript)

Beth was convinced that the level of expectations for third graders today is equally as high as when she was in third grade. Academically, she noted, "We did the same things like cursive, multiplication, division – the things you look forward to in third grade." Beth insisted that it was not the actual content that changed but rather, it was the actual way in which the content was taught and when skills must now be mastered by all learners that has changed.

The FCAT timeline up to its administration became the deciding variable for Beth. For example, literature discussions require instructional time to complete. Beth's reference to "let them have literature discussions," abandoning the lecture-practice format, implied that this was an allowance or concession that she made rather than viewed as a "necessity" needed to increase learning. Therefore, activities that directly prepared students for the FCAT received the greatest priority.

They can't miss what they haven't had. On the one hand, Beth noted that teachers (as well as school administrators) were well-aware of the instructional compromises that they feel forced to make, in spite of their ongoing beliefs, understanding, and experience concerning learning and instruction (stock of lifeworldly knowledge). Yet this was not the case for students, as Beth indicated, "I don't think they know because you can't really miss what you haven't had." In Beth's mind, her students were none-the-wiser.

Beth continued, "Like if they haven't had a setting where they are in a structured third-grade classroom where they do science projects, they can't really miss that because they haven't had it." This meant that if Beth's students had no prior knowledge or direct

experience with science projects then it would not be something students would long for since it would be an activity beyond each student's stock of lifeworldly knowledge. Hence, it was only the teachers who were the wiser regarding the consequences for the instructional decisions that were made and the potential loss that resulted.

Fear of the FCAT and mandatory retention. When asked whether Beth would want to be a third grader in Florida's public schools today, she stammered as she readily replied, "No way. No way. I would much rather be a third grader when I was." Although Beth felt her own learning as a third grader was largely comparable to her current third graders, she went on to explain her rationale that centered on her own ongoing lived experience observing her students taking the FCAT.

Generally speaking, Beth was not bothered by the employment of standardized tests to measure and evaluate student learning. She argued, "It's not that I don't agree with the testing. I think the testing really does show, in my experience, is very accurate." According to her stock of lifeworldly knowledge, she considered the FCAT to be a valid and reliable measurement of student achievement. In Beth's opinion, "The ones who make it are the ones you know really have it. And the ones who don't are the ones that are a little weaker in those areas." It is therefore redundant in this sense, in that it only tells teachers what they already know or believe about their students' overall academic performance, that is, some are weaker than others. It was the decision to retain students based largely on FCAT reading scores that Beth found most problematic and in her opinion, "heartbreaking" and may very well, have been a predicament she would not want to face herself as a student.

But to retain them based solely on a test is just the part that is so heartbreaking...
There are some who are strong test takers, and there are some that just have bad
days, or some that are so nervous. (Interview Transcript)

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (2003)

recommends the use of multiple sources of evidence (not a single test) to assess

children's growth and development, over a period of time, while limiting formal

standardized testing and norm-referenced tests with young children. The need for

students to pass the FCAT reading in order to be promoted to fourth grade was enough to

make one of Beth's students physically ill. She declared, "I had one throw up during the

test. They're so nervous on wanting to do well." Beth attributed her students' test anxiety

toward the FCAT as a direct result of mandatory retention based on FCAT reading

scores.

Consequently, Beth struggled with wanting her students to understand the

importance of doing well on the test on the one hand but did not want to create undue

stress and anxiety for her students to perform on the other. As she regretted, "There's

such a big emphasis put on it because you want them to know how important it is...that

they start to panic." This level of anxiety and stress over taking a standardized test was

far-removed from Beth's experience as a third grader in Florida.

I don't remember as a child panicking and worrying about tests and FCAT. I just
don't remember. So I definitely like it in the "good ole days..." It's
different...what's expected is the same just the way you meet those expectations
is a little different... (Interview Transcript)

Not only were Beth's students panicked over the FCAT, but she indicated she had

parents contacting her an entire month prior to the test, expressing concerns that their

children were panicked over taking the test. Beth declared, "I had parents calling me a

whole month before FCAT because their kids were like, the FCAT, the FCAT, the

FCAT" (spoken in a pulsating fashion). Again, Beth attributed the panic and worry

experienced by parents and students over the FCAT as a consequence of mandatory

retention based on test scores. It was for these reasons that Beth nostalgically reaffirmed

her preference to being a student back in the "good ole days."

In spite of Beth's concerns regarding the FCAT and mandatory retention, Beth

continued to assert that the greatest difference between being a third grader in Florida

past and present rested in how and when the curriculum is taught rather than what is

actually taught. Again, this perspective was informed and constructed according to Beth's

shattered, superseded, and integrated experiences as a former third grader with her

ongoing beliefs, understanding, and experience as a third grade teacher and her

observations of third graders in Florida today. Beth was convinced that how and when

third graders were taught certain skills and knowledge was a direct consequence of the

timeline needed to prepare for the FCAT.

<u>What Gets Tested Gets Taught</u>

As noted earlier, Beth's third grade teaching experience is limited to teaching

within the context of mandatory retention based on FCAT reading scores. Her continuous

reference to the FCAT and mandatory retention indicated that both steering media had a

strong influence on her outlook regarding the purpose of learning and instruction in third

grade in Florida and what that meant for learners and teachers. Not only was this the case

for Beth at the third grade level, but her reflections indicated this belief at the fourth and

fifth grade level as well.

Beth summed up teaching and learning in third grade as, "a reading retention grade. They have to score a level 2 or higher to go on." This meant for Beth as a third grade teacher, that the overarching goal in third grade was for her students to earn a minimum level 2 score or higher in reading to be promoted to fourth grade and therefore, achieve success (as defined by the FCAT reading score). As Beth explained,

> Now level 2, they're allowed to still go on but they have to have an AIP (Academic Improvement Plan) which means these are the things we have to do to help the student reach the level they're supposed to be on and the next grade level...still go on with level 2 but level 1 means you do not pass... (Interview Transcript)

From Beth's perspective, according to her stock of lifeworldly knowledge, that's what third grade now means for her as a teacher. That's what the third grade experience IS for her students. Beth confirmed this notion in her statement, "It's always been a reading retention grade since I've been in it...which was really stressful to me my first year because I was so nervous about doing well and making sure the kids went on." Consequently, much of her time and effort was devoted to ensuring that her students passed the FCAT in order to be promoted to fourth grade.

The pressure to ensure her students' success resulted in Beth's increased anxiety leading up to her students' performance on the FCAT. Beth viewed her own success as a teacher based on her students' performance on the FCAT. Beth commented, "Last year we had a really good year. I only had one that had to go on to summer school and it was one that it was expected. It wasn't a big surprise for the parents." Beth indicated, "You go in optimistic but you have to still be realistic." Beth worked hard to prepare as many

students to pass the test as possible, inevitably sorting them into winners and losers according to the FCAT.

While an emphasis on FCAT scores, as a steering media, identified the academic areas of focus for each grade level for Beth, it also inadvertently determined which subjects will not be a focus for instructional time and learning. This meant that in third grade, Beth felt compelled to place a greater increment of time and energy toward reading and math instruction at the expense of other subjects such as science, social studies, and writing. However, from Beth's perspective, the academic emphasis in fourth grade is somewhat different.

> Obviously writing is very important for 4th grade because of the FCAT Writes. That would be why I would be reluctant to do that...still try my best. Everything requires you to learn... Right now we're beginning to focus on writing. We had a guest teacher come. She's here for these two weeks after spring break to start. (Interview Transcript)

Just as mandatory retention based on FCAT reading scores defined for her, as a steering media, the purpose and outcomes for learning and instruction for students and teachers in third grade, the FCAT Writes was an equally important steering media that identified the learning and instructional focus on written language in fourth grade. Therefore, she was concerned about her students' writing skills as they prepared to enter fourth grade.

Beth languished, "I don't feel that writing is strength for me." Consequently, she was concerned about her students' future success as determined by the FCAT Writes next year. Beth anguished, "My students haven't done a lot of writing, obviously, because we were preparing for the reading part of the test...we've done journal writing, which is

more like free writing, and not really structured." Beth was concerned that her previous

focus on reading prevented her from sufficiently attending to written language

instruction. As a consequence, Beth now feared how well-prepared her students were for

the FCAT Writes the following year.

As soon as the FCAT was over, Beth immediately turned her attention toward

preparation for the FCAT Writes in fourth grade. Beth was assigned to work with her

former mentor teacher, Ms. V (who was now retired).

> And we've been practicing with Ms. V - the planner and then starting to write a 5-paragraph expository writing piece... It's not as intense as a practice for reading, but, I've explained to them ...and we're more relaxed - myself and them. We still have things to cover before they start 4th grade...(Interview Transcript)

In Beth's school district, first-year teachers were assigned a mentor who was a

veteran teacher at the same school. It was the mentor's responsibility to guide and

facilitate the first-year teacher's professional growth and development (stock of

lifeworldly knowledge), needed to make instructional and curricular decisions. According

to Beth, "You only get that mentor teacher the first year. After that, you're pretty much

on your own." Beth valued her mentor's experience and expertise and actively sought her

advice.

> Ms. V was my mentor teacher for my first year. She taught for 34 years. She was absolutely awesome. I've had such a great role model. I'm having trouble getting this across, what do you recommend? They assign you a mentor teacher...she's the one that's doing our writing. (Interview Transcript)

Although Beth's mentor teacher was retired, she was hired back on a grant to

provide assistance with developing and improving teachers' skill and expertise in written

language instruction. Beth explained, "The veteran teacher came on Monday and

Tuesday to teach writing and I felt much better. I was proud of them. But toward the end

of the week...I think they wanted to be fed more," suggesting a lack of autonomy among

her students as writers. Rather than demonstrate self-regulation within their writing

process, Beth's students required continuous guidance and feedback from the teacher. As

a beginning teacher, Beth appreciated any opportunity to expand on her skills and

expertise in written instruction, such as using graphic organizers as writing tools to help

students include needed details in their writing.

> Overall, it was very effective for me because her purpose for being here was not
> just to model the lesson for the students...but to model it for us by using our
> class...even if they didn't - I gained a lot from how to write the conclusion...the
> transitional words. (Interview Transcript)

Beth felt that the experience was as beneficial to her as a beginning teacher as it

was for her students. She exclaimed, "It did show me how much I didn't know...about

writing. It was really good for me, and our principal already said she was going to have

her back next year too. She's paid for by the grant." Even if her students did not fully

benefit from the experience, Beth was convinced that it helped improve and expand on

her skills in written language instruction (her stock of lifeworldly knowledge).

Just as the FCAT was the steering media that defined for Beth, as a beginning

teacher, the learning and instructional focus in third grade and in fourth grade, the same

held true for fifth grade. Science is included on the FCAT beginning in fifth grade and so

for Beth, that designated fifth grade as an FCAT Science grade (in addition to FCAT

reading and math and FCAT Writes at the fifth grade level). The emphasis on reading in

third grade held consequences for science in much the same way as it did for written

language. Sadly, Beth conceded, "In third grade we really don't put as much emphasis on

science as we should. In fifth grade they're tested on science. We really should spend more time on it."

As mentioned earlier by Beth, the FCAT defined for her which skills and subjects received learning and instructional time and attention at each grade level. Likewise, it inversely determined which skills and subjects would not be emphasized at each grade level. As a beginning teacher, the demands placed by her school district to raise FCAT reading and math scores prevented her from teaching a comprehensive third grade curriculum on a daily basis. Prior to her students completing the FCAT, Beth complained, "I don't know if it's county or state...I think it's our state...we have to do 90 minute reading blocks." This meant for Beth, "Normally, I'm teaching half of the day reading and the other half of the day math...and it tires you out." Forced to structure her students' academic day in this manner, Beth and her students were frustrated with this arrangement.

> Well we can do science as a reading block because we have to read the material from the science text and then we can go on when it's actually science time to do more hands-on things.... After awhile, I can imagine how the kids feel...because sometimes I even get bored with doing math...I want to change...do something different... (Interview Transcript)

With 45 minutes allotted to a specials class (i.e., art, music, PE, and science) and 30 minutes in the computer lab, both on a daily basis, there was very little time for other academic instruction in the morning and afternoon. The lack of flexibility or freedom to switch subjects or activities created a sense of academic boredom and monotony for Beth and her students.

Once FCAT was over, Beth finally felt she was able to focus on learning and instruction in subjects other than reading and math. Beth exclaimed, "I'm really glad we're now able to cover what we are supposed to in third grade. Like I said before (prior to FCAT), we did 'miniature' lessons and what I mean by 'mini' we touched on it." Not surprisingly, neither Beth nor her students were satisfied with this arrangement.

The mini lessons that Beth completed in science and social studies were enough to make her students long for more. Beth's students longed for academic diversity, as she indicated, "Every couple days we'd do a little science. Because after awhile they would ask, "Are we going to do social studies? Are we going to do science?" The mini lessons that Beth provided inspired her students to long for more, tapping into her students' interest in these subjects. Piaget (1954/1981) referred to the element of interest as the essential "fuel" needed to complete the constructive process. Capitalizing on students' interest provided the motivation her students needed to construct new meanings that could be further integrated into her students' ongoing stock of lifeworldly knowledge. The academic freedom to finally focus more on science and social studies was appreciated equally by both Beth and her students.

> But to be able to actually stop at 2 o'clock and say, "Okay, the next half hour to 45 minutes we're going to take out our science books" and we read and stopped the tape (we have a tape that reads to them)…a science tape…pause the tape and have a discussion and they all want to share stories…about this in the desert…about cactuses. … (Interview Transcript)

It wasn't until after FCAT that Beth felt a sense of satisfaction toward providing her students with the opportunity to enjoy learning in her classroom. She stated emphatically, "I just really saw them enjoying science. For me, I felt like it was more

complete." For Beth and her students, it finally felt like a fully-lived third grade experience.

FCAT Tells Us How Well It's Taught

Just as FCAT scores, as a steering media, were used to assess learning and promotion to fourth grade, the principal in turn, used the same test scores to evaluate teachers' performance. Beth shared that during her teaching evaluation, her school principal used FCAT test scores and computer lab scores from Successmaker (a test-prep program) as important steering mechanisms to determine whether Beth was making satisfactory progress in the area of reading and math instruction. Consequently, Beth was ecstatic when she openly shared, "I had my annual assessment meeting with my principal and I was very excited because she offered me my continuing contract."

Based on her students' test scores and computer lab scores, however, Beth indicated, "My principal felt that my strength was reading and my students have not made as much gains as we would have expected at this point of the year in math." Therefore, Beth agreed that her professional growth and development plan would include attending math workshops and seminars to increase her teaching mastery, skill, and expertise in this area.

> I did tell her I would take some professional development courses and then get with my team...to see what they're doing. May be I'm not as strong of a math teacher. They're doing so well and have made over a year's gain in reading...it sounds like we need to really focus on how to teach this math...a good thing and all constructive criticism... (Interview Transcript)

Emphasizing a professional growth plan that focused on math skills according to her students' lower math scores indicated that Beth's school principal believed that

student performance in math was a direct result of Beth's math instruction. According to her lifeworldly stock of knowledge regarding the FCAT as a third grade teacher, Beth believed this standardized test was an accurate measurement and evaluation of student learning and effective teaching instruction and practice. Therefore, if the FCAT were valid, than using it as a tool to inform and guide math instruction (and Beth's professional development) would be deemed appropriate. Using FCAT to facilitate teacher development seems far more developmentally appropriate and less coercive than how it is used coercively as a high-stakes test that determines grade-level promotion for students.

Earlier, Beth described third grade in Florida as a "retention grade." When Beth was asked how she thought her students would most likely remember their third grade experience, without hesitation, Beth responded, "Looking back on their third grade experience, I think they would probably remember the FCAT, I think they would." As Beth stated earlier, just as her students cannot miss what they haven't had, they will also most likely recall (from their stock of lifeworldly knowledge) what has been afforded them.

The Seasoned Veteran – Mother, Mentor, and Collaborator

The veteran teacher (given the pseudonym, Vicki) was also a product of Florida public schools. She was a mother in her fifties with grown children who came to teaching later in life (see Appendix C). Prior to teaching, Vicki was a volunteer in her children's schools and a Den mother in Cub Scouts. She taught preschool before returning to college to earn a Master's Degree in Elementary Education at the same major university in Florida as Beth. At the time of this study, Vicki had taught in Florida public schools

for a total of nine years: six years in fifth grade and three years in third grade (since the

mandate to end social promotion based on FCAT reading scores was first implemented).

Vicki felt that these important life experiences afforded her valuable insights even as a

beginning teacher.

> I was a mother and volunteer for ten years before teaching. Working as a
> preschool teacher, I know the stages of development and how kid's behavior
> works. As a den mother, I knew what they were going to do before they knew it.
> Certain things they wouldn't do. I have knowledge about classroom management
> and experience. Even before I began teaching, I knew my own personal
> tolerances, what I'm willing to put up with. Having lots of things going on at the
> same time is not a problem for me. (Interview Transcript)

As a beginning teacher, Vicki already had important and valuable life experiences

that, unlike Beth, contributed to her stock of lifeworldly knowledge. This additional

information and knowledge afforded Vicki important insights and understandings with

regard to children's development, behavior, and management that helped guide and

inform her decisions as a beginning teacher.

Beth was half the age of Vicki and readily discussed her third grade experience in

retrospect to today's third graders in Florida. Vicki, on the other hand, was far more

reluctant to describe or openly discuss her third grade experience, stating that, "My third

grade experience was not all that positive" and did not elaborate.

Vicki's reflections in relation to education and public schools in Florida generally

capitalized instead on her own perspective as a beginning teacher, a parent of previous

third graders, and the relationships she had as a teacher with her students' parents, past

and present. Again, using Habermas' theory of communicative action, Vicki's past

beliefs, understandings, and experiences as a beginning teacher and parent of former third

graders were shattered, superseded and reconfigured with her current experiences to form her ongoing stock of lifeworldly knowledge as a veteran teacher and her observations of parents of third graders into a newly organized whole.

Changing Parental Concerns

Unlike Beth, Vicki's completion of parent-teacher conferences was described as a central focus and topic during the phone interviews. When asked how things were going, Vicki responded, "We're winding down – our third marking period. I had report card conferences with parents and kids. That was part of what I had been doing...meeting with parents." Over the years, Vicki has developed an appreciation for the need to include students in the conferences and whenever possible, allow student-led conferences to take place. This semester, she indicated that approximately half of her students attended the conference with their parents.

Based on the parents who attended conferences this year, Vicki observed, "They're mostly concerned – they're all relieved that FCAT is behind. They want to know when the results are in." Beyond the FCAT, Vicki's parents' primary concerns were similar to past parental concerns related to student performance on report card and future classroom placement. Vicki noted, "Well first of all, they look at the grades...But they usually have comments about the FCAT. Then they're all concerned about next year." Vicki insisted, "There are no surprises because I communicate with my parents. I send home progress reports so usually the report card is not a big surprise. They know exactly what's going on."

In addition to academic performance as stated on the report cards, Vicki indicated that her current third grade parents were just as interested as parents have been in the past with regard to their children's overall participation and behavioral conduct in class. Vicki explained:

> Depending on the child, they also are interested in behavior. The way our report card, we have work kind of broken down. There's an academic progress part, an attitudes and work habits, and then kind of more like behavior – social interactions and behavior. If those codes that they get show that children need some work there, the parents usually are also talking about that. Which is nice – they're also concerned about their social development and then their behavior and their work habits. (Interview Transcript)

As a veteran teacher, Vicki was relieved by the inquiries that her parents expressed regarding their children's performance beyond academic progress. It was important to Vicki that her parents recognized the need to teach to the whole child, which included their social development and work habits.

In relation to Vicki's current third grade parents, Vicki also found it somewhat difficult to compare her past experience (according to her stock of lifeworldly knowledge) with fifth grade parent-teacher conferences in contrast to current conferences with third grade parents. Vicki admitted, "Those parents' concerns were with their children moving out of the elementary school into the middle school and be able to handle those changes." Vicki continued, "Those parents' concerns were more directed. They were worried about the middle school. So it's kind of hard for me because my experience for the first six years has been with fifth graders." Although Vicki's past and present experiences with teacher conferences provided interesting insights, the comparison was somewhat difficult since the placement goals were so different.

Educating in a Competitive World

Generally speaking, Vicki felt that in the past, parents were more concerned with how their children were feeling about school, whether or not they were happy, accepted, and well-adjusted to the learning environment (parents' stock of lifeworldly knowledge). Today's parents, she noted, seemed far more preoccupied and centered on overall academic performance and how they compare with their peers. Vicki pondered, "I think the concerns have been more academic. I think for awhile, they were more, it seems like especially with the younger children, parents were more worried about – my child have friends? Do they get along with others?" However, the views of Vicki's third grade parents today has meant a mixed bag of advantages and disadvantages in terms of what parents are concerned about, most interested in, and advocate for, concerning their children's learning and development in third grade.

> But as far as I think, and I think now, the shift is a little bit more to the academic. There's more focus on what are their deficiencies in math? Or reading? – I think I've seen that a little bit more. It used to be they would just look at the grades and just accept it. But now, I think it's more, I think parents actually know more, because it's been...more of a focus. And I think children with issues, with concerns, have been identified so much younger. (Interview Transcript)

It was at this juncture that Vicki contemplated a shift in emphasis from when she was a parent and first started teaching to what she has encountered since teaching third grade under the mandate to end social promotion based on FCAT reading scores. In contrast to parental concerns regarding children's social-emotional adjustment in school, parents today are not only focused on academic performance, more specifically, whether or not learning deficits exist. An increased emphasis on academic achievement based on

test scores has resulted in increasing trends to identify children with learning issues or

concerns at a much younger age.

This meant that Vicki's former beliefs, values, and assumptions as a social actor

in the combined roles as parent, beginning teacher, and past experiences with parents

were now shattered, superseded, and integrated into her new and ongoing beliefs, values,

and assumptions based on her current experiences as a third grade teacher and her

relationships with parents into her ongoing stock of lifeworldly knowledge. Her newly

organized whole now included knowledge and understanding that today's parents and

students were not only anxious about the FCAT and relieved to have the test completed,

but were increasingly aware of children's learning needs at earlier ages. Likewise, this

has meant a change in the stock of lifeworldly knowledge that Vicki's parents also utilize

in comparison to herself and parents in the past in relation to her third grade parents

today.

Parents as advocates. The change that Vicki has observed in her parents' stock of

lifeworldly knowledge has resulted in a shift in roles from primarily caretakers to now

including the role of child advocate. With this worldview, parents come to Vicki's

conferences better prepared to ask informed questions about their child's learning and

academic progress. Vicki observed, "Parents seem to know more what questions they can

ask. And how can I help them at home? Do they need a tutor? I hear that a lot! Do you

think they should be tutored?"

The majority of parents at Vicki's school have economic resources available to

them to provide additional services for the children, such as private tutors. With increased

awareness about learning styles and learning needs (stock of lifeworldly knowledge),

parents at Vicki's school were far more willing to actively advocate for intervention both

inside and outside of the school environment than previous parents.

> But they know that – they seem to ask about what more can they do? Exactly
> what is it in reading that...that they need to be concerned? A lot of emphasis on
> extra – Any kind of tutoring program or private tutors. (Interview Transcript)

Vicki appreciated her third grade parents' increased interest in their children's

learning in comparison to her past parents. Vicki believed that increased awareness of

student's learning strengths and needs (stock of lifeworldly knowledge) on the part of

both parents and educators has been a productive change for the best. As Vicki

illustrated, "For instance, if they see they can get a 'C' in reading, it's not just, 'Oh

well.'" Vicki's third grade parents were eager and anxious for their children to succeed in

school and were willing to do their part to ensure that their child achieve the highest

grades possible.

In addition, it was equally important to Vicki that this information was used to

guide and inform instruction, and the need for intervention was in the best interest of the

child. This meant that parent and teacher expectations also needed to be fair and just. As

a parent and veteran teacher, Vicki was convinced that increasing expectations translated

into real progress in contrast to passively accepting student's growth and development as

something that cannot be improved upon or changed according to presumed ability.

Increased push for early intervention. Vicki insisted that early intervention has the

potential to avoid or prevent failure among young learners. From her point of view

(according to her stock of lifeworldly knowledge), this was a critical concern that FCAT

has actually brought to the forefront in the minds of parents and educators today. Vicki insisted, "I think that, I do think that it's been a positive. I think parents should be aware early on. I think that earlier intervention is good for children." From Vicki's perspective, FCAT has placed a greater emphasis on prevention than in the past when her children were in elementary school.

> We're not waiting till they're failing before we're implementing and doing something different. I think that's one of the good parts that the testing has brought about - earlier identification. I think that if the parents handle it, they're giving their children more support...(Interview Transcript)

Along with Vicki's enthusiasm, she equally expressed concern that parental support was not translated into undue stress placed on the child to perform. Vicki adamantly cautioned, "Just as long as it's not too much stress on the child. If they put so much emphasis on it, then they don't have a well-balanced life!" Vicki's reference to a 'well-balanced life,' once again, conjured up the same concerns expressed earlier by Beth in relation to the kinds of learning and instruction provided.

Vicki envisioned a well-balanced life for young learners to mean the equivalent of maximizing individual learning growth and development. Vicki argued, "As we're taking all these things away from kids that they need to learn – like recess. It's like, okay, this makes sense. We're blasting the academics, but we're forgetting that children need to grow socially, emotionally, and cognitively." Vicki was concerned by the trends that overemphasized cognitive development at the expense of social and emotional development. She insisted, "We got a whole person here, not just a brain. We got hearts, and feelings, moods and emotions, and needs. And at what expense are we developing

the cognitive? What expense to the child?" Ultimately, Vicki pondered, "What are they missing out on?"

Vicki warned that parents and educators need to nurture all aspects of development of the 'whole' child – not just academics found in the cognitive domain that would also maximize each child's own stock of lifeworldly knowledge. NAEYC (2003) also supports the need for young learners to be cognitively, physically, socially, and artistically active in order to develop positive attitudes toward learning and feelings of security and emotional competence. Vicki insisted that failure to do so has far-reaching consequences for children.

Trading disadvantages. Vicki feared that the push for academics today in contrast to when her own children were growing up or even when she first began teaching, has placed many young children at risk of losing quality life experiences; life experiences that are essential to their overall growth and development. Subsequently, these same life experiences maximize each child's own stock of lifeworldly knowledge. Based on what Vicki witnessed at her school, she felt this was particularly true for children who were considered socio-economically disadvantaged and struggling academically; a trend that she suggested earlier was taking place district-wide.

> These are also the same kids who, maybe, aren't being involved in team sports – or extracurricular activities because of where they live, or who their parents are, or their socioeconomic background. They need to be playing more, and cooperating, getting out...I mean, these are the kids, and this is what blows my mind, these are the kids we know... (Interview Transcript)

Vicki continued to question this disturbing trend to maximize opportunities for academic learning at the expense of the child's social and emotional development that

can be provided in non-academic activities and settings. Tragically, creating increased opportunities for after school tutoring resulted in the creation of a new set of disadvantages by eliminating opportunities to grow and develop socially and emotionally through participation in extra-curricular activities. In order to increase overall learning, Vicki believed the quality life experiences must also be increased both inside and outside of school. Limiting or restricting access to extra-curricular activities will, in turn, limit the child's potential stock of lifeworldly knowledge. This disadvantage applied to a small fraction of the student population at Vicki's school, the need for after-school tutoring and the disadvantages that resulted from not having it were much more far-reaching and wide-spread at Beth's school. According to Vicki's experiences, this was a trend that has increased dramatically from when she first began teaching.

Too much, too soon. Likewise, Vicki also expressed concern toward an increasing tendency to push down the academics to younger learners that may be developmentally inappropriate in an attempt to accelerate learning and skill acquisition. As noted in Chapter 1, young children develop at varying rates with their own unique developmental patterns in growth and personality, learning style, and family background (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Researchers like Katz (1995) also challenge this kind of practice as potentially more hurtful than helpful to educators' attempts to meet the developmental needs of all learners.

Vicki used written language instruction as a prime example of the kind of academic acceleration in the primary grades that has taken place since her children were in public schools or when she first began teaching. Frustrated with these trends, Vicki

exclaimed, "I mean, kids are writing. I mean, my students, my children didn't write in kindergarten. If they did, they wanted to. But writing wasn't instructed. They weren't, you know, they weren't asked to. I mean, our kindergartners write." To satisfy these new expectations, Vicki noted, "We've got *Handwriting Without Tears* program in kindergarten."

Unlike some of her colleagues, Vicki openly questioned the need to begin formal writing instruction earlier. Based on her own experience and understanding of language and literacy development (stock of lifeworldly knowledge) as a parent and educator, Vicki questioned whether this expectation was developmentally appropriate. Vicki argued, "I mean, five-year-olds aren't developmentally ready for that necessarily. I don't think we're paying any attention to the developmental place of the children and then we're prescribing medications. I think the children – they are stressed."

Pressuring children to perform skills or understand concepts that are not developmentally appropriate, according to Vicki, as well as failure to understand individual learning styles or learning needs can result in undue stress for young learners. Vicki was convinced that this kind of stress is counterproductive and potentially harmful to young children's overall growth and well-being. With an increase in academic expectations in the early grades, Vicki was equally concerned that this trend has created a tendency among parents and educators to diagnose and prescribe medications for young children for ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder). As Vicki directly insinuated, "Well, I also think that there's probably an increase in the amount of children that we diagnose that

have attention deficit, because we're trying to get them to perform and do things as five-year-olds that they're not meant to do."

From Vicki's viewpoint, raising unfair academic expectations in the early grades that are developmentally inappropriate for some learners may result in misdiagnoses such as ADD. She feared that educators and parents automatically assume that something is developmentally wrong with the learner who cannot achieve the expectation rather than consider the developmental appropriateness of the expectation itself and the instructional strategies used. Young learners, who lacked the interest, focus, and motivation to perform high-level skills such as writing may be unfairly diagnosed as having an attention deficit or learning disability. Vicki felt this might be particularly true for physically active boys in the early grades.

> I'm not so sure of it – all these attention deficit boys that are – you know, out of their seats as first graders are...boys that should be doing that. I think that we have a lot of kids that get diagnosed incorrectly because of what we expect them to do. (Interview Transcript)

Vicki believed that raising parent and teacher expectations for children's academic performance is a positive outcome as long as they are developmentally and instructionally appropriate to individual learning styles and needs. After all, in Vicki's opinion, "They're behaving like kids, but we're expecting them to do things that are far more advanced." It is therefore imperative to provide a well balanced academic program that teaches to the whole child. Likewise, if the goal of education is to maximize each child's stock of lifeworldly knowledge, then both Vicki and Beth seemed to suggest that schools must increase and maximize (not minimize or eliminate) students' access to developmentally appropriate educational opportunities and life experiences.

Using Research to Raise the Bar for Teacher Professionalism

According to Vicki, one of her most significant transformations was in relation to how she now approached the curriculum. Vicki described her early approach to curriculum and instruction as follows, "Well, you know, when I first taught, I didn't have an understanding of the curriculum, so I relied more on teacher resources that just – that I would deliver instruction based on just one resource."

Rather than relying on a single approach, method, or strategy to learning as she had done as a beginning teacher, Vicki indicated, "I think now I use more of a variety of resources, cuz [sic] I understand that children need to have different kind of content or any kind of learning needs to come out of different ways." The various strategies and approaches Vicki uses in her current teaching included project-learning, cooperative learning, classroom meetings, readers' workshop, and writers' workshop. Vicki' now believed in the importance of research, from a wide assortment of resources, to inform best teaching practice. According to Vicki, education is "A very dynamic field and it's always changing – and there's always new research."

At Vicki's school, there were teacher candidates placed in classrooms throughout the school year at the time of this study. As Vicki indicated, "I get interns all the time – I mean I have them all this year." Due to her own experiences and subsequent insights as a mentor teacher to interns, Vicki felt that teacher interns, in particular, "Need to understand that what they learn today in school might not be applicable next year necessarily – that it's very important to stay current – and to pay attention." As a mentor teacher, Vicki actively encouraged teacher interns and beginning teachers to "stay current

and to look at what best practices are and how brain research impacts teaching and practice." Hence, an important part of mentorship for Vicki included facilitating and guiding her interns to use research to inform curriculum decisions and teaching practice.

Just as Vicki described her own past struggles with modifying the curriculum or classroom management to accommodate the needs of learners early in her teaching career, she also observed the same tendencies among her interns. Vicki recalled, "They say things to me like, 'Well, I didn't learn it that way.' But you know they're being exposed to it through these new strategies in college, but they personally had not experienced in elementary school." Based specifically on her observations and interactions with interns, Vicki determined that this was particularly true in the case of math.

> The biggest one that comes to me is math and they remember how they learned. And they even know they're learning it a different way in school. They tend to revert back to how they learned it and what happens is that they need to really focus on how developmentally children need to learn it – not revert back to the way they were taught. And that happens quite a bit. (Interview Transcript)

Vicki felt that the best way to ensure that interns do not revert to old habits, it would be necessary to increase their level of confidence and trust to attempt something new. She explained, "I think new teachers don't always have the confidence to – they don't have the experience to trust themselves. They'll revert back when you're [sic] in that situation." Vicki suggested that this is only further compounded by everything that interns are required to do, implying, "You tend to revert back to what you know because you can get a bit overwhelmed with all there is to do." Therefore, she recommended that interns remember to, "Start with kids first, no matter what their state tells them to do."

Even when research was used to support strategies that were developmentally appropriate to teach math concepts, the temptation for teacher interns to revert back to old habits was tremendous. As a supervising teacher, this was especially frustrating for Vicki. Based on Vicki's experience, teacher interns' stock of lifeworldly knowledge related to math concepts was one that students were particularly reluctant to shatter, supersede, and integrate previously held beliefs, knowledge, and experience into a newly constructed organized whole.

If the desired goal of practicum experience for pre-service teachers is to encourage "risk-taking" as they design and implement curriculum and instruction, as implied by Vicki, her observations may be instructional in how we design and organize practicum experiences. Interns and beginners need practicum experiences that allow for error-informed experimentation with teaching strategies and practice in order to shatter, supersede, and integrate old belief systems into a newly constructed organized whole. This in turn, requires a supportive, collaborative learning environment with experienced, knowledgeable teachers who allow interns to grow and actively learn by making mistakes (or making misconceptions) rather than avoid making them at all cost.

Vicki's own experience as a mentor teacher revealed that even when research was used to support teaching practice in a supportive practicum setting with an experienced, veteran teacher, the tendency for interns (and quite possibly, beginning teachers) to revert to old beliefs and habits is difficult to overcome. To further compound the challenge of designing and implementing effective teaching practice, Vicki recognized that this may

be an increasingly difficult task to accomplish due to pressures to increase test scores.

Vicki warned,

> Don't let that, the fear of the test, dictate how you're going to teach. Continue to teach the children as third-grade children. But you can keep the testing in mind. But if you really teach children what they really need – teach them the skills – the joy of reading, and writing and math – they will be fine on the standardized test. Don't let that dictate how you approach teaching in your classroom. (Interview Transcript)

In states like Florida, to think outside the box may, in actuality, run counter to

what is dictated by state legislators and leaders or whoever the decision-makers happen to

be (referred to by Vicki as "the Man"). Whatever teachers do, Vicki recommended,

"Don't fear the man, whatever you do. Don't fear the man, whoever the man is." In

opposition to fearing state policy like that found in Florida, Vicki countered with the need

to advocate for a level of professionalism in which teacher interns challenge and question

teaching practice. Vicki fervently insisted that to achieve this, "I'd like to see a level of

professionalism with young students that I tend to not to see [sic]. Where they are

confident enough and they need to ask questions – then reach out."

Vicki believed that beginning teachers require support and opportunities for

collaboration with more experienced peers. According to Vicki, it is particularly crucial,

"Especially as teachers coming in and coming in third grade - to reach out - to reach out

to their peers," to increase their confidence and assertiveness needed to actively engage in

the decision-making process. For first year teachers, Vicki felt this is especially difficult

because, "You are isolated six and a half hours a day with those groups of children." The

first year of teaching can be an isolating experience. To ensure that beginners challenge

and question teacher practice, it is imperative to ensure that they are collaborating with teachers who have more experience.

Unfortunately, as suggested by Vicki, state governments like Florida have drafted state legislation and policy (steering media) that may arguably discourage critical thinking among teaching professionals. Furthermore, as described earlier by Beth, the effort to nurture and support teacher confidence and competence among beginning teachers in a school district that only guarantees an assigned mentor during the first year makes this an ever-daunting task to achieve as well.

Likewise, Vicki came to understand and appreciate the importance of collaborating with other teachers. As a beginning teacher, however, Vicki shared, "I would do a project because all the other fifth-grade teachers did the project. It didn't matter that it wasn't necessarily that beneficial to student learning – I sort of did it because it seemed to be tradition to do it." With great remorse, she added, "And that's a really stupid reason to keep doing something." As a veteran teacher, Vicki asserted with greater satisfaction, "I collaborate more with others finding out what works."

Vicki fully understood that when she collaborated with her peers to plan and design curriculum and teaching practice, much like her partnerships with interns, she had to take responsibility to prepare herself to actively engage in the decision-making process. Through these experiences, Vicki came to believe that this kind of critical, dialogic discourse was best achieved when they used current research on best teaching practice to guide and inform their decisions.

Using Tests as a Tool to Inform – Not Measure

As Vicki's understanding of learning and instruction grew, she increasingly used what is commonly referred to as authentic assessment to guide and facilitate student learning and teaching practice. This caused Vicki to be, "A little more thoughtful" as she planned her curriculum and instruction. According to Vicki, "When I do implement them in the classroom – I sort of, you know, I'll stop and assess more often, and go, well, is it working or not." This use of assessment enabled Vicki to decide, "If it's not working, I'm willing to abandon it. If it is working, I might extend it. Keep it going." This helped her to determine which activities were meaningful, purposeful, and therefore beneficial to student learning.

This also meant a dramatic philosophical shift in educational perspectives from when Vicki was a beginning teacher. Rather than stick with a curriculum or activity, hesitant to deviate or question it or challenge what others were doing and why (according to her stock of lifeworldly knowledge as a beginning teacher), ongoing assessments have empowered Vicki to make learning and instructional decisions that were most beneficial to her individual students.

Vicki also realized, however, that her worldview of assessment was a dramatic departure from how the state of Florida viewed assessment. In frustration Vicki asserted, "The current trend in Florida is more of an emphasis on achieving based on test results rather than looking at real, authentic student learning. And so that doesn't, for me – line up." This did not mean that Vicki was against the use of standardized assessments, as she

insisted, "I don't have a problem with standardized testing. I just have a problem with how it's used."

From Vicki's viewpoint, assessments were best used for authentic purposes that guide and facilitate learning and instruction. Vicki suggested, "If we're going to use it to collect data and improve our practice and instruction – then that makes sense." On the other hand, Vicki was adamant that, "If we're gonna [sic] use it to punish children – or use it to have some punitive action because the child doesn't progress at what we think they should, then I do have a problem with that." Just as Vicki expressed concerns earlier regarding the use of developmentally appropriate practice according to developmentally appropriate expectations, Vicki also questioned the developmental appropriateness of standardized tests to determine and measure academic expectations for learners regardless of individual learning needs.

> I think that the demands are a little – they tend to be a little unrealistic for this wide ability and range of learners. That we have one measure that expects them all to be on the same level – it just doesn't make sense with who we're dealing with. And I'm really... (Interview Transcript)

According to Vicki's stock of lifeworldly knowledge, when adults use or design curriculum, classroom management, learning, instruction, assessment, or expectations in developmentally inappropriate ways, the consequence will always result in undue pressure and stress for learners. Therefore, Vicki felt strongly that the only developmentally appropriate use of the FCAT or any other standardized test, as a steering media, would be to inform and guide learning and instruction, not dictate it nor attempt to exclusively measure it.

In terms of whether Vicki would want to be a student in third grade in Florida today, given the advantages and disadvantages she has thus far described, she interestingly insisted without hesitation, "Especially at the school environment that I'm in, it would not bother me to be in third grade today, because we don't...we know that the test is a part of what we do, it's not all that we do." However, she explained that it would definitely depend on the school in Florida. Vicki understood that different third graders may have a completely different school experience, depending on the individual school's focus and the kind of learning environment (lifeworld) that is provided.

> Being in third-grade today – I actually think that it can be an exciting place to be, but it's also a little – I don't know – I wouldn't let that test be the deter...To me, it's a part of what we do and like I said, I have a different focus because our school, our entire school environment is not focused just on the test. (Interview Transcript)

Beth insisted that the difference between being a third grader in Florida, past and present, was not due to a difference in the content that was actually taught, but rather, was a difference in the manner or method in how the content was taught. Vicki agreed, suggesting that individual schools in Florida approach the FCAT very differently. Although all third grade teachers are required to follow the Florida Sunshine State Standards, how these standards are taught, can be dramatically different between different teachers and even different schools, as illustrated in this study. Vicki reiterated this belief, as she insisted,

> I mean, their emphasis, whether they're being taught to the test, whether they're experiencing other activities...or are engaged in different types of learning. I think it does vary greatly, even though they're all third graders in the state of Florida. I mean, all third-grade teachers have a required curriculum to teach, but how that's taught – there's a lot of choice. (Interview Transcript)

Vicki further illustrated the potential difference among teachers and schools using her own social studies unit on Egypt.

> I can teach my social studies unit – my Ancient Egypt Unit – through a marketplace – or through some real experience...projects like that. Whereas another school that's focused greatly on improving test scores might just have children reading from a textbook. The same content but the approach would be completely different. (Interview Transcript)

Different teaching practice and instruction leads to different learning opportunities and experiences. While the standards were the same across different school districts and individual schools the opportunities afforded result in very different learning outcomes for students.

Teacher Summary

The reasons for the previously described differences between these two schools will be further explored and contemplated by specifically examining the lifeworlds of the two elementary schools. Exploring the teachers' life histories thus far revealed how each teacher's previously held beliefs, understanding, and experiences were uniquely shattered, superseded, and integrated into two different organized wholes as third grade teachers in Florida today. It was also from each teacher's respective organized whole that each individual biography emerged.

In spite of the differences in their individual life histories and their own stock of lifeworldly knowledge, both teachers came to the same conclusion regarding the third grade experience in Florida, past and present. Each teacher concluded that the greatest difference was not due to WHAT is now taught in third grade, but rather, the difference lies in HOW and WHEN it is taught. Likewise, both testimonials revealed an overarching

concern as to whether all third graders in Florida are granted the SAME third grade experience. Generally speaking, each teacher seemed to ponder whether full access to learning experiences and opportunities needed to live full and active lives (within lifeworlds that are ultimately controlled and engineered by adults) were achieved equally for all third graders.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 2, Thorndike promoted the notion of "human engineering" in education through the employment of standardized curricula and instruction (and subsequently, learning) to increase achievement for the betterment of a meritocratic (and arguably capitalistic) society. It is now imperative to examine what Florida's accountability system's rationale to increase learning and achievement has meant for actual learning and teaching practice and whether this system supports/compliments or competes/colonizes the lifeworld rationale for learning and teaching practice at each school community.

<div align="center">A Tale of Two Schools: Lifeworlds Apart</div>

The lifeworld as defined by Habermas is the "taken-for-granteds" and "unshaken convictions" that communicative actors draw from in "collective processes of interpretation." It is the transcendental site where communicative actors, the speaker and hearer, meet and reciprocally raise claims that what they say and do according to their beliefs, understanding, and experience (stock of lifeworldly knowledge) fit into the world encountered; criticize and confirm those validity claims; discuss and resolve disagreements; and arrive at new agreements within situational contexts that shift, expand and contract.

Similarly, Boody (1992) following Heidegger, concluded that the very essence of "human-being" by nature is temporal and historical. Hence, "the fundamental activity of human existing is interpretation of the world" – not just verbalized interpretation, but rather, by our actions within the world. Likewise, Boody argues that knowledge emerges from a temporal process that is conversational and dialectical, in the same sense as Habermas' communicative action. Just as Habermas insists that the communicative actor's stock of lifeworldly knowledge is shattered, superseded, and integrated in an ongoing process of organizing a whole, Boody generally agrees, stating, "It does not end, there is no last word. If it were atemporal, a last word could be said, which indeed is the goal of traditional science. But we are, Heidegger says, fundamentally situated, temporal, historical beings" (p. 120).

Understanding that there is no "final word" to be sought or gained in this analysis, the goal then was to increase (rather than operationalize) our understanding of what individual actors know of themselves and experience within their school community's lifeworld. To complete this dialectical process, it was imperative to specifically consider the individual lifeworld of each school community as it intersected with each individual teacher's life history.

In addition to revealing the life histories of the primary participants (the beginning and veteran teachers), the primary data obtained from interviews, observations, and permanent products also provided important insights regarding each school community's individual lifeworld. An integration of the primary data with the secondary data (obtained during videotaped interviews with the secondary participants and written narratives by

third graders toward the FCAT) created a constellation of pieces needed to construct the fabric of communicative practice that comprised each respective school lifeworld. This assimilated data revealed: a) how the two school cultures were reproduced; b) how students and teachers were socialized; and c) how personality competences of knowing, speaking, and acting were employed to reach understanding, achieve goals, and assert individual autonomy. This in turn, provided insight as to how the beginning and veteran teachers in the different school lifeworlds, responded differently to the steering media (Florida's high-stakes testing and retention mandate based on reading scores) and the consequences for learning and teaching practice that resulted.

Although the two elementary schools in this study were located in the same school district and situated just 6.31 miles apart, the lifeworlds and rationale for education at each school was very different according to the culture, society, and personality experienced and advanced by individual administrators, educators, students, and their families in the study. In general, the purpose of this data analysis is to now examine those differences and the varying circumstances that could help to explain the reasons for those differences and the potential consequences for learners and practice at each school.

Beth's School Community: A Lifeworld of Needs

Beth's school community was described by the school administration as a blue collar, lower- to middle-income neighborhood with "working-class" families. The surrounding homes were largely comprised of older tract homes. Beth's school building had a standard brick design in the front, with a large drive up area, and front parking lot

for staff and visitors that was largely exposed to sun and heat. Outside benches were situated near the main school entrance that was locked from the outside. This required all visitors to enter (for security reasons) through the school's main office, allowing office staff to screen everyone who entered and exited the building. Any day of the week, parents were found bringing their children to school during the morning hours and randomly picking them up in the afternoon. The front office workers complained that this created a "continuous revolving door" of parents and children and the ongoing disruption that it caused for the entire school.

The student population at this school, as described in Chapter 3, was demographically diverse in terms of race/ethnicity and socio-economic status (see Appendix A). Less than half of the student population (40.6%) was identified as White while more than half of the students (57.7%) were identified as either African American, Hispanic or multiracial. Due to the school community's low-income status more than half (62.8%) of the student population participated in the free or reduced lunch program. The majority of the teachers had a bachelor's degree while only 25% had a master's degree, with no teachers identified as having a specialist degree or doctorate (No Child Left Behind School Accountability Reports, 2006).

An open revolving door. Just as the front office workers complained about the continuous flow of students and parents on any given day, the same can be said with regard to enrollment and attendance throughout the school year. Beth (and her colleagues) considered the high mobility rate among students at their school (due to the socioeconomic circumstances of families) to be the single most pervasive concern facing

their school community (see Table 5). According to Beth, "[the school's name] has a very high turn-over rate for kids like an 'open door.' They're just in and out, in and out...and a lot may have to do with the professions the parents are in." She suggested that her students' parents in blue collar jobs experienced a higher turn-over rate that had a direct impact on housing and the continuous need to relocate in order to seek new employment.

> They're mainly blue collar workers and if they lose their job, they're having to get a new apartment, or work at a store on the other side of town. They have to move which I think was the case with my one student's situation...when I first came here, they told me that it was very common to get new students all the time. (Interview Transcript)

In the three years that Beth taught at her school, she witnessed firsthand the unfortunate consequences in both private and public spheres for students who attend more than one school on a yearly basis. As Beth exclaimed in frustration, "When I have kids and I get the cums [sic] and I see that they've been to five elementary schools in two years, it explains so much. They don't have time to retain information." Not only did Beth readily recognize the disruption that took place at school within the public sphere when children were moved, she equally understood the potential emotional consequences within the child's private sphere that resulted.

> They move them from school to school making new friends and adjusting to new environments. I think that has a big effect on how well they do. I have one student, she came three weeks after school started and she's already left. They moved to Deltona. That's really common actually for this school. (Interview Transcript)

Here again we find the personal choices made by adults (in this case, due largely to socioeconomic demands and pressures) that have direct and profound impact on children. Beth, like Vicki, understood the social and emotional importance of maintaining young

children's relationships with other children and with adults in a variety of contexts and settings. Looking back, Beth noted, "Luckily, my first year, they didn't do that because I had a really tough group." Her first class was largely comprised of struggling learners and so Beth was particularly grateful to have her students for the entire year. However, that was not the case her second year.

> But last year I did get, I think, two new students. I want to say all of them finished off the year last year, but out of that group of 23 last year, probably 15 returned to this school and the rest went to another school. It's really, really high...
> (Interview Transcript)

This ratio meant that approximately 65% of Beth's class returned to her school to continue in fourth grade. The other 35% disbursed to other schools.

When Beth reminisced about her own life experiences growing up in a stable school community in contrast to her third graders' experiences, she openly admitted, "I can't really relate to it because I went to the same elementary school. All the years, the same middle school and high school and I never changed." Based on her own lived experiences with starting a new job, Beth speculated, "I don't know how it affects children, but just by my thoughts alone, I'm sure it's very hard. I know how it feels to start a new job or be in a new place - have to learn the routine of things - that's a lot." Beth clearly believed that the burden of attending several schools must be tremendous for young learners.

A hierarchy of community membership. Unfortunately, Beth observed that this kind of transient lifestyle can have unforeseen (and potentially devastating) consequences for students and families within the lifeworld of the school community. Whether

conscious or not, Beth alluded to the tragic belief that students moving in and out of the

school community could cause teachers to react differently toward different students.

> I think the kids that do come here and have been here all five years...I think even teachers respond to them differently...when you put so much work and effort into after school things, you want to know that it's going to help the school too...and help the child too...and if you think, 'Oh, they're just dropping in...they're just going to leave again...I think that teachers have different attitudes about it...I really, really do...(Interview Transcript)

While some students might be viewed as 'vested members of the community,' less

fortunate transient populations may be perceived as students who were merely 'dropping

in' (temporarily taking up space) only to eventually 'leave again.'

Like Vicki earlier, Beth also described an after school program to improve

reading skills. Beth explained, "We do programs here like the Mini Blast...an after

school program that I've done each year where we work with reading and phonics,

depending on what grade level" to improve reading benchmarks needed to pass the

FCAT. While Beth was clearly elated by the growth and progress made by students

participating in the program, she appeared to be most delighted about the students who

continued in the program for consecutive years.

> I've had some of the kids two years or three years and that's really good because it shows me they're here. By the time they actually get to third grade, that will be wonderful because it will not only be wonderful to the third graders or team, it will also be beneficial to our school and our scores...(Interview Transcript)

This translated into a long-term investment for increased academic performance not only

for individual students, but more importantly, for the academic future of the entire school

community (according to FCAT scores). In this instance, it appeared to Beth to be a 'win-

win' situation for everyone in the school community.

Sadly, Beth equally noted the disappointment and discouragement that was felt by teachers when students left to enroll at another school. Beth sighed, "But when you put in all this work, you think, 'Oh, we're going to keep this going' and they go somewhere else. Where they go, they don't get the same help." Almost in defeat, Beth relinquished, "Then it's just like you feel like it's almost time wasted." In this case, when students move away, her words tragically suggested a "lose-lose" situation, feeling defeated.

In the end, Beth quite boldly admitted, "I think (it) indirectly affects how well they're received." Considering the high-stakes steering mechanisms (ranking schools and mandatory retention) employed by Florida's accountability system used to increase achievement and teaching performance according to FCAT scores, it was not difficult to understand why teachers like Beth felt that way about her own school community. Even with the best of intentions, teachers like Beth were clearly frustrated with this situation (see Table 5).

In sheer aggravation, Beth declared, "You want to know that they're going to be there. Be at your school and be in your class. Help your school." She continued,

> I've been in those extra programs that we do and all this extra work we put into help the kids. We want to know that they're going to be here. Not that we're helping them to just go somewhere else and fall between the cracks...(Interview Transcript)

Beth's words clearly expressed an 'input-output' equation that is actively promoted and advanced by high-stakes accountability systems that use powerful steering media like standardized test scores to measure overall achievement and performance. According to Beth, this arrangement made teachers feel that in order for their time, effort, and energy to be well-spent, they needed to see a payoff in their investment in the form of

increased student academic achievement as determined by standardized test scores. From

Beth's perspective, this clearly translated into a 'win-win' formula for students, teachers,

and schools.

Which students belong to which school? Ranking and sorting schools according

to the same standards for academic learning and achievement among school communities

with existing disparities has resulted in the need for steering mechanisms in an attempt to

offset the inherent disadvantages among groups. Grading school communities with

existing societal inequities (such as the disadvantages related to large transient

populations) according to FCAT scores has resulted in the creation of steering

mechanisms designed to counter these effects. These mechanisms are then believed to

even an otherwise 'unequal playing field.' Beth explained, "After students come here

after a certain time, their scores don't count toward our school...I forget what the time

frame is, but they count toward the school where they came from."

From an 'input-output' perspective, this kind of 'trade off' made perfect sense to

Beth. If Beth's performance was evaluated according to student test scores, then it was

only natural for her to want to be judged according to the students she taught to for the

greatest amount of time. As Beth continued,

> Which is good because you don't want to be accountable for someone's reading
> scores when you've only had them for one month of reading. I think that's pretty
> fair and even after they leave, if they tested here, their scores count for here which
> is good. That part I like because even if they came from somewhere else, those
> scores are going to count for the other school, depending on how much time they
> spent in either classroom...(Interview Transcript)

Which schools were held accountable for which students were ultimately decided

by creating a steering mechanism based on the 'date' of enrollment rather than by the act

of enrollment at a particular school. Beth's own reflections suggested that students and families who transferred to her school after the predetermined enrollment date were not viewed the same as those students whose test scores 'counted' for her school. Whether students, whose test scores did not count, received the same level of priority in terms of learning and instruction, as in the case of their counterparts whose test scores actually counted for her school, was a potential consequence that no one has yet considered.

For those students who typically move around, Beth acknowledged, "They just move from school to school and never really develop or have a relationship with teachers." Unfortunately, the reverse may be equally true. Following Beth's line of reasoning, it could be argued that these students never really developed relationships with teachers because teachers ultimately failed to develop deep and meaningful relationships with these students. This circular relationship becomes all the more pervasive when this kind of high-stakes steering mechanism is employed.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the Excellence Movement emerged and received particular momentum from the widely publicized report, *A Nation at Risk* (1983) by the National Commission on Education Excellence. The familiar battle cry for increased accountability was echoed in the rhetoric of the famous slogan, "Johnny Can't Read!" While standardized test scores were used then as they are used today to identify who 'Johnny' is, test scores alone cannot reveal 'why' Johnny can't read. With large populations of transient populations in Florida, it may be even more imperative instead to ask or challenge, "Who is ultimately responsible (accountable) for Johnny?" Will the

pressure to increase test scores in actuality cause this entire group of learners to be potentially 'left behind?'

Students are not equally prepared. Beth found it difficult, based on her own life history, to relate to her students' transient life style. Likewise, it was equally difficult for Beth to understand and accept the differences in parenting (or her perceived lack of parenting) in contrast to her own middle-class upbringing. In addition to academic learning, Beth placed equal importance on respect and responsibility. She declared, "I want them to know to be respectful to one another and to be responsible." As their teacher, Beth felt it was her responsibility to make sure her students knew what was expected of them. She further insisted, "You can't come to school and this is your job - this is your work. You come here - you need to bring all your supplies - everything you need because this is your job."

Although Beth believed this to be a priority at school, she did not feel that her students' parents shared nor supported this belief. In a wishful voice, she regretted,

> I think that's what I'd like all of them to leave with, but all of them don't. [They] don't come from homes where they have to be respectful. Really changed with how children speak to adults and the things they are allowed to do from when I was growing up. I guess you could say I'm really old school...(Interview Transcript)

For Beth, 'old school' suggested a more traditional approach to learning, instruction, and classroom management. She further questioned whether students today were allowed too many liberties in their relationships with adults, seeming to prefer a more heteronomous relationship in which adults were the unchallenged authority that students were obligated

to acknowledge and respect. From a consumer/service provider perspective, Beth

concluded,

> A lot of the clientele at our school (and I use clientele to describe the type of
> school we have) - we just need more parental involvement. I mean, a lot of the
> parents are involved, but you can really tell the ones who aren't. (Interview
> Transcript)

Using the example of one student who came from a middle-income family with

both parents living at home (an arrangement that was more closely aligned with her own

up-bringing) Beth described the apparent advantages of parental involvement.

> I have this one little boy in my class and he has both parents and they're both
> professional people who spend time with him and talk with him. If you had a
> conversation with him you would not believe he was just eight or nine, because he
> is able to communicate with a vocabulary that is so extensive for a 3rd grader.
> (Interview Transcript)

The clear advantages for this student, from Beth's perspective, were an increased

vocabulary and overall communication skills beyond their son's chronological age. Beth

insisted, "But it's because he's been exposed to it and a lot of kids don't have that

exposure and that's what I wish for - how important it is to just talk to your child or

answer questions or ask questions." Beth exclaimed, "They learn from things like that

instead of just watching television, playing play station...reading a book or having a

conversation...skills they use at school."

This may, however, be less the case for parents who moved around the most due

to socioeconomic factors. Working longer hours for less pay meant some parents were

forced to work multiple jobs that resulted in less available time to spend with their

children. Consequently, these same children may spend greater increments of time

watching TV and playing on play station.

Beth's reflections suggested that the lack of parental involvement and support in preparing children for school and students' ongoing learning and development meant that teachers and staff at her school felt a greater sense of obligation and responsibility in educating each child. Similar to the views expressed by teachers in an ethnographical study at a low-income Midwestern middle school by Pettit (2006), this SES trend seemed to translate into educators assuming a more assertive role as authoritarians in the lives of students and their families. Unlike Vicki who spoke extensively about parent-teacher conferences, Beth made no direct reference to conferences with parents. Instead, she referred to difficulties trying to reach parents by telephone, getting them to attend meetings, and to follow-through with school recommendations.

Beth described her frustrations with one particular mother she referred to as not involved. According to Beth, her son has ADD and he was not allowed to go on the field trip to the art museum:

> Has been diagnosed but she won't get him medicine. He's so smart but he can't control himself. He can't help himself. He's supposed to go to after school day care. Whatever he wants to do, no consequences. Doesn't respect authority. I'm afraid for his safety. Brightest student in class. Reads on a fifth grade level. (Interview Transcript)

The mother's unwillingness to medicate her son was viewed as parental negligence (if not a form of abuse) by Beth. Consequently, Beth separated this student's desk from the group in the back of the classroom.

Beth also described a recent incident with this student in the girl's restroom. As a school policy in the main building, classes take a mandatory bathroom break twice a day. This student insisted one day that he had an emergency and needed to run to the

restroom. However, he did not run to the boy's restroom, he used the girl's restroom

instead. According to Beth,

> He called his mom and he was boo-hoo on the phone with her. Mom said she
> wondered what he did that was so terrible. Gave her the name of the CRT
> (curriculum resource teacher) who caught him and the vice principal who
> completed behavior referrals. Same parent who will say he did his homework. He
> received two Ns (needs improvement) this semester as a result that kept him off
> the honors roll list - for homework and restroom incident. (Interview Transcript)

Tragically, this was a student who Beth readily admitted was a capable student with a

high aptitude and great learning potential. Yet, he did not make honor roll (which could

be construed as punishment) due to his perceived undisciplined, impulsive behavior and

overall lack of self-control.

Beth was not alone in her view that: a) the large transient population and low SES

and subsequent resources among school families; b) lack of parental involvement and

support; c) limited preparation of students to begin school; and d) subsequent demands on

behavior management were central concerns believed to directly impact academic

achievement and progress at Beth's school. Data collected during videotaped interviews

with three veteran third grade teachers (designated as teachers X, Y, and Z) further

corroborated Beth's concerns within her school community (see Table 4).

Table 4

Matrix of Responses by Veteran Third Grade Teachers in Relation to SES Factors
(Beginning Teacher's School)

	SES Disparities	Needed Parental Support	Limited Student Preparation	Emphasis on Behavior Management
Teacher X	- Lack of money - Difficulties making rent - Can't afford tutoring	- Not willing to listen to child's learning style - Parents refuse medication for ADD – almost child abuse	- Parents not in-tune with kid's needs - Don't understand or unable to provide early experiences needed	- Use rewards/pts system constantly to motivate learning - Need to stay on task (stress of testing)
Teacher Y	- New student every 2-3 weeks - Very transient pop. – Too many students without telephones - Problems NOT race related – its all due to low SES	- Little follow-through in home - Kids have free reign at home - Parents pull kids out early - No support for teachers - No communication with parents - Difficult to complete parent/teacher conferences - Students can't med. Slip thru the cracks	- Students lack motivation and preparation due to home life - Parents don't understand concepts – can't help	- Class full of fatherless children – don't show respect and conduct - Structured Behavior Management - Spend LOTS of time going over rules everyday - Review Code of Conduct - Managing behavior more than anything – time consuming - Class of 18 students (7 students on medications) – Off meds, you can tell - Only three times to the playground entire school year – No Recess - Putting out fires instead of preventing them
Teacher Z	- Balancing schools today – more in the SES balance NOT the Racial balance - Society has changed drastically last 10 years – mobility rate much higher than before - Parents working multiple jobs	- Communications difficult due to language barriers – parents try to support - Difficulties reaching parents	- Cultural and economic barriers prevent strong beginning when entering school - May not understand developmental needs	- Main emphasis is enjoy what they are doing - Eliminated recess to increase time on academics – a lot to ask students to sit – creates its own set of behavior needs and challenges - Need unstructured PLAY

Beth was equally concerned that teachers' performance was judged the same even though the advantages and disadvantages experienced among their students and families varied greatly. Just as Beth observed the potential disparities found among different students, she noted the subsequent consequences for teachers and school communities. Apparently frustrated by the socioeconomic factors beyond Beth's control, she noted,

> Some teachers, really good teachers, are at schools where there are a class of students that are not exposed and don't do as well. Those teachers have to work for years...they have to have a chain of good teachers to finally show that they have had all this growth... (Interview Transcript)

Beth's words implied that good teachers at school communities faced with socioeconomic disadvantages worked harder and correspondingly, it took longer before students demonstrated significant growth and achievement. While on the other hand, Beth insisted, "Teachers at schools where it's very affluent, it's really easy for them. Doesn't require a lot from them to do well." From Beth's perspective, this meant that teachers at more affluent schools had students who were better prepared to learn and therefore, teachers did not have to overcome the disadvantages encountered at less affluent schools.

Beth argued, "Some really good teachers don't teach at schools that are advantaged. Teach [sic] at inner city schools or schools that really need the help. They're not in it for monetary compensation." Beth found it problematic for teachers like herself, to be judged and held accountable for student achievement based on test scores, while the advantages (or disadvantages) found among the different school communities varied tremendously. Even if the teachers were not in it for the monetary compensation, this did

not mean that the teachers at less affluent schools do not resent unfair comparisons with more affluent schools.

Vicki's School Community: A Lifeworld of Resources

In stark contrast, Vicki's school community was largely comprised of white collar, middle to upper middle income families. The homes were generally large, older, well-maintained ranches and multiple-story homes with two- and three-car garages interspersed with lakefront property (a large nearby lake). Vicki's school building had a darker standard brick front with a circle drive and many large, shading trees. There were benches along one wall in the front and picnic tables were strategically situated in the front away from traffic for teachers and parents to visit and enjoy. The front doors opened into a large open foyer where a waiting area for parents and visitors was provided with couches and chairs situated outside the central office.

The student population at Vicki's school, as previously described in Chapter 3, did not have the demographic diversity in terms of race/ethnicity and socio-economic status found at Beth's school (see Appendix A). More than three-quarters of the student population (81.4%) was identified as White while less than one-fifth of the students (17.5%) were identified as either African American, Hispanic or multiracial. The high-income status of this school meant that less than one-fifth (14.2%) of the student body participated in the free or reduced lunch program. While Vicki's school reported that less than 5% (4.6%) of the entire student body qualified for LEP services, this actually meant that out of the bilingual population itself, almost all bilingual students (99%) received LEP services. On the other hand, slightly more students (15.2%) had active IEPs for

special education services in comparison to Beth's school. The educational background among the teaching staff indicated that 58% of the teachers had a bachelor's degree while 38% had a master's degree, with 4% (two teachers) identified as having doctorates (No Child Left Behind School Accountability Reports, 2006).

Roll out the red carpet. On any given day of the week, parent volunteers were found signing in to help out with a variety of school events and classroom activities. Parents at Vicki's school were a vivid presence who actively partnered to support the school community's educational efforts. Parents at Vicki's school participated in school fundraisers needed to finance a variety of school projects and special events. Likewise, parents sought opportunities to serve on a variety of planning committees such at the PTA and SAC in order to participate in decision-making processes.

Vicki's school did not have the high turn-over rate among its families that was experienced by Beth's school. Therefore, the steering mechanism designed to offset the consequence of late enrollment at school is of little or no consequence at Vicki's school. Instead, the vast majority of third graders had attended Vicki's school since kindergarten. Consequently, parents developed an acute awareness and familiarity with teachers at the different grade levels. This resulted in parents making requests for favorite teachers. One father who had taken his children out of a private school and intentionally bought a home so that his children could attend Vicki's school referred to her school as a 'private public school' with all the advantages of 'both worlds.'

Increased partnership with parents also ushered in increased expectations (pressure) and accountability on the part of parents for student progress and development.

Just as parents asked informed questions about their child's learning, whether their child was reaching his or her full potential in each academic subject, they were also more likely to question and challenge whether the teachers and school were maximizing their child's learning opportunities as well. This increased teachers' and administrators' sense of accountability to parents and students rather than FCAT.

These parents were more aware (and concerned) with how their child ranked academically in comparison with their peers. Again, the increased level of interest and willingness on the part of parents to do whatever they could to support the school's efforts was not problematic for Vicki as long as the expectations were realistic and developmentally appropriate. Likewise, educated parents at Vicki's school were equally more aware of their legal rights and understood how to use the legal system in ways that would to advance their child's education.

Videotaped interviews with eight parents of third graders at Vicki's school (six mothers and two fathers; one father was married to one of the mothers who interviewed) were completed before and after FCAT. These parents overwhelmingly expressed support for their child's school community and simultaneously revealed many similar attitudes and concerns regarding: a) what parents most value in their child's education; b) the current employment and subsequent impact of FCAT in third grade; c) third grade retention based on the FCAT reading score; and d) the use of merit pay to increase student achievement and teacher performance (see Table 5).

Table 5

Parents Speak Out: The Impact of FCAT in Third Grade at Veteran Teacher's School

	Value Most in Child's Education	Employment of FCAT in 3rd Grade	3rd Grade Retention based on FCAT	Teacher Merit Pay
Parent 1 (Mother)	- Excited about learning - Higher Level Thinking - Teach WHOLE child	- Not about FCAT – About the Child	- NOT an option - Crushes self-esteem - Punishment for differences - Effects parents of struggling learners	- Should reward teachers for more than test scores (safe environ, values child, risk-takers)
Parent 2 (Mother)	- Excited about learning - Loves Science (analytical and critical)	- Since Feb., migraines/vomiting - Sent home during FCAT math with head ache, anxiety - As a pharmacist, see meds lead to - School starts – focus on test	- Retention is devastating for child	- A chance to get higher pay - Teaching to the test - Find a better way
Parent 3 (Mother)	- Excited about learning - Making reading connections; questioning - Need social skills – NOT all academic	- More time preparing for FCAT - Completed circle map to brainstorm reasons to feel confident on FCAT - As yrs. go by, pressure gets thicker and thicker - Like a 'huge ugly Monster coming to eat up the kids' - All for testing to figure out and help	- All children are individuals, unique - Retention ignores that – all same page - - Trying to 'pigeon hole everyone into the same peg - Levels 1 & 2 – what are we doing to them? – sending them out as failures, telling them their failures over and over	- Merit pay doesn't work at inner city schools - Get rid of bad teachers and pay good teachers more - Not fair at schools where parents don't care - Teachers need to inspire and motivate – too much mandated
Parent 4 (Father)	- Son's natural ability in math - See they're developing	- Potential concern w/FCAT - As parents – stressed emphasis of a test – you have to do your best to go on to 4th – never would have said that a year ago - How accurate is the FCAT reading score?	- To think he can be held back is absurd to me - Don't even look at math – retention based 100% on reading – this very simplistic way to decide - Same math again – waste of time	- I think across the board, they should make more money - If we need to raise taxes to do it, then do it

(table continues)

	Value Most in Child's Education	Employment of FCAT in 3rd Grade	3rd Grade Retention based on FCAT	Teacher Merit Pay
Parent 5 (Mother)	- Whole point of public education – get on the solid base – jump it and go higher - Learning to read – reading to learn - Left private school to participate in gifted program (classic gifted children)	- Discovered FCAT Explorer – practiced passages everyday – taught test taking strategies - Take tests your entire life – Yes – its important - The more you take them, the more comfortable you are - 'It's a fact of life so Deal with it'	- Daughter reads below grade level – reluctant reader - FCAT score should be an endorsement of what they knew about this child – what needs to be rectified - Lets confirm what we need to do – FCAT makes sure it happens - Retain on an individual basis	- Teaching is a gift that not just anybody can do - I'm the biggest advocate for teachers – Bring in resources - Pay the good ones what they're worth; get rid of the bad ones
Parent 6 (Mother)	-- Learning made fun - Excited about science – discovery - Creative thinking outside the box	- Parents NOT informed enough about FCAT – ramifications of FCAT - FCAT is NOT the end-all-be-all - Kids worried and concerned – get one wrong - Difficult time sleeping	- Retained in 1st grd – emotional - didn't want to go to school - Done fine/gift of time - 3rd grade is really young to be doing this kind of testing - A lot of pressure	- Teachers bonuses based on scores – Not right - Based on prior learning too - Evaluate teachers on more than one test
Parent 7 (Father)	- Science-oriented - Teacher genuinely excited about teaching - Interested in learning; like to learn	- FCAT not good how it is used - Teaching to the test – don't WANT that - NOT using FCAT as a TOOL – using it as a GATE – TOOL helps to advance kids – a GATE used to STOP kids from advancing	- Didn't like the decision to retain in 1st grd – traumatic - Felt she 'failed' - it was her age - Hard on me and my wife – 'Toughest decision we've EVER had to make' - Retention stigma is among kids	- Business world not paid by performance necessarily - Grading teacher stares them down - Just pay them more
Parent 8 (Mother)	- Learning something new - Has enthusiasm; enjoy school; excited to learn – higher level critical thinking	- Stress and fear of the unknown – not passing - Self confidence goes down – comfort her as much as possible	- Retention not a means to an ends - Undue pressure NOT necessary - Held accountable for their experiences – NOT equitable	- Pay teachers MORE - Merit pay leads to teaching to the test – need to teach subjects - Encourages cheating - Instead of reward/ compensate them

The parent responses revealed an overwhelming desire for their child to enjoy learning, love reading, to be excited about new discoveries in hope that their children would become lifelong learners. While there were a range of responses across the other emergent themes, parent responses generally indicated that: a) tests can be a helpful tool if used to make instructional improvements and guide learning rather than as a punishment for performance; b) test scores can not measure a teacher's educational impact, making it an inappropriate form of compensation; and c) mandatory retention should only be considered and determined on an individual basis by the parents and the school (not the state).

Ready to begin: Ready to learn. Vicki was well-aware that the majority of students at her school entered with a vast array of enrichment experiences and instruction that added to their readiness to begin school. Parents at Vicki's school appeared to have greater access to information that better enabled them to advocate for their children's education in comparison to parents at Beth's school. They asked informed questions and possessed an overall awareness and understanding of the various services and programs available to support student learning and development. This did not suggest that all students at Vicki's school (or in the state of Florida) were equally advantaged however. According to Vicki,

> In the state of Florida, they don't have the same experiences. We expect a child that comes from a low socioeconomic home where he might have a real disadvantaged neighborhood next to a child who has a two-parent home...has all these enrichment experiences...had a 1,000 books read to them – And expect them to be in the same place (Interview Transcript)

The unfortunate students who fell into the bottom 30% of FCAT scores in reading

qualified for an after school tutoring program.

Vicki readily recognized the advantages (and disadvantages) of increasing

opportunities for learning for students performing below grade level as discussed earlier.

Asking schools to essentially fix the inequities and disparities in society in order that

students perform at the same level with negative consequences was in Vicki's view

impossible. In frustration, Vicki countered, "Well, if they can standardize the home

environment, I guess we could do that. That's what I want to say. Hey, how about let's

having no family left behind first." Using a eugenicist (genetics) perspective, Vicki

sarcastically added, "Where you standardized everybody's experiences. And everybody,

you know... bloodline. I guess then we can achieve at those high levels. If anybody really

looked at it logically, I mean, come on, and how much sense does it make?"

Struggling learners from lower-income groups, like Beth's school, were equally

vulnerable. While higher income families with struggling learners had financial resources

to pay for private tutoring and services, lower-income families had fewer options, forced

to make personal sacrifices that higher income families may not have to face. Likewise,

Vicki reported that lower-income parents (much like parents at Beth's school) were less

confident about their ability to provide for their children's educational needs, relying

more on guidance and support from the school.

<u>Communicative Actors: Participants vs. Spectators</u>

As discussed in Chapter 3, exploring phenomenon according to individuals' lived

experiences must consider the concepts and structures of experience (what social actors

say and do) according to the practical reasoning and common sense knowledge and subsequent rationality used by individuals. An examination of what communicative actors say and do within different school community lifeworlds can enable us to examine the rationality applied based on how the different community members acquire and use knowledge. The beginning and veteran teachers were the key individuals whose lived experiences with the phenomenon of interest at each school community were central to this study. Additional insights into the school community lifeworlds further revealed how the purpose, goal, and mission of each school's lifeworld followed a rationality that consequently defined the culture, socialization, and personality (communication styles) of the various communicative actors.

The kind of communicative action employed and promoted by each school leader (principal) translated largely into whether teachers were seen as passive spectators or as empowered participants. These roles in turn, generally embraced either an autocratic or democratic approach to the operation of the learning community that was then integrated (possibly to varying degrees) within the classroom setting. From Habermas' perspective, organized groups that operate and function democratically utilize communicative action in the form of active deliberation and reflection that is completed in a critical spirit by all of the participating social actors. In opposition to this view, Habermas argued that groups that operate and function less democratically lack the consciousness to recognize how uncharted customs, obscure sentiments, and prejudices evade, dominate, and subsequently prevent various social actors from completing critical investigation, discussion, and analysis needed for meaningful participation in communicative action.

Hence, the extent to which communicative action was employed within each classroom

to support democratic deliberation and reflection likewise determined whether students'

social roles as learners were defined as spectators or participants.

Beth's school community vision, according to their 2003-2004 SPAR (School

Public Accountability Report) posted at the school web site stated the following:

> A school that functions through a school-wide safe, cooperative, and collaborative
> atmosphere. Through the implementation of an integrated and aligned curriculum
> and using updated technology, all students will learn, achieve, and become
> successful, productive members of society. (NCLB-SPAR, 2003-2004)

The language used in the school's mission addressed some of the very factors that were

deemed to be areas of need within the lives of the school's students, families, and

surrounding community. A call for school-wide safety was meant to ensure that every

student would attend school without risk of physical harm that was achieved in a

cooperative and collaborative atmosphere in united team effort by all community

members. An integrated and aligned curriculum (published textbooks aligned with

Florida State Standards and FCAT) with current technology (such as Successmaker

test/prep instructional software) was believed necessary to enable all learners to learn,

achieve, and become productive citizens by increasing test scores needed for academic

advancement. In general, this school improvement plan was intended to satisfy the new

requirements outlined by Florida's high-stakes accountability system.

According to Beth's school principal, Florida's accountability system for public

education has resulted in a data-driven culture in which data is used to inform, guide, and

facilitate learning, instruction, and curriculum development needed to raise the standards

for teaching and achievement among learners. For too long, problems have been ignored

at impoverished schools. Low-performance by students, teachers, and schools can no longer be tolerated. Public education can no longer afford to entertain passive learners nor can social promotion practices be used as an acceptable response to low-achievement.

From this worldview perspective, the steering mechanisms and media, as explained in Chapter 2, were now used to advance Florida's system rationale of accountability for increased teacher and student performance according to test scores. Beth's principal insisted that less affluent schools must now accept the challenge to educate learners through active engagement and use current educational research in order to increase quality instruction and academic performance as indicated by standardized test scores. All teachers at low-performing schools, according to Beth's principal, should ideally serve as "reading specialists," equal in their competence and expertise in reading instruction (see Table 6).

Beth's principal appreciated the fact that state legislators and the governor were finally paying attention to what was happening in low-income schools. Though she did not agree entirely with the methods (steering mechanisms) used she was hopeful that it would lead to long overdue improvements at 'needy' schools. However, the Monday prior to FCAT week, Beth's principal was notably stressed. She described the third grade teachers' plates as "overflowing with FCAT." From her viewpoint, everyone at Beth's school was stressed out. Beth's principal witnessed students' behavior conflicts increase as FCAT drew closer while teachers' tolerance for disruptions rapidly decreased. While Beth's principal may have viewed Florida's A+ Plan as a "necessity for school

improvement," this did not mean that she agreed with nor approved of the undue stress that it created for everyone involved.

Table 6

Beginning Teacher's School Principal's Response to Florida's Accountability System

	Data Driven Culture	Data Impact on Teachers	Data Impact on Learners	Data Impact on Curriculum
Principal's Responses	- Increased accountability for learners, teachers, and schools - No Excuses for low-performance (low test scores)	- Entertain (before) vs. Educate (today) - Quality Instruction leads to increased test scores - More Time to Prepare, Study, and Research - Every Teacher needs to be a Reading Specialist - Assess and analyze reading problems and vary Reading instruction and intervention - Beginning Teachers need to maintain class management	- Passive Learners before FCAT - Need Engaged Learners (using Brain Research) - Importance of knowing whole child - Want lifelong learners - Focus becomes #s instead of children	- Data Drives Curriculum (according to test scores) - Integrate Reading into SS & Science -Use Action Research to guide/inform curriculum - Curriculum aligned with Florida Sunshine State Standards and FCAT - SuccessMaker increased math scores - DIEBELS used to assess and determine reading intervention and at-risk for failing FCAT Reading

Much like the 'spokes' in a wheel, a wheel is made stronger, will move faster (efficiently), and go farther if each spoke theoretically contributes equally in a aerodynamic fashion in the fulfillment of the wheel's purpose. If public education were the wheel, educators would serve as the spokes, and Florida's accountability system

would provide the speed/rate, distance, and desired destination to be achieved. As passive

spectators, Florida's accountability system's worldview for public education does not

consider, elicit, nor emphasize the strengths, talents, beliefs, values, or abilities of

individual educators (or students). Rather, the goal, the tasks, and outcomes are

predetermined and essentially dictated to school personnel. It then becomes the

responsibility (or mission) of the school community to take the initiative and make it

happen (satisfy the system outcomes). Fulfillment of the system rationale results in an A+

school ranking (see Table 7).

Table 7

Veteran Teacher's School Principal's View of School's Lifeworld Community

	Community Goals	Teacher Goals	Learning Goals	Curriculum Goals
Principal's Responses	- Higher public awareness of student achievement and performance - Education is more political today - School's responsibility educate and train parents - Share Research with parents (read 1,000 books to child by 5 yrs) - Partner hand-in-hand with parents - Cannot teach the child without the parent (Parents help school educate the child/School helps parents raise the child) - How accountable for children not entire year? - Parents NOT supportive – its an Uphill battle	- Well qualified teachers (18 National Board Certified) - In-house staff development - Teach students to THINK – FCAT not encourage that kind of learning - Teachers are instructional leaders - Use research on best practice - Use mentors as teacher trainers with beginners - Respect teachers as experts - Create time and opportunity for collegial collaboration - Need mechanisms for eliminating unsatisfactory teachers - Meet individual needs of learners	- Life long learners - Must look at WHOLE child - Children fear death, divorce, and failure - Child-centered education - Teacher respected, child respected, and education respected - Retention is viewed as a parental call	- Math: no longer rote – higher thinking - Testing used to guide instruction, develop content as a reflective tool - State legislators not do away with testing – do way with pressures – Merit pay not helpful - Society place child funding at bottom of list

Unlike Beth's school principal, Vicki's principal depicted a lifeworld of partnership between students, parents, teachers, and administrators in which each member was valued as contributing members within the school community There is no SPAR posted at Vicki's school website. Vicki's school has been ranked as an A+ school every year since the accountability plan was first implemented. Likewise, there was no school mission statement but only a simple school motto that states, "Where learning is chief."

From this principal's lifeworld perspective, increasing academic achievement and lifelong learning is interdependent on a close working relationship with parents. To achieve the desired educational outcomes, it becomes the responsibility of schools to educate and train parents on ways to support the school's efforts according to current research. In this worldview, teachers were neither "spokes in a wheel" nor passive spectators carrying out orders designed by those situated from afar. Instead, teachers were viewed as engaged "participants," recognized for their individual expertise, encouraged as instructional leaders (communicative actors) who can mentor, guide, and facilitate parent training as well as foster and contribute to the professional growth and development of their colleagues. By recognizing the individual contributions made by each community member, students, and teachers were ultimately respected and validated as communicative actors having something worthwhile to say (and do) relevant to education.

During a third grade team meeting (with four out of the six third grade teachers) that was arranged specifically by Vicki's CRT to allow me the opportunity to discuss my

study with the teachers and gauge their level of interest as possible participants, the

teachers shared openly and honestly about their lifeworld perspectives of their school

community. The views shared by two particular teachers during the meeting indicated

that as teachers they felt equally recognized and valued by their principal for their

individual skills and expertise. Likewise, they agreed with their principal that teaching

efforts at their school focused on encouraging lifelong learning rather than increasing

FCAT scores. According to Teacher #2,

> We are really lucky as a school to have a principal like [principal's name] who
> does not emphasize FCAT or pay much attention to FCAT. She will never put on
> the school marquee, 'FCAT Week' or 'A+ School' nor will she reward students
> with special prizes because they're at school to learn and we are in the business to
> teach. (Memo Notes)

FCAT was viewed as neither a serious concern nor a threat to the general welfare or well-

being of their school. The school was not in business to prepare successful test takers, but

rather, lifelong learners. Teacher #3 (Vicki) added:

> [Principal's name] really has a lot of trust and faith in her teachers. She treats us
> like professionals and knows that we are capable and allows us the room and
> freedom to do our job. We support one another in our efforts to meet our students'
> needs. We really don't do anything different as a result of FCAT. (Memo Notes)

Vicki implied that her school principal afforded the teachers the freedom to 'experiment'

and to be 'risk-takers' in order to grow professionally and expand on their abilities to

meet the needs of learners. As communicative actors, these teachers indicated that they

sincerely believed that their school principal viewed her teachers as capable

'participants,' able to make decisions and guide instruction and learning to benefit all

learners.

Culture of Conformity vs. Diversity

Culture, according to Habermas, refers to the stock of knowledge from which the various participants (such as parents, teachers, and students) supply themselves with interpretations as they come to an understanding about something in the world. The current stock of knowledge used to interpret and subsequently inform the lifeworld of Beth's school community appeared to be largely influenced by the consequences of the large, lower socioeconomic transient population enrolled at her school. The socioeconomic inequities (and subsequent consequences for learners) at Beth's school have made her community particularly vulnerable to the steering mechanisms of Florida's high-stakes accountability system.

In an effort satisfy the demands for increased student and teacher performance made by the data-driven culture of Florida's A+ Plan, the third grade classrooms at Beth's school were subsequently organized according to categories based on need (or merit). One third grade class contained students diagnosed with severe learning disabilities while another class was comprised of students for whom English was a second language (mostly Hispanic students). Another third grade teacher was reported to have students who were mostly above grade level and enrolled in the gifted program assigned to his class. This tracking mechanism (meritocratic utilitarian selection) was believed to provide an efficient way to group students instructionally in order to satisfy their needs individually (as has been the case historically). Tracked systems tend to teach in a uniform way according to learners' perceived needs (assumptions) and learners in turn, are expected to conform to the learning strategies used.

Contrary to Beth's school community's worldview and subsequent approach to learning and instruction, the current stock of lifeworldly knowledge used to interpret and subsequently inform the lifeworld of Vicki's school appeared to be largely influenced by the consequences of an affluent school community whose parents actively participated in their children's education through partnerships with teachers. Using a support model for inclusion, students with diverse learning styles and needs were included in the third grade classes. As revered experts, teachers at Vicki's school collaborated with the instructional supports and other colleagues who possessed the skills and expertise needed to individualize instruction according to learning needs within an inclusive, diverse learning community.

Communicative action: Measuring up to fit in. Teaching at a school with a large transient and lower socioeconomic community, as described by Beth, meant that there was an ongoing struggle on the part of the school to attain parental involvement and support for teachers' educational efforts needed to achieve the system rationale. Without parental partnerships to support school efforts, Beth's school personnel responded with system mechanisms designed to compensate for the lack of parental involvement by increasing the school's authoritarian role in the lives of students and families. In others words, this general lack of parental guidance and supervision meant that the school assumed a much greater role and responsibility in disciplining and managing student expectations for behavior and conduct.

From Beth's old school view as the unchallenged authority, Beth believed it was her ultimate responsibility as the 'moral compass' in her classroom to not only model but

to navigate the development of respect and responsibility on the part of her students toward adults and peers.

> Besides everything they needed to know in 3rd grade, I hope they leave with...I'm very big on respect and responsibility. I hope they leave with...I don't let them say 'shut up' and I don't let them say 'stupid.' I don't like those words. Everyone I've had knows you don't say them... in life, you have to be accountable...I want them to know to be respectful to one another and to be responsible (Interview Transcript)

As noted earlier, Beth was very concerned by the disparities in parenting that she witnessed at her school and what this meant for students' learning, growth, and development at school. Without parental participation and support, academic learning was an uphill battle for Beth. Regretfully, Beth concluded, I think that's what I'd like all of them to leave with, but all of them don't." According to DeVries and Zan (1994), "the entire network of interpersonal relations that makes up a child's experience of school" is conceptualized as the "sociomoral atmosphere" (p. 7). Within the lifeworld of the school community, the child's lived experiences include interactions and relationships with teachers, peers, academic learning and instruction, and rules for conduct and participation. Hence, Beth's "old school" view of the learning community guided and informed the relationships and communication action experienced by her students in her classroom.

A democratic learning community mutually values and appreciates all members (particularly between children and adults) and as a consequence, actively engages students in the decision-making process through critical deliberation and reflection as suggested by Habermas. Kohn's (1999) view of democratic classrooms provide students (as social actors) with the opportunity to: (a) have a voice in what happens; (b) help shape

the course of study; (c) help decide when, where, why, how, and with whom learning takes place; and (d) how progress will be assessed. The evidence in this study indicated that the teachers and school administrators at Beth's school were largely the decision-makers (possibly as a result of the disparities experienced among students and their families) who felt the need to decide and direct all learning activities as well as how students were to conduct themselves according to adult expectations. In general, this meant a lifeworld of communicative actors whose roles were largely limited to that of passive "spectators" for students.

Beth designed the physical arrangement of her learning atmosphere to elicit and reinforce her control of all communicative action within her classroom setting. The students' desks in Beth's classroom were arranged in an elongated U-formation facing a large white dry erase board at the front of the classroom. Two student's desks were separated from the group, one at the back of the classroom and the other at the front of the classroom facing the dry erase board. Beth's desk was in the front left corner of the room, one student computer was provided (mostly for the AR program) across from her desk, and a large area rug and large rocking chair were positioned along the same wall. The rug area was used for shared reading when Beth read books aloud to the entire class while sitting on the rug. Beth's classroom was sparsely decorated and did not exhibit any evidence of class projects, student writings, art and other written work that would allow for individual self-expression and creativity as communicative actors.

Beth's bulletin board displays and posters conveyed an emphasis on performance and competition that used ranking and sorting practices to motivate learners. The only

student products on display in Beth's classroom were timed multiplication drill sheets arranged on a large bulletin board entitled, "Aim for the Stars." Only students' 100% timed drill tests were posted. A second large bulletin board in the classroom was used to display students' participation in the Accelerated Reader Program. Entitled, "[teacher's name] Bookworms," a large red apple was positioned in the center of the board with cut-out open books with multiples of ten (i.e., 10, 20, 30) written on each to represent the number of books read. Green bookworms with each child's name were positioned according to the number of books each child read, allowing students to readily see how they compared (ranked) in comparison to their classmates.

A computer print out of the total points earned by each student in Accelerated Reading was also posted on the bulletin board. Students' names were listed alphabetically and amounts listed for points earned, points used, and points available were recorded in three columns next to each student's name.

A typed sheet of paper entitled, "Compliment Chart" was posted with black tally marks on the wall next to the bulletin board. The teacher made a tally mark whenever children complimented or helped one another without teacher solicitation. Likewise, when students performed and conducted themselves according to the school's and classroom expectations, Beth would instruct students to write their names in the "You Rock" book and would include this in the notes that were written to parents in the students' daily planners. When the class earned 20 compliment marks, they celebrated with a Compliment Party. Above the bulletin board near the ceiling were large colorful picture words that formed the message, "We are Super Kids!"

A sheet of paper entitled, "Rules for Our Line" was posted strategically near the door. This meant that the teacher could readily refer to it and draw students' attention to it whenever they lined up to exit the classroom. The rules for lining up read as follows:

Rules for Lining Up
1. Stand in a straight line
2. Check your distance
3. No touching
4. Look forward
5. No talking
6. Stay in line order

Beth firmly believed that preparing her students for fourth grade meant that they would demonstrate absolute self-control and self-discipline according to teacher expectations at all times within the school day. This belief was further reinforced by the school's guidelines for student conduct as well. A three-ring binder rested on top of a bookcase positioned next to the door labeled, "[School's Name] Elementary School Guidelines for Success." According to the school's guidelines, each student must:

- Be honest and responsible
- Always try and do your best
- Cooperate with others
- Treat others with dignity and respect
- Be polite and courteous
- Keep our school clean

If a student's behavior failed to achieve or contradicted one of these goals, Beth could instruct the student to sign his or her name in the behavior log and a parent could be contacted by phone to discuss and hopefully resolve the problem directly with the teacher and student. Consequences that the student would face at home were often discussed, though it was often difficult to contact parents and get them to follow-through.

This was an attempt on Beth's part to achieve autonomous behavior from her student but through heteronymous means (adult control and coercion).

A small class jobs chart entitled, "Helpers" was posted near her desk. Clothespins with student's names were used to designate who the class helpers were each day. A large chalkboard on one side of the room listed the week's homework assignments for reading, math, spelling, and language arts that included assignments such as: 30 minutes of reading every day, studying for the Unit 8 math test, writing spelling words in ABC order, and a practice worksheet in language arts.

Beth's clearly defined expectations for behavior and conduct as well as academic achievement indicated a prescriptive, reductionist, and behaviorist approach to learning, instruction, and classroom management that were teacher- or text-centered and teacher-directed. Two commercially printed posters by Houghton Mifflin emphasized reading skills. One poster specifically outlined reading strategies (predict/infer, question, clarify) and the other reading poster targeted phonics/decoding strategies that were specifically used with the Houghton Mifflin Reading Series. Three recommendations for how to write a conclusion/ending for expository writing was handwritten on chart paper hanging from a chart stand.

The messages conveyed by Beth's learning environment or atmosphere placed the greatest emphasis on performance, discipline, and control according to teacher expectations. The following commercially printed poster, however, could be construed in one of two ways to either support or contradict Beth's philosophical beliefs about learning and instruction.

This poster read:

Your biggest
MISSTAKE (crossed out)
MSTAEK (crossed out)
MISTAK (crossed out)
MISTAKE
Is never learning from one.

Did this poster value the actual process of learning or only the learning outcome? Was this poster suggesting that the most important part of learning was getting an answer correct (outcome) or understanding why it was correct or incorrect (process)? Was the importance of mistakes interpreted here to be valued, appreciated, and understood within the learning process or something to be corrected and avoided or eliminated as the ultimate outcome? More importantly, what did Beth believe? Whichever the case, the explicit messages that Beth communicated to her students through the physical arrangement of her classroom atmosphere conveyed an emphasis on how students ranked (or measured up) in comparison to their peers. Their ranking suggested what they needed to do (as communicative actors) in order to fit in (conform) and granted membership (acceptance) within the social group (third grade class).

Communicative action: Valuing everyone by making room. Vicki's classroom was located in one of several trailers that were placed on campus to compensate for increased student enrollment. Students' desks were arranged in pods of four desks. Students sat on stools rather than chairs with backings in Vicki's classroom. According to Vicki, research has shown that it is better for children's posture to be forced to sit upright (unable to slouch with a backing) and subsequently increases student's attention and

alertness. Consequently, Vicki helped write a grant to fund the purchase of stools at her school.

Vicki's classroom was visually stimulating, immersed in color and print. Many of the themes or messages posted around Vicki's room pertained to either class membership (citizenship) or literacy. No charts or records were displayed that ranked and sorted students according to test scores, points, or grades. Large chart paper posted near the door was entitled:

> T.I.N.S.
> Think: What is the problem?
> Information: What information does the problem provide?
> Need to Know: What information do I need to know?
> (N)umber Sentence
> Solve the Problem

Along side this chart above the doorway was posted the following chart:

"SLANT" Posture Strategy
S – Sit up straight
  L – Lean forward slightly
    A – Ask related question
      N – Need (to show watching)
        T – Track the speaker

While the first chart provided a problem-solving strategy, the SLANT posture promoted engaged listening (communicative action). Although this strategy also relied on observable behavior (sit up straight, lean forward, show watching), unlike passive listening, this strategy encouraged active/engaged listening in a dialectic process in which the listener participated by questioning the speaker in an ongoing process of clarification.

Problem-solving and active communication skills crucial to critical deliberation and reflection needed to support a democratic learning community were evident in

Vicki's classroom. Other printed text used to support and advance the kind of democratic

learning community membership and participation described by Kohn included a 'Class

Pledge' and Guidelines for Class Meetings as follows:

> The Class Pledge
> (Pictures of Individually Drawn Happy Faces attached to the edges as a border)
> We promise to come to school each day with a good attitude. We will respect
> others by using kind words. We will also keep our hands and feet to ourselves.
> We will try our best to work hard and complete our work in a timely fashion. We
> will work together as a team. And we will have fun as we LEARN! Teacher and
> student signatures were signed below the pledge. (Observation Notes)

This class pledge represented a concerted effort to collectively define the kind of learning

community each member wanted to participate in. Rather than the teacher deciding and

directing how the class would operate, this pledge required equal participation and

subsequent ownership by all community members. Together as a class, it was decided

and agreed upon (verified by teacher and student signatures) that all members would use

a teamwork approach in how they conducted their daily affairs. This approach was meant

to ensure that learning would be an enjoyable process for everyone. To further assist

students during class meetings, Vicki posted the following procedural outline:

Goals of a Class Meeting
- to be helpful
- to give compliments
- to solve problems
- to plan events

Guidelines to Ask Myself
- Is what I am doing or saying reasonable?
- Is it related to what is being discussed?
- Is it respectful to my teacher and classmates?

Problem Solving
1. State the Problem
2. Share your thoughts on the problem (those involved)

3. Brainstorm Solutions
4. Choose the Solution
5. Celebrate!

This outline provided students with helpful procedures that advanced the kind of communicative action (what social actors say and do) that encouraged and supported turn-taking, multiple perspective-taking, decision-making, cooperating, and collaborating in ways that was mutually respectful, valued all members, while maximizing everyone's opportunity to contribute and participate.

Interestingly, like Beth, Vicki also had a commercially produced poster on the same theme of 'learning from mistakes.' Her poster read: "The only real MISTAKE is the one from which you don't learn." However, this quote appeared as a caption under a large cartoon cat with a bandaged finger hovering over a fish bowl containing a fish that has a toothed grin. Whereas Beth's poster read, "Your biggest mistake," this poster instead, framed it within the context of, "The only real mistake" made. Both posters referred to learning, but Beth's poster related to academic learning whereas Vicki's poster pertained more to practical, commonsense learning in a real life context.

On one large bulletin board, a Morning Routine Chart was posted. It stated the following:

1. Greet Each Other
2. Sign-in/Lunch Count
3. Turn in Paperwork
4. Begin Morning Work

Like Beth, Vicki also had a class jobs chart posted. Personalized information about each student included charts and posters based on the following topics and themes: "Birthdays in Our Class," "How Do We Get Home?" and a large laminated calendar for recording

student, class, and school events. Together, a large laminated colorful poster/decoration

above the clock that read, "Today's a Great Day to Learn Something NEW" in

combination with the following printed poster, best captured the aesthetic mood of

Vicki's classroom atmosphere:

> Do more than exist,
> > *love*
> Do more than touch,
> > *feel*
> Do more than look,
> > *observe*
> Do more than read,
> > *absorb*
> Do more than hear,
> > *listen*
> Do more than listen,
> > *understand*
> Do more than think,
> > *ponder*
> Do more than talk,
> > *say something*

Vicki actively promoted the kind of communicative action that challenged each

community member (social actor) to more than act in observable ways, but to act, talk,

and think in meaningful, purposeful, valuable ways that would ultimately lead to new

ideas, relationships, and understandings (constructions) within a social context.

The remaining posters and charts pertained to language arts and reading

instruction and the science unit on 'birds.' Language arts and reading displays included: a

colorful alphabetically arranged word wall; a large colorful Bib Overalls Chart with high

frequency sight words; a large chart listing verbs and adjectives; a chart listing Awesome

Phrases and Use of Words (that students can use in their writing); and a reading journals

chart (listing requirements and schedule). Commercially produced 'Thinking Maps' were

semantic maps used as organizational tools in writing or to summarize information in

reading.

Posted Diagram Posters: Thinking Maps

- Tree Map
- Flow Map
- Circle Map
- Multi-Flow Map
- Brace Map
- Bridge Map
- Double Bubble Map

While these displays largely reinforced word recognition and usage, the following chart

encouraged students to think beyond the 'mechanics' of reading to focus more on the

'thinking process' of reading:

Reading is Thinking - What do readers do?
- They think about what's going on in the story (they Stop and Think)
- If they don't understand something they go back and try to figure it out
- They RE-READ confusing parts
- They focus on what they are reading
- They pay attention to punctuation

Vicki used the thinking map (tree map) to further organize and illustrate for students the

three phases of the reading process: before, during, and after reading (see Table 9).

Table 8

Tree Map: The Reader of Nonfiction

Before I read	While I read	After I read
Think about what you already know "I Wonder" questions or thoughts Look at the pictures	Stop and Think about what you are reading or learning Make connections that help you understand Ask questions?	Think about your "wonder" questions Answer your questions or go back in the text reflect on learning

Vicki also used the same 'tree map' format to visually organize for students the process

needed for them to independently select books according to each child's reading level

(see Table 9).

Table 9

Tree Map: Selecting Book Level

Easy	Just Right	Challenging
Know all the words	Know most of the words	Words you don't understand
No effort to read	You understand what you read	Can't read it smoothly
Can read it in 10 minutes or less	Takes about a week to finish	Takes a long time to finish
	You can tell people what it's about	Can't tell a friend what the story is about!
Fun to read	You want to read it over and over!	

For the class poetry unit in language arts, Vicki had one poem printed on large chart

paper positioned on the wall above the computer center (four computers along one wall

with the teacher's computer/work area nearby):

> My Baseball Cap
> You can take away my hamster,
> You can take away my cat,
> But PLEASE don't take away
> My beloved baseball cap.
> I can do without green,
> I can do without red,
> But I can't do without
> My cap on my head.

Vicki also displayed a poem on large chart paper that was written by the entire class:

If I Were...
If I were a painting on a wall,
I would stare back at people staring at me.
If I were a tomato,
I would lie in the sun all day growing red and juicy.
If I were a teddy bear,
I would have a soul and love a little boy like he loved me.
If I were a flower,
I would want to be the prettiest so I'd be picked first.
If I were a tiger, I'd kill all the bad people in the world.

On a large chalkboard, Vicki wrote the date and class schedule. On the blackboard, Vicki taped the students' illustrated science posters describing interesting facts and information about different birds (e.g., vultures, falcons, bald eagles, and owls). The following KWWL chart was posted next to the students' bird posters. The final part of the KWWL was completed as a class after the students shared their posters.

Table 10

KWWL: Birds

What we know	What we want to know	What we learned
- Hunt small animals (mice, rats, etc) - vultures are sort of like birds of prey - sharp talons - capture prey w/talons - meat-eaters - some are larger than "backyard birds"	- Biggest? - Kinds? How many? - Where do they live? - How do you know it's a bird of prey? - Colors of feathers? - Why are birds at the Audubon center? - Endangered? - Noises they make?	

Several bookcases and tote stands lined the walls with leveled books. A large rocking chair, audiovisual cart with an overhead projector, dry erase easel, and chart paper stand designated the class circle area to the right of the chalkboard. Newspaper articles on a local bird sanctuary were taped to the easel. Next to the articles, Vicki wrote, "This baby hawk was in the hospital when we visited the Bird of Prey Center!" The class had recently completed a field trip to the bird sanctuary as part of their science unit on 'birds.'

A comparison of Beth's school's guidelines for success with Vicki's class pledge revealed the similarities and differences between the desired outcomes for student conduct and performance at school (see Table 11). Both lifeworlds stressed the importance of students being responsible, respectful, and cooperative within the classroom setting. The greatest difference was not in the desired 'ends' (outcomes) but rather, the greatest difference pertained to the kind of communicative 'means' (autocratic vs. democratic approach) as social actors that were employed.

Table 11

Autocratic vs. Democratic Classroom Management

Beth's (Autocratic) Learning Environment	Vicki's (Democratic) Learning Environment
Based on the School's Guidelines for Success: - Be honest and responsible - Always try and do your best - Cooperate with others - Treat others with dignity and respect - Be polite and courteous - Keep our school clean	Based on the Class Pledge: - Come to school with a good attitude - Try our best to work hard/complete work in a timely fashion - We will work together as a team - We will respect others by using kind words - We will keep our hands and feet to ourselves – Have fun as we LEARN!

The chosen approach ultimately determined whether students, as communicative actors, were granted the opportunity to fully participate in the learning community as either active participants or as passive spectators.

Socialized for Obedience vs. Mutual Respect

Habermas (1987) described society as the legitimation of orders used by participants to regulate their membership in social groups needed to secure solidarity. The large transient population at Beth's school and the general lack of direct support and involvement of parents in their children's education served as the legitimation for a school culture that emphasized student respect and responsibility through mechanisms of discipline and control.

As described earlier, the ways that Beth saw students interact with their parents was viewed as unacceptable to the way that she had been raised. From an "old school" perspective, any kind of behavior that could be construed as "acting out" was considered unacceptable and was not tolerated at Beth's school. Less parental involvement and support meant that Beth and her school community developed steering media and mechanisms (e.g., school guidelines for success; behavioral referrals; behavior log; You Rock book) intended to compensate for the absence of parents in order to maintain a lifeworld rationale that emphasized authoritarian control of student behavior, conduct, learning, and academic performance.

Even in the case of the student in Beth's class who was suspected of having ADD, the school (and Beth) resented the mother's refusal to place her son on medication. Like students, parents were also expected to obey and submit to the recommendations made by

the school. A refusal to do so was viewed as negligent and the parent was deemed as unwilling to participate and uninvolved, failing to support her son's learning and development; a view that was shared by two other third grade teachers at Beth's school (see Table 4).

From the time students entered the school building until they left at the end of the school day, everything that happened was largely determined by adults – when to use the restroom, when to get a drink of water, how to sit and pay attention, and how to walk in the halls. Inside the classroom, students were socialized to obey and submit to the classroom teacher's expectations for behavior and learning at all times. All learning and instruction was decided and directed by the teacher. Teacher permission was an absolute requirement for students to talk or move in any fashion. Positive reinforcement such as compliment parties was used to reward student compliance. High performance in daily seatwork and on unit tests was interpreted as representative of students' hard work and effort required to succeed in school.

Unlike the traditional, authoritarian approach to communicative action based on discipline and control that seemed to dominate Beth's school as a means to compensate for lack of parent support and participation, Vicki's school promoted a democratic learning community that mutually valued and respected all community members. Parents were not only active participants, but students actively engaged in the decision-making process within a variety of learning and social contexts at school as well. Rather than be passive spectators, teachers at Vicki's school encouraged students to actively share and voice their opinions and beliefs as valued members of the learning community.

<u>Teacher's permission required</u>. The teaching style and philosophy reflected in the physical learning environment was consistent with how Beth taught language arts and math during the classroom observations. Throughout Beth's lessons, she frequently interrupted what she was doing in order to reprimand students for what she considered to be their inappropriate (off-task) behavior in order to redirect (socialize) students' to use more appropriate (on-task) behavior needed for desired obedience.

One morning after a fieldtrip to the local art museum, the students were asked to write about their favorite part or most interesting fact about the museum as their language arts assignment for the day. As one student shared his interesting fact about a bell, other students were chatting excitedly about the trip. Beth suddenly interrupted and declared, "I'm sorry, I am truly embarrassed. This is not how we behave. If someone's talking, 'J' what are you supposed to do?" Beth repeated the question a second time before rephrasing the question and asked, "Someone's sharing, what should you be doing?"

After Beth reprimanded students' behavior during lessons and activities, she often followed up with verbal cues and prompts to support (or praise) the desired (on-task) behavior that was considered necessary for successful participation in the classroom setting. In this instance, after the student assumed the correct posture, hands in lap and eyes on her, Beth responded, "Show me with words. Thank you. That's what I need to see you doing."

Beth operationalized student behavior as correct (on-task) or incorrect (off-task) according to specific observable behavior or actions that could be isolated, discriminated, and modeled either by Beth or other students. After the students were finished

volunteering to read their writings about the field trip, for example, Beth asked the students to pass their papers forward. As students passed their papers to the front of the class, Beth reinforced the desired behavior by commenting, "I like how this side is calm and quiet as they pass up their papers. I don't hear a lot of talking from them. Real nice, Side A." For Beth, "calm and quiet" were desired outcomes that were observed and subsequently defined as students "not talking." She frequently reinforced student's on-task behavior by instructing them to write their name in the "You Rock" book for daily good behavior.

During telephone interviews, Beth insisted that she was less interested in students' written work, test scores, or grades. She indicated that what was most rewarding for her was to see her students apply what they have learned and understand. Beth asserted that what she enjoys most "Isn't in the written work. It's more in the conversations. It's not when I grade their tests or check their workbooks...it's more when I see them actually applying what they know."

Beth declared that she valued her students' spontaneous conversations that further demonstrated and confirmed her students' listened and fully integrated what they learned with their prior knowledge (stock of lifeworldly knowledge). Beth elaborated,

> The things that really move me - overhearing their conversations. Talking about things in ways I know they understand something. They actually do listen. Definitely have to say it doesn't come from the assessment. Sadly enough we have to assess them, what really moves me is not the A on the test. More so when I actually see them applying something...(Interview Transcript)

However, Beth not only directed and reinforced how students were to conduct themselves in the classroom setting, but she was equally explicit in how her students were to visibly participate in various learning activities.

Teacher-directed whole group math instruction. During a math lesson to review fractions for the unit test, Beth began the review lesson by naming two fractions at a time in order to practice the concepts, "greater than," "less than," and "equal." She instructed the class to respond explicitly in one of three ways:

> What I want you to do is I want you to tell me if the fraction that I call out is greater than, less than, or equal to "half." If it's greater than, I want "thumbs up." You don't need to say anything, just thumbs up. If it's less than, I want to see you do thumbs down (like this). And what if it's equal to? If it's equal to, then I want you to do this (makes a fist)…a fist. Okay, let's review…(Observation Transcript)

Beth was adamant that she most valued the spontaneous interactions among students that allowed them to openly demonstrate their understanding and application of newly gained concepts and skills, Beth's actual instruction generally limited or even prevented this kind of spontaneous exchange of ideas to take place among her students. Whether she was teaching reading or math, Beth typically centered her students' learning according to teacher-generated questions that targeted scripted responses intended to demonstrate predetermined concepts, skills, or knowledge (such as logical-mathematical concepts like greater than, less than, and equal to) that would more importantly appear on the unit test.

To review the concept of dividing by halves, Beth drew a rectangle on the board and drew a vertical line down the center of the rectangle. She pointed to one side of the rectangle and asked, "What will we call this part?" A student responded, "one-half." Beth confirmed the student's answer, stating, "Half is absolutely correct. Now we're rocking

and rolling." Beth continued dividing the newly formed fractions in half, creating the sequence of ½, ¼, 1/8, and 1/16. When she divided the fraction 1/16 in half, she told the class,

> Half of a 1/16. I'm going to give you some extra thinking time cuz that's just too hard. Oh yeah. Ssshhh...you definitely need some thinking time. I don't doubt that you know it...go ahead...(Observation Transcript)

Rather than allowing her students' to actively engage in an error-informed experimentation or exploration with each other as they attempted to construct the meaning and relationship of one-half of one-sixteenth, Beth openly discouraged her students from interacting with one another, telling them, "Thinking should be silent like you're concentrating. That tells me that you need more time. Then when I see your hands up I know that "C" you're ready." After three different students guessed 1/18, 1/20, and 1/24, a fourth student finally responded, "1/32 – 16 plus 16." Beth asked the class, "Does everyone see the pattern? Please know that you will see something like this tomorrow" (on the test).

One student attempted to construct the relationship needed to demonstrate what happened when fractions were divided in half, suggesting, "I thought it went 2, 4, 6, 8 10..." Instead of capitalizing on the student's misconception as a potential teaching moment and engaging other student's in the learning process, Beth simply corrected the student, informing him that, "It's not counting.by 2s, it's doubling. It's multiplying by 2s, not counting by 2s." By simply feeding the student the answer, he (and others) may very well have missed the opportunity to construct this relationship that would then be added to their stock of lifeworldly knowledge in relation to fractions. Beth focused instead on

increasing the likelihood that her students would use the procedure or trick of doubling the denominator in order to get the needed answer for this particular type of problem on the test.

Another mathematical concept related to fractions that Beth reviewed with her students pertained to "mixed numbers." Beth warned the class, "You'll see that on the test tomorrow. You'll see that term, mixed number. What is a mixed number?" Beth called on a student to tell her what a mixed number was but the student was uncertain. Beth reiterated, "You'll see that on the test tomorrow. You'll see that term, mixed number. What is a mixed number?" Finally another student explained that a mixed number was a whole number and a fraction. Unfortunately, Beth did not place this concept in practical terms for her students to understand its meaning or value, only that they really needed to know it for the unit math test.

After reviewing math fractions for more than 30 minutes, including converting fractions to mixed fractions and shading in circles on the board to represent fractions, her students became increasingly restless and distracted. Beth reprimanded her students for their off-task behavior:

> I'm sorry, I need time-out. I know that you're anxious and excited because this is our first day with the guest, but this is not okay. 'J' have a seat. Let me stop right now before we go any further because I'm not happy. We do not call out and get out of our seats...and ask to go to the rest room...and ask to get a sip of water...and lean back in our chairs...while we're learning. We just don't do that. So I'm not sure why this is happening...but it needs to stop now...(Interview Transcript)

For Beth, the behaviors she observed were distractions that prevented students from learning. Beth then countered her students' off-task (inappropriate) behavior by

reminding them of the desired on-task (appropriate) behavior that she expected and what it should look like:

> Now let me see you all in the same positions...and then I'll know that we're ready. "C," hands down and listening position...Is that listening positioning? Fix it now. Thank you side B for doing that so quickly and so nicely. Listening position "Jus" that would mean you too...thank you "S"...thank you "Chr"...now you're telling me that you're ready...(Observation Transcript)

Beth's current philosophy and subsequent teaching style according to her stock of lifeworldly knowledge convinced her that active learning required active listening that meant absolute attention to teacher direction and instruction. Therefore, she interpreted students' movement or talking to mean that students were not paying attention nor listening and therefore unable to process the teacher's direct instruction – hence, unable to learn.

There was only one instance during the lesson in which Beth encouraged students to work together to solve a problem. Three students were up at the dry erase board shading circles to represent different fractions. One student attempted to help another student solve her problem. Beth smiled and encouraged, "It might be a good idea for you to work together while you are up there."

Toward the end of the lesson, students became increasingly restless again, moving and chatting amongst themselves. One student meowed in the back of the room while another student began making a crying sound. Once again, Beth reminded her class, "I sure do like how nicely 'SH' and 'Chr' are sitting. 'D' very nice. 'R' nice. I like how nicely 'Col' is sitting and paying attention."

As noted earlier, Beth equated students' on-task behavior to mean students were listening, attending, and concentrating as essential conditions for learning. Furthermore, she predicted that the on-task behavior displayed by students during the review would result in high-performance on the unit math test. She told the class, "I can tell where our star papers will be for sure...Star? What do you think that means? All you have to do is pay attention. You'd be surprised at how much you'd learn..." Of course, the extent of learning that can take place is equally dependent and interdependent on the opportunities for learning that are afforded students by teachers.

Although Beth insisted during one phone interview that test scores and letter grades were not the most important aspect of her teaching, the overriding message she communicated to the class at the end of this math lesson completely contradicted her assertion that grades are not what matters. Beth reminded her students as she passed back the previous unit test on fractions (low test scores were the reason she was having them retake the unit test) the importance of this review in order to do better on this unit test on fractions:

> We had a really good review and I can promise you 100% of the things you saw on the board today will be on the test tomorrow. What does 100% mean? If 100% of the things you saw today are going to be on the test tomorrow, how much of this is going to be on the test? Ya...all of it...(Observation Transcript)

While Beth expressed concerns, as noted earlier, toward the panic and stress her students felt toward taking the FCAT, she simultaneously felt it necessary for her students to be aware of and understand the importance of test scores as a measurement of presumed learning, progress, and overall academic performance. The validity of FCAT scores as scientific measurements of performance was subsequently transferred by Beth to unit

tests in reading and math. Consequently, Beth struggled with balancing the pressures placed on her students to perform well on tests with the potential for increased anxiety and stress that can result. As Beth noted,

> I don't think they are working at the same pace now as before FCAT. Before, the word, 'FCAT' would really get their attention. It was almost like I could say, 'Okay, you need to focus, you need to concentrate on this' or 'Why don't you do your homework, we have FCAT coming up.' As soon as they heard the word, they straighten up in their seats. They are all ears. Now that's not hanging over their heads...(Interview Transcript)

From Beth's point of view, an emphasis on test scores provided an element of seriousness that can give students the impetus (or purpose) and subsequent motivation needed for learning. Hence, what gets tested, gets taught and what is taught is important (need to know) because it will be on the test. Beth equally lamented,

> So it's more like...I say to them now, 'Third grade is not over yet. There's still things we have to learn before you go on to fourth grade and they're going to expect you to know.' So that's what I say now to get their attention now. Before, if I even said FCAT it was, everyone was silent. So I didn't have to spend a lot of time on the management part. Spent more time instructing because I had their attention. But now they're...they're just anxious... (Interview Transcript)

An emphasis on test scores, as suggested by Beth, not only served as a motivational tool used to reinforce the purpose for learning (though arguably coercive), its importance also became a management tool that Beth used to acquire and maintain students' attention during instruction. The word 'FCAT' became a signal or cue that she used to let her students know, 'this is important – you need to know this for the FCAT – so pay attention.'

Remember that Beth's expertise in math had been identified by her school principal as an area in need of improvement on her professional development plan. On

more than one occasion, Beth confessed her frustrations with teaching math and her own

disappointment in her students' general performance on math tests. As Beth complained

during her second phone interview,

> I gave a Unit 6 math test and it was a geometry unit and I thought we had covered
> all the material and they were ready for the test. I don't know if it was just the
> questions or the way the questions were asked on the test. When we went over it,
> they all seemed to know the answers but I was just disappointed because I didn't
> have the success I would have liked to have. So we have to redo that. So that's my
> project next week...to put together another test because only one test comes with
> the unit and then you have a CD where you can pick and choose questions from
> that skill to make up a test...(Interview Transcript)

Beth anguished over her students' performance on this math test. She elaborated, "I think

I may have had 4 Cs and the rest were Ds and Fs and that's out of a class of 16...no As,

no Bs...and it was mostly symmetry." Much like the fraction lesson observed in class,

Beth taught geometry using a direct teach, reductionist approach in which mathematical

concepts and skills were taught as isolated facts that were memorized and applied to

worksheets and tests (a trend that is promoted by high-stakes accountability systems that

employ standardized tests like the FCAT). Beth explained that the meaning of a right

angle was a mathematical concept that her students consistently missed on the test.

> For example, draw a triangle that includes a right angle. They all know what right
> angles are. Had to draw a triangle with a right angle in it. It was like, 'what?'
> They all just drew a triangle and then put a little square in the corner to make it
> look like a right angle. (Interview Transcript)

Beth's students' inability to successfully draw a triangle with a right angle completely

stumped her. She was baffled by what this meant and how this could happen.

> I don't know if it was just the test. They all knew the material and we all went
> over it. They knew the answers...were raising their hands...were marking the
> right ones before we even got to them. Just one of those things you want to do it
> again and see how it goes...(Interview Transcript)

Evidently, Beth's students understood that a right-angle box placed on an angle within a geometric shape such as a triangle symbolized a right angle (as an isolated fact). However, asking students to 'draw a triangle with a right angle' meant that her students needed to apply their understanding of a right angle in relationship to a triangle. Randomly placing a box on any angle meant that the students had not constructed the meaning of a right angle (formed by two perpendicular lines; measures 90 degrees). In defeat, Beth relinquished, "Either I just didn't teach well or they just didn't grasp it."

Beth's frustrations with teaching math reverberated with Vicki's own observations and frustrations experienced while working with teacher interns and beginning teachers who struggled with teaching math developmentally, resisting new strategies and approaches that were foreign to their own learning experiences. Beth further exclaimed,

> This math program is called, "Every Day Math" and it's only our second year using it. It's supposed to be this spiraling affect where you don't just teach units and master them and then go on. Instead, you have a unit that involves measurement, geometry, along with multiplication and division and you see it over and over throughout the year. You don't have just one type of skill per unit. I'm adjusting to it...but it's been quite an adjustment...(Interview Transcript)

Not only did Beth find this approach in conflict with the way that she was taught math skills (as isolated facts and concepts) but she struggled with how to teach higher level thinking as an integral part of mathematical reasoning.

> The skills are integrated. It's just a lot of higher level thinking. I think before kids can do the higher level thinking, they have to be able to understand what they are required to do. I think I like teaching the traditional way and then I'll go back to doing it their way...(Interview Transcript)

Just as Vicki noted, when beginning teachers' become overwhelmed with trying

to teach math in developmentally appropriate ways, if they do not achieve the desired

outcomes expected of students, they are more inclined to revert back to a more traditional

approach that is familiar, as suggested by Beth. Only if Beth is allowed to make errors as

she attempts new strategies and methods can she further develop her own skills in

mathematical instruction. She may then eventually shatter her former beliefs about math

concepts and reasoning, superseding them with new insights and understandings into a

newly organized whole (stock of lifeworldly knowledge). Holding teachers accountable

for standardized test scores (reinforced by steering media and mechanisms like merit pay

based on test scores) however may only serve to further hinder, prohibit and undermine

rather than encourage and support error-informed experimentation needed to make this

kind of professional growth and development.

Teacher-directed whole group reading instruction. Beth's approach to reading and

language arts mirrored her instructional approach to math. After previously reading a

story from the Houghton-Mifflin Reading Program entitled, *Trapped by the Ice*, Beth

exclusively directed a discussion of the story. Using the teacher's manual, Beth called on

students to define and give examples of organizational elements and tools used by the

author (headings, captions, illustrations, order, and definitions) to enhance meaning and

aid the reader's comprehension of the story.

To introduce the organizational concept of captions, Beth asked, "Who knows

what caption is? I don't think we've talked about caption. Who knows what caption is?"

After no one offered a response, Beth continued, "Has something to do with photographs

or illustrations. We see them more often in our science book or social studies book.

They'll have pictures with captions underneath." A student then responded, "Oh, the little

writing." Beth continued, "Ya...the little writing. The little writing that describes what?

What is the little writing describing?" The same student offered, "Describes the picture."

Beth further elaborated,

> Ya, it tells us about the pictures. It helps us understand what picture, what photo, what illustration the author or photographer is showing us. It also gives us more details. So the reasons for these photographs captures or gives specific details and helps us to understand the text...what we read...(Observation Transcript)

Using this same prescribed question/answer format, Beth discussed the remaining

elements outlined in the teacher's manual for discussion. Students' individual feelings,

personal experiences, or opinions in relation to the story itself were not elicited. Students

only shared when called on and answers were scripted and largely limited to the nature of

the questions pertaining to the organizational elements that were introduced in the

reading.

After the students returned from "specials" (art, music, PE, etc.) class, Beth

paired-up the students for paired-shared reading, reminding them how to sit appropriately

(legs criss-cross, side-by-side if sitting on the floor), calling on one student to

demonstrate how 'not' to sit. Beth reiterated the need for students to follow along as their

partner read and to pay attention to the heading, captions, illustrations, order, and special

definitions because they will complete another activity using that information.

After computer lab, Beth's class compiled a timeline based on the story's

chronological events. Students worked with their reading partner to summarize the

chronological date that was assigned to them by Beth. Beth drew a black timeline on the

dry erase board with each date and the student pairs took turns reading their event summary and taping it to the time line.

After all of the events were taped to the timeline, Beth instructed the students to follow along in the text as she read each event aloud. As Beth read she reminded students to follow along in the text. When she came to the date, April 24th she announced, "I should hear papers turning. Why aren't you following along? Let me see you following along." As Beth read each written event, she occasionally questioned the students' wording or asked literal comprehension questions (e.g., Did all 22 men go?).

After Beth finished reading the timeline, she instructed students who followed along in their text to write their names in the "You Rock" book. Those students charged the book, eager to write their names as they glanced back at the students who remained seated in their seats. The following day in language arts, the students completed pages in the Houghton-Mifflin Student Skill Workbook to practice and review the organizational concepts used in the story (headings, definitions, chronological order, and captions), VCCV spelling patterns, and homophones.

Beth generally did not provide small tiered group instruction in reading or math based on skills, learning styles or needs, or student interests. Beth indicated that all group instruction in reading and math was provided and completed as a whole class. However, instructional recommendations for improving reading as stated on Beth's Individual Profession Development Plan (IPDP) included: (a) increase 66% of the high-risk students (at least two out of the three students) reading fluency by 20 points (increasing test scores) on the DIEBELS, (b) the implementation of 30 minutes of small

group reading instruction for the lowest three students in Beth's class and (c) the incorporation of a word wall/enrichment wall to enhance reading fluency. Beth's school principal openly admitted to the data driven culture as a result of Florida's accountability system. While she agreed with holding teachers and learners accountable in order to increase the quality of instruction and academic performance, she also expressed concern that an emphasis on test scores tends to view children as 'numbers' rather than as whole individuals (see Table 7).

To supplement and support whole group instruction in reading, students also participated in Accelerated Reading, D.E.A.R (Drop Everything and Read), Read Naturally (a commercially produced reading fluency program), Successmaker Math and Reading Computer Program (test-prep software), and paired-shared reading. Students reading below grade level in Beth's class were assigned to one of three reading levels in Read Naturally (2.0, 2.5, 3.0). Although the program was designed so that students could listen to reading passages together in small groups, Beth generally instructed each child to use earphones to complete the reading passages independently.

Writing journals were only used sporadically in Beth's class. Beth usually responded to students' writings with general comments. Journals were not used to maintain an on-going written correspondence between Beth and her students.

Equal participation a must. When Vicki was a beginning teacher, she tended to center learning and instruction on the curriculum for the sake of the curriculum. Without hesitation, Vicki admitted, "When I first began to teach – I started more with what curriculum - I needed to 'dispense' to them, you know." Vicki's notion to "dispense"

suggested that information (or the curriculum itself) was largely transmitted to her students using a traditional approach to learning and instruction.

As a veteran teacher today, Vicki centered her curriculum planning and instruction, first and foremost, on her individual students. For Vicki, this meant, "I just think that I now – I think of how I focus on where children are and where they need to go. I start with them first." By starting with her students, Vicki realized she needed to, "Look at who they are – what their skills are – what they can do – how can I use that to deliver the curriculum – or start the curriculum – so I think that's how it has changed." Vicki determined that even before she looked to research for best teaching practice to inform her curricular and instructional decisions, she first had to understand her students as individual learners.

Likewise, Vicki considered it equally important to design classroom management centered on the individual needs of students. Vicki believed, "Classroom management is a big part of understanding children developmentally." Therefore, similar to Vicki's approach to learning and instruction, the goal for classroom management was not, "Dispensing everything that you know onto children." Rather, Vicki insisted that classroom management should be about, "Understanding who they are and understanding where they are developmentally. How you need to adapt the concept to them. Not take what – not impart what [sic] your knowledge onto them." In other words, developing the communication skills needed to actively engage in active discourse as social actors.

Instead of using a transmission model approach that, as Vicki stated earlier, was merely 'dispensing the curriculum,' she increasingly gravitated toward a more

constructivist approach that centered on individual student experience, knowledge, understanding, and skills. She found that this approach made learning meaningful, purposeful, and relevant to her students' lives. In other words, this approach encouraged her students as actors, to construct their own stock of lifeworldly knowledge. Vicki believed the same to be true with classroom management, a central concern for many beginning teachers like Beth.

Due to the diverse learning needs of Vicki's students, she felt it was imperative for her to individualize instruction. To ensure that all of her students had access to the same grade-level content, such as the science unit on birds, Vicki provided different books and reading material for different students according to their individual learning needs. Assistive technology such as taped books and computer software were used to increase student access to learning and information. Instructional grouping allowed students to work in pairs and small groups for paired-shared reading, discussions, and peer-editing. Vicki continued,

> You know they will work together so they can, they can help each other understand what we're reading about. I think that's mainly what I would want you to see. I have a range, you know. I have children that range from 'educable mentally handicapped' to 'gifted.' Within that range, I have to meet the needs of all of them. I think that's what I would want you to understand.

Vicki viewed the learning atmosphere as an integral part of her instruction and their sum equaled her students' third grade experience. Vicki assured that,

> The community that I've created, that's something that's very important and I understand it's very important for children and I work very hard at the beginning of the year to establish that. To establish open communication and all the things that you do, all the community building activities and things that we do that encourages that. That didn't just – they didn't just come in as sweet little children with being willing to help. (Interview Transcript)

Creating a community of learners based on mutual respect, cooperation, and collaboration was hard work. Including all learners across learning needs was viewed by Vicki as not only essential to their academic learning, but was equally important to promote the needed social and communication skills needed to participate as lifelong community members in the 'real world.'

> Especially like my EMH children, my educable mentally handicapped children. They need to be included so that, because there's social reasons that they need to work with groups. If these kids are going to be in the real world, they're not going to be in an isolated room, they're going to work in jobs with all kinds of people. And they need to know, I think a lot of what they need to understand is that their behavior and their actions and how to control themselves. How to fit into the bigger world. If we always keep them, you know, isolated, they tend not to learn. I don't think they learn as quickly, they don't have all the positive models. (Interview Transcript)

Vicki was convinced that if we eventually want all students to fully function and operate in the real world, then we need to give them 'access' to real world experiences that cannot be achieved in sheltered settings apart from their peers. Kliewer (1998) would agree. Education is all about membership. Membership that is active, meaningful, and valued (and therefore, shared across communicative actors) cannot be achieved outside of the education setting anymore than education can be achieved at the exclusion of membership. Kliewer insisted that, "One does not learn membership apart from being a member" (p. 317). Membership cannot be achieved without opportunities to participate. Communicative actors learn to think and act in ways that are meaningful and purposeful in different social contexts. A democratic learning community supports the development of communicative action needed to acquire and adequately maintain community membership within any social group or setting.

Unfortunately, Vicki feared that steering media and mechanisms like teacher merit pay based on test scores will only serve to undermine the application and use of the support model among general education teachers. Vicki warned,

> And who's going to want, who's going to want the EMH children? And who's going to want the specific learning disabilities or all the other baggage when, when they're going to look at your test scores and base pay checks on that? Well aren't you going to take ALL the high achieving kids? You know, who's going to teach those, who's going to teach those? I don't get it! I don't understand it. That makes no sense to me…(Interview Transcript)

A democratic learning community must equally value all members, maximizing everyone's access to learning and participation. Sorting and ranking students can only serve to undermine the process of acceptance and the celebration of diversity.

Steering media and mechanisms such as grade-level retention based on test scores, from Vicki's perspective, failed to understand or appreciate the individual learning needs of students. In the end, retaining students who were already known to have learning needs only served to further punish these learners for their differences.

> Our state doesn't pay attention to the fact that not ALL children will progress at the same rate. If you might have a child that does developmentally need, if you got children with specific learning disabilities or their educable mentally handicapped, we already know that they're not going to progress at the same rate than average ability children do. Yet, we penalize them for having the challenges that they have. That makes no sense! That doesn't support learning! (Interview Transcript)

Just as Vicki would like to see the teaching profession use research to guide and inform instruction in the classroom setting, she wished her state legislators would also use research to guide and inform state legislation.

> I mean, every piece of educational research, which the state of Florida apparently doesn't pay attention to, doesn't support that there's any benefit to retention – at all! It's been like that for years. There's no, it doesn't, there's no correlation that

retaining children improves student learning – especially for those poor children being retained. In fact, it's quite the opposite...(Interview Transcript)

Likewise, just as Vicki believed competition interferes with and subverts

cooperation among learners, (possibly undermining the democratic process as well), she

also suggested the same was true among teachers.

> Don't even get me started on the merit pay. Oh yeah, there's a good one! Oh, now we're going to pit teachers against each other. So yeah, that will really help them to collaborate more and work together to benefit children. Are you kidding me? (Interview Transcript)

Vicki felt that learners, "Really love to learn for the sake of learning." She insisted,

> They might have anxiety about those tests. But they don't, that's not why they're studying, or reading or being involved in projects. They're doing it because they're completely curious and completely have a real LOVE of different, you know, they really just LOVE to learn at this age. (Interview Transcript)

Vicki argued that learning was best promoted and achieved when teachers capitalize on

learners' love and enjoyment of the learning process as the motivator, not according to

test scores. She implied that the same was true for teachers.

> And I've never known money to - well money doesn't motivate teachers for heaven's sake! That's not why they get into the profession. You know, that's not their motive. But yet they're, they're not oriented that way. I mean, 'map' the kids? That just doesn't make any sense to me – no sense...(Interview Transcript)

Vicki was adamant that what motivates teachers most has nothing to do with extrinsic

monetary rewards, but rather, has everything to do with intrinsic emotional rewards. The

satisfaction of watching children enthusiastically learn and grow was what mattered most

to her, understanding that the learning process and journey cannot be predetermined

according to an arbitrarily assigned timeline.

> That's what I enjoy. They're very, they're very enthusiastic. They find everything pretty fascinating and it's just very rewarding to watch them grow and watch

them change throughout, throughout the year. And they really kind of go to being pretty independent learners than being a little unsure of themselves because of their age. I mean, they're eight and nine and they leave, they become more independent. They've built more confidence. Their curiosity, it just continues... (Interview Transcript)

Vicki also warned that over-emphasizing test scores as a measurement of growth

and learning can potentially have adverse effects on children, including their overall

desire and interest in learning. If we're not careful, she concluded,

I think you can turn children off to learning. I think you can create, they lack motivation. Or if they're constantly, if there's all these have to's they have, there's no choice, there's no choice in what they get to learn or study. There's not as much motivation because they don't think they have any control over it anyway. They just become little receptors of information...(Interview Transcript)

Children, based on Vicki's teaching experience, will most likely thrive when

given the opportunity to learn and grow according to what is intrinsically rewarding to

them. Does Beth's experience in third grade in comparison to Vicki's experience suggest

that steering media and mechanisms that base in-grade retention on test scores potentially

rob educators of the opportunity to otherwise provide struggling learners and entire

learning communities with opportunities to enjoy learning for the sake of learning (as

social actors) and not for the sake of test scores (as mere receptors of information)?

Vicki began every school day with morning circle. She made announcements

regarding school events and activities. Students also took turns and shared personal

events and activities of interest with the class. After Easter Sunday, many students shared

personal stories about Easter egg hunts. Other students discussed soccer games and

tournaments while one student shared about her weekend trip to New York City to attend

a live performance of *Phantom of the Opera*. One unfortunate student held up a bandaged

finger, sharing that it was accidentally caught in the door at home. After classroom jobs were assigned, students briefly stood up for brain exercises and stretches while crossing midline.

Writing for meaning. While Vicki was also concerned, like Beth, about her students' academic readiness for fourth grade in relation to their writing skills, she did not approach writing from the viewpoint of FCAT Writes. Unlike Beth, Vicki designed her reading and writing curriculum around readers' and writers' workshops that students participated in daily throughout the school year. Rather than approach writing at the end of the year with an emphasis on expository writing that mirrored the FCAT Writes as Beth was encouraged and instructed to do, Vicki chose to complete a unit on poetry.

Based on Reggie Routman's (2000) work in developing children's writing through poetry, Vicki's instruction emphasized the following: talking about poetry using many sources of published poetry; modeling and talking through the writing process using children's actual poems; and peer review and editing within the writing community. With great enthusiasm, Vicki declared, "It's just been interesting. I've done a poetry unit before, but I haven't actually used the three sources before, where you basically are using the children's poems."

Vicki was especially enthusiastic about the fact that this approach was student-centered. Using students' own poetry, Vicki explained, "When you see the poetry – what Reggie Routman calls this – when you see a 'gem,' you actually have the child write it (their poem) on an overhead and then you share that – so that it's coming from other children."

<u>Writing as a personal journey</u>. This approach diverged dramatically from the way that Beth approached writing and the way that Vicki herself approached writing in the past as a beginning teacher. According to Vicki, "Reggie Routman's kind of a language arts reader's/writer's workshop guru - been around a good while. She does a lot of writer's workshops." In contrast to a more traditional view of writing with a beginning, middle, and end in the writing task, Routman views writing as a journey that takes place within the context of children's conversations.

Using Routman's resource, "Kid's Poems: Teaching Third and Fourth Graders to Love Writing Poetry," Vicki exclaimed,

> It's a really neat little resource because it – she actually – the way the book is set up – it's conversations with children. So instead of giving them – making them write a – she does a lot of free verse and she uses children's poems...to inspire children to write their own. It's just really the way she approaches it is way cool. It shows you, kind of guides you, in the types of conversations to engage children in that will pull-out poetry or help them with poetry. (Interview Transcript)

This was a huge departure for Vicki from more typical writing experiences in the past that were centered on the writing curriculum or teacher. Vicki welcomed the change, insisting, "That's been a really neat unit and the kids are really into it. And they've been reading and writing and sharing a lot of poetry in the last couple of weeks – so it's been a lot of fun!"

<u>Student-selected topics</u>. As part of her poetry unit, Vicki completed a mini lesson to brainstorm situations that the students perceived to be stressful. She allowed her students to discuss stressful situations within their personal life experiences in both public and private spheres within the writing community. As Vicki recalled, "Of course, a lot of it was - they talked about interactions with each other." More specifically, "They said

things like, 'Well, its stressful when my friends yell at me' or 'they don't give me a

chance to talk and everybody's talking.' So a lot of their, what they consider stressful

situations were peers – peer related."

The stressful events that were generated by the students ranged from peer-related

issues to testing (see Appendix G), sports (see Appendix H), moving (see Appendix I),

and the death of a family member; results also consistent with Yamamato's (1979)

findings on children's life stressors. While her students most frequently wrote about peer-

related issues, Vicki declared, "Oh, my gosh. There's one that a little girl wrote that and

it's about Grandpa Joe." Based on another mini lesson, Vicki explained,

> I had done another mini lesson about special people in your life. I actually
> modeled writing in front of them. I chose a friend and it was something – it was
> an older friend that's in her 80's. So I told the children there were things I wanted
> to do just like her when I got older. I started listing those things. (Interview
> Transcript)

Vicki's own poem about her elderly friend may have been the source of

inspiration for the student's poem about her Grandpa Joe. According to Vicki's

recollection, this little girl's poem about her grandpa, who she recently lost to cancer,

went something like this:

> My Grandpa Joe, he likes to play cards with me and Go Fish.
> His voice is like the sweet sound of a melody.
> He shouldn't have smoked.
> Grandpa really liked living.
> I liked him living too.
> (Died at age 78). (Interview Transcript)

Many of the children's poems were prolific reminders that children are forced to

live in a lifeworld controlled, manipulated, and operated by adults. Their lives are

frequently impacted, without choice, by the decisions that adults make, for better and for worse, in both public and private spheres.

Thinking and talking about expository writing. Using a dialectic approach to discussion, Vicki facilitated a review of the "Birds of Prey" posters that the students had been working on in science. Vicki asked, "What is the purpose or goal of what you are doing?" One student responded, "Trying to write three paragraphs." For clarification, Vicki repeated, "Trying to write 3 paragraphs. And what were we focusing on when we were doing paragraphs?" Another student added, "To make paragraphs."

Vicki inquired, "So how we were organizing them, don't want to just show them? Slap them on? What are we trying to do?" A student offered, "Trying to organize facts into a paragraph." Vicki nodded and queried, "Organize them into a paragraph. What are you doing?" Same student answered, "Not just listing facts." Vicki concurred with the student, clarifying, "Adding words so that you have complete sentences."

Vicki added, "What is it about facts? What are we doing with them?" Several students offered, "Have to make sense with each other." Vicki agreed, affirming, "Have to make sense with each other so they are focused on one topic." Vicki then asked, "How should it look on the poster?" Several students responded, "Should look organized."

Vicki asked the class whether everyone had everything they needed. She told the class to begin readers' workshop. Students worked either independently, in pairs, or in small groups on either their spelling words, (generated from journal writings and independent readings) reading book and recording information in journals, or birds of

prey posters. Vicki floated around the room, helping and facilitating students' problem-solving by questioning to increase understanding and clarification.

After reader's workshop, Vicki called students back to circle and taped students' finished birds of prey posters on the chalkboard. She asked, "Going from research, getting facts down, grouping them, and thinking about the finished products, what do you notice about them?" One student offered, "Pictures." Vicki acknowledged the student's response, stating, "You noticed pictures. What else have you noticed?" Another student added, "I noticed that in some of them, they tell you what the pictures are about." Vicki smiled and her eyes grew wide. She explained,

> Some of them have some labels on them to tell you what the pictures are. This one for instance, protecting the babies, capturing food. Illustrations to help understand what's going on. What else do you notice about our finished copies? They have their information written. What is it you're expecting to see when you read the information? (Observation Notes)

After a long pause, Vicki gently reminded her students:

> Boys and girls, one thing I've noticed is there seems to be some confusion. A rough draft to a clean copy, in what stage is our writing when you have someone else look at it to make sure you have the letters all the way they need to be? When does that happen? (Observation Notes)

One student hesitantly suggested, "Happens during editing." Vicki pointed to the student and asked, "And who does that editing?" Again, the student responded, "You're partner could do that. You're teacher. Ms. 'J' (the teacher intern)."

Vicki expanded, "Why is it sometimes you ask an adult to help you out with that? The editing part?" One student suggested, "Need someone else." Pointing to a poster, Vicki added, "Sometimes you've just looked at it so long you don't really notice. Sometimes your partner misses it too." One student shrugged his shoulders and

suggested, "Sometimes kids just jot something down. They look at it. They think that it's right." Vicki nodded and noted, "Sounds right, looks right to them. They might be spelling words the same way. It's a 'sounds found sounds' good to them."

Vicki queried, "Editing and revising. Its' not something we're real crazy about. When do we want to do that?" One student answered, "Before it's glued down." (Students giggled). Vicki chuckled, "Before it's glued down. Before we put it on your bigger sheet of paper. That's supposed to be a nice clean copy."

In closing, Vicki asked, "Anybody have a comment? What you thought was challenging? What you liked about doing this?" One student insisted, "Organizing the facts" was the hardest part. Vicki inquired, "Did you think organizing the facts was challenging? Why's that?"

The student explained that she had several facts to organize concerning the nest, the babies, and food. Vicki suddenly exclaimed,

> Did you hear what she said? She had, I love that! Cuz [sic] I was thinking to myself, wait a minute. That she would have a hard time because one fact that she had was also dealt with not only as the nest where they raise their young, it also had to do with food. And her next paragraph was about food. What do you think would be a good place for that particular fact? Did you end up putting it with the nest information? (Observation Notes)

The student nodded, "Yes, I put it right at the end." Vicki agreed,

> That's your last sentence and it's perfect! You've heard the big word, 'transition' into the next paragraph. That's a nice sentence that will help you transition, or move to that next paragraph. That's a perfect place to put it! I'm glad you noticed that! (Observation Notes)

In an effort to give everyone a chance to share, Vicki asked again, "Anybody else? Any challenges? Or anything that you thought worked well?" Another student

enthusiastically announced, "I like going on the internet, finding the pictures, and then

writing about them." Vicki asked the group,

> Do illustrations add to your information? How many of you are going to pick up
> informational books about these birds and not have pictures? I have not seen
> anybody pick up a book without illustrations. That makes it so much better. And
> we went to visit the birds and that was so much better. Pictures are good, but
> seeing them in real life is even better! (Observation Notes)

Another student reluctantly admitted, "I thought that ending the paragraph was

really hard." Vicki pondered, "Did you think the ending or the conclusion was hard?

What was hard about that?" In apparent frustration, he answered, "You do just one

sentence to just close it all up and you have to do more." In acknowledgement, Vicki told

the class,

> You just want to be done. That's a really good point! You get to that last
> paragraph and its like, 'Uh, I just want to say, that's all folks! That's very hard to
> do, that conclusion or that ending paragraph!' (Observation Notes)

Vicki continued, "What kinds of things go there? I noticed that 'K' said that this

was my favorite thing that I learned. Sometimes you put a "favorite' in your conclusion.

What else?" Another student volunteered, "Why they're important." Vicki confirmed,

"May be you're going to put why they're important – that's an excellent choice!"

Another student insisted, "You don't want too much information!" Vicki also agreed with

her and clarified more specifically, "You don't want 'new' information. We're trying to

wrap it up! Good!"

The kinds of questions that Vicki used were intended to guide and facilitate the

students understanding and thinking about expository writing. It was important for her

students to construct and identify their purpose for writing about birds of prey. What

information was important? What information was useful? What information was

interesting? How could they organize their material? Was there a sequence? How did

they transition between topics? Were illustrations valuable? What should be included in

the conclusion? Students were actively engaged as listeners and Vicki valued every

student's shared thoughts and contributions.

Every morning, Vicki's class took a 10-minute break for a morning snack. After

snack, the class reconvened at the circle area for another group discussion.

Thinking and talking about poetry. Vicki planned for students to continue

working on their poems in writer's workshop. She therefore reviewed some poems with

the class, focusing on the descriptive words and facts used to describe various animals.

Vicki explained,

> We continue to work on our poetry unit and I have all your poems that you gave
> me last week. I want to share a few poems with you. Today, I'd like to share a
> few poems and I'm not going to tell you the animal that it's about. I want to see if
> you guess, just by listening to the words. (Observation Notes)

Vicki read the following poem:

I wait and wait on this hot summer day for your return
I clean your loft,
Your roof top nest where you'll fly home for much needed rest

When hands shot up in the air, Vicki commented on the one student who made a

'thumbs up.' Vicki told the student, "Thank you for doing a thumbs up instead of a hand

in the air. That was so very thoughtful." That student then guessed, "A bird's nest." A

second student guessed, "A roof-top nest." Vicki asked, "Why did you think it was about

a bird? What clue did the author give you?" One student offered, "Flying." Vicki

explained that the poem was actually about a homing pigeon. She then asked a student

sitting in the back to move up closer to her.

As Vicki read more poems, she continued to thank students for using 'thumbs up'

instead of raising hands. She reminded the students that while thumbs up signals to her

that someone has an answer, it doesn't 'stop other brains' (i.e., interrupt or pressure

others who are still trying to think). She appreciated everyone's consideration for other

thinkers.

After reviewing several poems, Vicki told the class,

> I thought may be we would brainstorm one together. What I'd like you to try to do is to write a poem. It could be about an animal or it could be about something else. What animal? We've already heard about a hamster, give us an idea. (Observation Notes)

One student suggested, "An owl." Another student suggested, "A dog." A third student

suggested, "A bald eagle." The class quickly voted and agreed to write about a bald

eagle. Vicki modeled for the class (using a talk-aloud),

> What I'm doing right now is actually something you'll be doing. I'm thinking and I'm just going to dump my brain. So anything that we can think about a bald eagle, words that go together, phrases and short phrases. Let's brainstorm what we can think about bald eagle but let's not put the name. Let's think about what we heard this author do and add some things that would tell us about bald eagles without actually saying it. This is just my brainstorm – not my poem yet. What else could we say? Observation Transcript)

As Vicki brainstormed descriptions and facts with the students she wrote them on the

large chart paper. Student suggestions included: bright eye, pictured on the dollar bill,

symbol of America, white head, yellow beak, strong wings, and sharp talons. Together

with the class, Vicki used the clues the students provided for this "Who Am I?" poem:

> Sharp hooked yellow beak
> Large bright eyes
> White headed
> Strong wings in flight
> I'm pictured on the dollar bill
> I am America's symbol
> I have sharp talons for hunting prey
> I am the Bald Eagle

Vicki inquired, "Anything else you want me to add or take out here? That's fine. You can end it anyway you want. Think about how our poetry workshop has been going. Writing and then sharing." She then instructed the class:

> You can do it as a "Who Am I?" or you can just put the title, but the idea is that these are descriptions or facts or details about what you are writing about. Don't really tell us in the poem. You can tell at the beginning or at the end. Question? (Observation Notes)

One student inquired whether they could work on a poem with a partner. Vicki paused and then responded,

> No, I want you to write your own. You got to work with partners (with spelling work and science posters). Thank you for asking. I really want you to do some of your own thinking and I think we need at least 10 to 12 minutes of some really, quiet time to get our thoughts on paper. We got to talk quite a bit during spelling and while working on our research on birds. (Observation Notes)

Vicki played some classical music in the background as students worked. She walked around and conferenced with students, asking questions to guide and facilitate their writing.

By celebrating children as communicative actors, this approach capitalized on each child's own stock of lifeworldly knowledge. By embracing a more student-centered approach immersed in students' conversations about topics that interested them, Vicki believed her students' writing became more purposeful and meaningful. Within the

writing community, Vicki observed her students actively encouraging, supporting, and inspiring each other to write about things that mattered most to them.

Personality Promotes Sameness vs. Individuality

Personality, according to Habermas, refers to the speaking and acting competences used by members to reach understanding and assert individual identity. As already stated, though Beth insisted that class discussions that allowed students to draw from their personal interests and experiences were most important to her, opportunities provided to students to share their autonomous ideas and perspectives were never witnessed during the week of classroom observations. The closest the students came to expressing their personal thoughts, feelings, or preferences was when they shared their short written essays about the field trip to the art museum. However, even in this instance, how they shared and the content that was shared followed a standardized format and time restrictions that did not allow or encourage students to elaborate personally to any great extent.

The school culture at Beth's school largely encouraged students to conform to specified standards that demanded unchallenged reverence to authoritarian discipline and control. As a consequence, the school employed steering mechanisms to socialize students for passive participation and obedience. This resulted in a personality in which students were largely expected to walk, talk, and act in a uniform way that expressed the values and belief system of the school. In this culture, diversity and individuality was minimized in favor of conforming to a group identity that ignored difference in order to perceive and treat everyone the same. Equal opportunity at Beth's school meant that all

students were accountable for grade-level performance and were therefore expected to learn and develop at the same rate (as promoted by the Florida Sunshine State Standards).

Just as chosen curricula and activities were indicative of the priorities at Beth's school, the elimination of other activities provide additional insights and meanings as well. The familiar elementary school activities that typically allow for student-choice; self-expression, interpersonal, social, emotional and communication skills; and interest such as 'sharing,' 'morning snack,' 'free choice,' or 'recess' were completely absent from Beth's third grade schedule and routine. Recess was completely eliminated in third grade at Beth's school in order to allow for computer lab time with Successmaker. Yet, Beth never expressed any remorse or regret over the absence of recess. Could it be that much like her students whom she insisted earlier, were unable to miss what they have never known, that she too cannot miss recess or other unstructured activities if she herself has never experienced them (and subsequently learned to appreciate them) as an educator?

The pressure to increase test scores within a strict timeline meant that larger increments of time were devoted toward structured, teacher-directed learning and instruction needed to improve the school's level of efficiency (use of time, manpower, and resources) in order to increase productivity (higher test scores). Unstructured, student-centered activities that did not contribute directly toward increasing test scores were evidently considered 'inefficient' or 'unproductive' and were therefore greatly minimized or completely eliminated.

Once again, in stark comparison, Vicki's school community nurtured a democratic learning environment in which all members were respected, valued, and appreciated within the learning process. As illustrated during Vicki's readers and writers workshops, Vicki's students were actively encouraged to engage with one another as communicative actors throughout various reading and writing activities. Reading and writing activities were social events in Vicki's third grade classroom. Her learning environment was filled with organizational and instructional guidelines to inform and facilitate her students' metacognition while speaking, acting, thinking, listening, reading, and writing in a variety of group arrangements.

As Vicki's principal insisted, in the best case scenario in public education, we find school community lifeworlds that maximize partnerships with parents that enable "Parents to help the school educate the child and the school in turn, helps to raise the child." Without parental support, public education is an 'uphill battle' for everyone involved. Unlike Beth's school, Vicki's school community's socioeconomic advantages afforded them the luxury to remain largely faithful to their lifeworld rationale of educating the whole child in ways that nurture and support the child's overall growth and development as lifelong learners and thinkers regardless of learning needs.

As Vicki stated earlier and her views were further supported by her school principal, the greatest problem with the FCAT as a steering media has more to do with how it is currently used in the state of Florida rather than as a test itself. Beth and Vicki agreed, based on their experiences and observations, the pressure to increase FCAT scores have most greatly impacted HOW and WHEN skills and content are taught in

Florida with a potentially wide variance in teaching styles, strategies, and practice used across individual classrooms, schools, and districts. On the other hand, both teachers insisted that the WHAT has remained constant across all third grade classrooms according to the Sunshine State Standards, particularly in reading and math.

The employment of the powerful steering media of standardized tests has effectively served to further drive the mechanism to align standards and curriculum in reading and math in order to satisfy the system rationale to increase teacher and student performance according to FCAT scores. However, as a result of this mechanism, there was also a great disparity between WHAT or more accurately, to WHAT EXTENT social studies, science, and even written language were taught in these two classrooms. As one father from Vicki's school prophetically summarized it, when FCAT is used as a tool to guide and facilitate instruction, learners' growth and development is advanced. However, when the State of Florida chooses to use the FCAT as a gate, it serves not to advance learners but rather, becomes a mechanism that instead, prevents learners from advancing forward (not only in terms of grade-level promotion but in relation to what is actually taught that either advances or halts actual learning).

Culture of Fear

Throughout this study, one emergent theme that was either implied or directly implicated across participants or settings pertained to the notion of 'fear' toward FCAT and mandatory retention. At Vicki's school community, neither Vicki, her school principal, nor fellow third grade teachers alluded to feelings of stress or anxiety toward whether students would do well on the FCAT. Vicki and her colleagues were generally

confident in the quality of instruction provided and subsequent belief that each student would perform in accordance to individual ability.

In stark contrast, Beth, her principal, and fellow teachers all referred to feelings of increased stress and anxiety particularly as time drew nearer to taking the FCAT. The data from various participants suggested the FCAT conjured a full-continuum of emotional response to the test-taking experience, varying from high levels of fear in contrast to varying levels of confidence. While Beth and Vicki's reported responses to FCAT were at opposite ends of the spectrum, both teachers described increased levels of stress and anxiety expressed by parents and students toward passing the FCAT required for fourth grade promotion, regardless of the different lifeworlds of the two school communities.

Students' Own Fears

Any discussion regarding the fear of FCAT must begin with the 'heart of the matter' – the fear of failure among children. As described in Chapter 3, 143 student narratives were completed in nine third grade classes between the two schools in response to the following question, "How are you feeling about next week (February 27-March 3) at school?" This query was designed specifically to elicit whether students were: (a) thinking about taking the FCAT next week and (b) how were they feeling about the FCAT in general? While varying levels of fear were expressed, only 31 students did not express any indication of fear at all.

Out of the 143 student narratives, 87 students (61%) explicitly identified taking the FCAT or 'test' (e.g., "I feel nervous about the FCAT. It might be hard;" "I will feel

nervos about the fcat. But I'll have to do my best"). Another 53 students made general references related to pass/fail or other comments that suggested the FCAT (e.g., "How I am feeling a little excited to past third grade;" "I feel happy because i cannot wait went it is done."). Only three students made general comments that were too vague to definitively relate to the FCAT or pass/fail (i.e., "I feel very good about next week on Monday;" "I would feel tired going to school next week;" "I feel good at school laring about things all day. It is good for me to larn a lot of thing. I can larn mach at school. School is the greatest place for me. I love school School is the funest place").

The most frequently used emotion to describe how students were feeling was "nervous" used by 79 students (55%). Feelings of fear toward taking the FCAT ranged along a full-continuum from "so nervous, very scary, or nervous wreck" at the extreme end of nervousness, stress, and anxiety to the other end of the continuum in which children expressed feelings of confidence such as "confident, not scared, or feel smart." As noted in Chapter 2, research has demonstrated that minority males from the lowest SES quartile rank tended to be disproportionately represented among students retained (Kaplan & Owings, 2002). Yet, the student narratives indicated that regardless of the students' school, SES, gender, current reading level, or race, students experienced a full-continuum of fear toward the FCAT and possible retention (see Table 12).

Table 12

Student Narratives: Full-Continuum of Fear

Student Expressed Level of Fear	Samples of Student Responses
Most Fearful/No Confidence	"I am feeling so scared and nerves [sic]. Help!" "I am feeling so nerves. And may be a little excited. But a lot of scared! Please help me Mrs. ____!" "I am feelling like a nevis rek. Though part of me wonders what it's like. I feel like my world has be terned up side down. It is very scary. The more informashon I get the more I'm skerd. I don't want to take the teast." "I am feeling very nouverves because I am afraid that I won't pass the fcat." "I'm scared! I'm nerves! I don't want to fall agian! I don't want to be the oldest kid in the class!" "I am nurvuse [sic] about it because I do not know if I fale or not and if I do fale my mom is going to ground me for life so I wish I pass F.C.A.T." "I'm scared, afraid, nervous, and I'm afraid I might fail."
Both Fearful and Confident	"I am pretty exited but a little scard ok am a lot scared. I am also curious about what qutiones." "I feel scared but I'm a strait A+ student! What i'm really scared of if i don't pass, maybe the 3rd grade students will lagh at me and 4th graders but i have trust in myself." "I am feeling really nervous about it. One side of me says I won't pass it and one side says I will. I hope I will pass it" "I am feeling very nervous that I may not pass the test. But I am going to try my hardes [sic] to get a 5 and a 6. My teacher tells me not to worry and that makes me feel much better about it." "I feel nervous about the test because I'm scared that I might not pass and I want all the stuff my mom said she was going to get me if I pass."
Most Confident/No Fear	"I am glad about the FCAT. I like to take tests." "I am confident and happy about the tests and F-CAT!" "I feel good and I am going to pass. I feel super because it's the Fcat." "I am going to feel good because I know I can pass the Fcat cause I am smart. And the reading is easy All I got to do is focus and take my time." "I'm feeling that I will do my best. I'm not nervous at all."

The vast majority of students expressed mixed emotions about the FCAT. The concern among parents and educators was whether creating this context of anxiety, stress, and ultimately, fear is helpful or hurtful to young children? Likewise, we must ask whether it is necessary and appropriate to pressure children in this coercive manner in order to raise student achievement, according to test scores.

In a comparison of the beginning and veteran teachers' classes specifically, all 19 students in the Vicki's class and all 18 students in Beth's class completed written narratives in response to taking the FCAT. Students' SES backgrounds in the two classes, like the two schools, was very different. While 66% of Beth's class participated in the free/reduced lunch program, only 16% of Vicki's class participated as well. In spite of the students' socioeconomic differences and how the beginning and veteran teachers responded very differently to the FCAT in terms of learning and instruction within the classroom setting, the incidence of fear among the third graders in each class toward taking the FCAT was very similar and followed a full continuum of fear toward the FCAT (see Table 13).

Table 13

Student Narratives: Full-Continuum of Fear - Beginning and Veteran Teachers' Classes

Student Expressed Level of Fear	Samples of Student Responses
Most Fearful/No Confidence: Beth's Class	"I am pretty exited but a little scard ok am a lot scared. I am also curisous about what qutiones." "I am feeling very nouverves because I am afaied that I won't pass the fcat." "I am fealing nurvic. Because It is the Fcat." "I'm feeling scared and worried next week."
Most Fearful/No Confidence: Vicki's Class	"I feel like I'm going to flunk. I'm bad at multiplication" "Well, I'm feeling a mix of neverc and ancous. This is because of fcat." "Well, I feeling nordficns because when the test come next week...I hope I pass 3rd grades." "I fill like an nevis reck. Like thars a knot in my stumik, mist in wheth butrflis and a frog."
Both Fearful and Confident: Beth's Class	"I feel nevous About the Fcat. And I will try to pass" "Im feeling nervous, because I'm having the FCAT Monday. And I will try to pass the FCAT, and if I pass, my Grandma will get me something for passing." "I feel nervous about next week...but I know I can do it!" "I feel exsided Because I've Been studying for a long time and I hope I'll do good."
Both Fearful and Confident: Vicki's Class	"I fell kined of wored and kined of skared. But I think I ill do good." "I feel calm but kind of nervous. I am studying at home. The Fcat can't be to hard." "Still a little nevous and a little calm because the Fcat is coming." "I know I that I will pass, do good, and only miss aleast 5 questions at the most...When I hear the word FCAT I get a funny feeling inside my stomach. I try hard to make that feeling go away..." "A little nerves about the FCAT. I know I'm going to pass but what if I don't? Thinking about 80 min, of silence makes me shiver."
Most Confident/No Fear: Beth's Class	"How I am feeling a little excited to past third grade." "I feel about next week is not happy because the fcat but I know I will do good on the fcat and I can believe in myself..."
Most Confident/No Fear: Vcki's Class	"I feel calm. I trust Ms. ____ saying that I won't "flunk" the FCAT." "I'm feeling good about the fcat. Because it is not that bad." "I know that we have the Fcat test. but I feel good about it." "I feel freeked out because I'm going to a different room. ...But I'm not freeked out about the FCAT."

Only four students in the veteran teacher's class and only two students in the beginning teacher's class expressed no apparent fear toward taking the FCAT. One student's narrative in the beginning teacher's class was too vague to relate directly toward taking the FCAT, reducing the total number of narratives related to the FCAT in Beth's class by one. This meant that in the veteran teacher's class, 15 out of 19 students (79%) indicated some level of fear toward he FCAT while 15 out of 17 students (88%) in the beginning teacher's class indicated some level of fear toward the FCAT. In addition to describing their feelings about taking the FCAT, some students in the veteran teacher's class also indicated having physical symptoms as well (e.g., "knot in my stomach," "funny feeling in my stomach," "80 minutes of silence makes me shiver").

Fear Knows No Social Class

All of the parents interviewed expressed concerns whether their third grader would pass the FCAT reading needed for promotion to fourth grade. The parent participants at the beginning teacher's school were single-parent moms of daughters. Both mothers indicated that they did not have a particularly positive public school experience. Each felt that teachers did not have high expectations for them as learners and felt that NCLB was attempting to increase achievement for all learners. Like their more affluent counterparts, these parents disagreed with retention based on test scores and felt parents should have the right to decide with their child's school and were not happy about that. Yet, they appeared less stressed and willing to passively accept the decision to retain, relying on the school for direction and support.

However, affluent parents openly expressed distress over the possibility of their sons or daughters being retained. Only one mother, who identified her children as "classic gifted" felt that testing is a 'part of life, and therefore, children will, "Take tests your entire life. Yes, it's important. The more you take them, the more comfortable you are." Although she referred to her third grade daughter as a 'reluctant' reader who reads below grade level, she held her daughter's former private school responsible and was actively prepping her daughter using FCAT Explorer online for the test. This test-prep computer program employs practice reading passages like those found on the FCAT. From this mother's perspective, she boldly insisted, "It's a fact of life. So deal with it.' She was clearly alone in her view of standardized testing in comparison to other parents who participated.

Another father whose son previously attended the same private school was equally concerned about his son passing the FCAT. This father asserted in disbelief, "

> To think he can be held back is absurd to me. Don't even look at math, retention based 100% on reading. How do you look strictly at an 8 yr old – strictly at reading level? That's my problem. This very simplistic way to decide to hold back or not. (Field Notes)

This father was an engineer who excelled in math much like his son. He insisted he was not a reader himself and at his son's age, he couldn't stand to read a book. From his viewpoint, "What happened to teaching to the whole child?" Why should reading be the sole determinant for success?

Like the previous mother, he and his wife relented to using practice comprehension packets at home provided by their son's teacher and tested him every other night weeks leading up to FCAT. Unlike the other mother, he clearly had

misgivings about pressuring his son to pass this test, "As parents, having to stress the emphasis of a test, telling your child, you have to do your best to go on to fourth. I never would have said that a year ago."

As the parents described their fears and concerns regarding the FCAT and retention, they frequently interjected their children's feelings toward taking the test as well. Another mother with a daughter who was a struggling reader said, "This test crushes self-esteems. It punishes children for their differences and effects the parents of struggling learners as well."

A mother who knows parents whose children struggle academically empathized with them and although her daughter does not struggle, her daughter was stressed like many of her peers about taking the FCAT. This mother declared,

> Students are stressed and fear the unknown about a test they have never taken. They're stressing about passing. Self-confidence goes down because of this test. If she failed I would comfort her as much as possible, but she would feel very sad, embarrassed and upset. (Field Notes)

One frustrated mother described the FCAT as a "Monster coming to eat up the kids." Like her daughter's peers, her child was so nervous, constantly talking about the stress and pressure on teachers and students. Similar to other parents, she complained, "All children are unique individuals, but retention ignores that. It wants them all on the same page - pigeon hole into the same peg."

The stress levels that some children experienced made them physically ill, as in the case of the student Beth described in her class who threw up on her test. One parent, who was a pharmacist, shared that her son was sent home during the FCAT math with a headache due to test anxiety. She insisted that her son never experienced migraines

before entering third grade. Symptoms of nausea and migraines began in February one month prior to FCAT. As a pharmacist, she could see the medications that this would lead to for children. From her viewpoint, retention is a devastating experience for young children. She was adamant that the State of Florida needs to, "Get rid of the FCAT! What can I do to get this test changed – I'll do it!"

The one set of parents who participated and were interviewed separately, also described their child's fears about taking the FCAT but with a slightly different perspective than the other parents. These parents opted to retain their daughter when she was in first grade due in part because she was chronologically younger and they felt subsequently, more emotionally immature than her peers. Although their daughter eventually adjusted to being retained, it was a stressful time for their entire family as the father painfully recalled,

> I didn't like the decision to retain her in first grade. It was very traumatic. Fortunately it worked out for her but she felt she 'failed' for a long time. We had to convince her it was age. This was very hard on me and my wife. Probably the 'toughest decision' we've ever had to make. (Field Notes)

Due to the fact that his daughter had already been retained, he was particularly sensitive and fearful of the possibility of forced retention based on the FCAT. He confessed, "I will be honest with you. She was really stressed out. Teacher told her not to worry. She is very bright. It is still very stressful for her!" Based on his daughter's personal experiences with retention he added, "Retention stigma is among kids. They talk about it more because of FCAT and this makes it super stressful for kids and parents alike."

According to his wife, their daughter's expressed fears in response to recent class discussions pertaining to the FCAT were immediate and intense as she recalled,

> A note came home that they are talking about FCAT in class. As it got closer, our daughter worried that all of her class won't be promoted with her. There were big tears. She was exacerbated over it, worried about kids who don't take tests well. Tests don't reflect what they know necessarily. (Field Notes)

Like her husband, she described her daughter's experience with retention as, "Very emotional. She didn't want to go to school." Like the parent views described in Byrnes and Yamamoto's (1986) study on grade level retention, his wife believed that retaining their daughter in first grade was, "A gift of time she needed and has since done fine in school." However, this did not mean that she wanted her daughter to be retained again. She echoed the thoughts of the other father regarding understanding the whole child, as she emphatically argued,

> Third grade is really young to be doing this kind of testing - a lot of pressure. Standardized test don't really reflect what they know. Do they show anything? The whole person? I can't remember stressing over a test, even in college. FCAT is NOT the end-all-be-all! Kids are worried and concerned, fearful of getting even one wrong! (Field Notes)

Like other children who were described as experiencing physical ailment as a result of stress due to the FCAT, she reported that her daughter was stressed so much that she was having difficulties sleeping.

The last mother interviewed, whose son was in fourth grade, insisted on participating in the study. She was determined to share her son's and consequently, her family's odyssey the previous school year while her son was in third grade. Her son was a struggling reader, experiencing particular difficulties with reading comprehension and like the first father interviewed her husband was also an engineer who experienced difficulties learning to read. Like other parents who attempted to prepare their children for the FCAT, this mom reported that they hired a private tutor four to six weeks prior to

FCAT. Their son was a hard worker and earned good grades. However, in spite of their

efforts, her son failed the reading portion of the FCAT. In frustration and disbelief, this

mother explained, "I was a mom who stayed home, read and talked to my children. We're

not divorced. Grandparents are involved in our children's lives. We are college

educated." In spite of the apparent cultural, socioeconomic advantages, their son

struggled to read.

When her son failed the FCAT, she said it felt like, "Us against the State of

Florida." Private tutoring revealed a reading disability and fortunately for her son who

attended summer school he then passed the test (presumably the Stanford-9) needed for

fourth grade promotion. While she could choose to shrug her shoulders and 'check it off

as experience,' instead, she was insistent that no other parent or child should have to

undergo what they were subjected to as a family due to FCAT.

> There was a lot of stress on my son. Lots of crying – telling others he had to go to summer school. It was horrible! As a mother, I was crying ALL the time. We had to rearrange our entire summer plans. (Field Notes)

No matter how "heart-wrenching" it was for her and her husband as parents, she insisted

it was much worse for her son. She declared, "One of the best days EVER was telling

him he PASSED!"

She understood all too well that like other parents at her son's school, she was

"lucky to have the money others don't" to provide options for her son. Like others, her

and her husband had a private school plan in place if their son should happen to fail the

summer exam in order to avoid retention. Unfortunately for low-income families like

those attending Beth's school and at even more poverty-stricken inner-city schools, no options exist for families to counter what has been dictated by the State.

Fear-Filled Lives

In modern society, living in close proximity to others in large metropolitan areas requires individual actors to learn how to live, work, act, talk, collaborate, and cooperate with one another in meaningful and purposeful ways. Stress is common in the adult world in both private and public spheres. While any effort to completely eliminate stress may be a futile attempt, as social actors, communicative action can either construct or avoid stressful contexts. Affluent parents clearly wanted to guard or eliminate their third graders' exposure to stressful contexts such as taking the FCAT that can cause undue fear and stress that they considered neither helpful nor beneficial with the potential for long-term effects such as lowered confidence, self esteem, and self-worth.

Vicki's students wrote poems about familiar stressful events such as competing in sports (see Appendix H), moving (see Appendix I), and even the loss of a loved-one such as a grandparent (as described earlier by Vicki). One student even wrote about test-taking as a stressful experience (see Appendix G) and the pressure of getting the answer correct or inversely, the fear of getting an answer wrong. Like the student who wrote a poem about her grandpa who died of lung cancer, that unfortunate life choice permanently impacted his granddaughter's lifeworld within her private sphere. For many children of poverty, a wide-assortment of life stressors are a frequent, regular occurrence due to the life choices (or lack of choices) made by the key adults in their lives as well.

Unlike Vicki's affluent lifeworld community in which the majority of children begin school with a wealth of enrichment experiences that supported and promoted their learning and development, the inner-city school personnel described inner-city school lifeworlds as communities of great need, similar to Beth's school but to an even greater extent as noted by a guidance counselor at an inner-city school in the same district:

> Our kids don't come from a print rich environment. High income kids have a 30,000 word vocabulary and emergent skills – NOT our kids. Nutrition and exercise another factor – No access. NO major grocery store within walking distance of school. Convenience stores contribute to obesity/ malnutrition. Now punishment for circumstances BEYOND child's control! (Field Notes)

A Pre-K teacher at another inner-city school also reported the same developmental needs among kindergartners at her school, "Homes with bare communication; no alphabet knowledge; and children at inner-city schools are generally left out in the dark by themselves" lacking the kind of parental support found at Vicki's school. A social worker, who has worked in the school district since 1984, provided the following explanation for the lack of parental involvement, including poverty and mobility rates as described at Beth's school but to a much greater extent at inner-city schools over the last 20 years:

> Increases in homeless families have resulted in Florida Healthy Kid Care Program for homeless families and nurse practitioners for physicals at schools. Lots of mobility. More families living on the edge who can't meet monthly obligations. Working minimum of 2-3 jobs and still pushed out of rent. More kids without school supplies. Families under stress! Schools pressure parents who don't see their kids until the weekend - getting home and kids in bed. Parents are unable to provide basic medical needs. Kids tired, unstable – schools and teachers frustrated – creates negativity when parents can't take off from work to come to school. (Field Notes)

According to this social worker, this is a trend or 'cycle of negativity' that begins at the federal level with NCLB, and then trickles down to the state-level with Florida's accountability system, to the school district, and then to the individual schools that pressure the students and families to measure up no matter how the odds are stacked.

Now with the advent of mandatory retention in third grade based on FCAT reading scores, inner-city teachers and school personnel insist that the State of Florida has created just one more source of fear in their students' already fear-filled lives. According to the observations of the Pre-K teacher, children at her school experienced severe, adverse effects to retention, at all grade levels, particularly for struggling learners (as indicated by parents). She passionately exclaimed,

> Retention does irreparable damage for low kids. What do they think - that the IQ will go up? Last couple years, retaining kindergarten students who don't know all letters, sounds, and sight words – ABSURD! Increasing behavior issues for two students retained. They were so angry; lashed out. They threw furniture and were more angry [sic] than ever! Horrible reason for retention! I blame 98.9% on NCLB and FCAT. So frustrating, worrying about a test. Children are so fearful – absolutely mortified! (Field Notes)

The Pre-K teacher's thoughts were also echoed by the guidance counselor:

> Assumption that children are lazy and need a motivator, drives me insane! I know: depressed children and deprived children. Lazy children is a harsh value! Fear as a motivator means counseling kids thru anger and pain. See kids weekly who have been retained. Now we have 11 and 12 year olds in third grade. They're pretty harmed – retained once and twice...(Field Notes)

Like Vicki and many of the parents interviewed, the Pre-K teacher also argued that the current use of the FCAT to make retention decisions was developmentally inappropriate. Based on her 32 years as a former kindergarten teacher, she also understood that subjecting children to standardized tests in the primary grades contradicts what research

tells us about the appropriateness of this practice and the tendency to rank and sort at an age when there is a wide variance in development and learning rates:

> Forcing 5-year-olds to sit still for longer than 15minutes is developmentally inappropriate. The young child's brain doesn't work that way. Everyone is trying to cram every child in Florida into the same box. That attempt is futile. Birth-9 has huge differences in developmental levels and rates. (Field Notes)

Just as Vicki had expressed concern toward an increasing tendency to medicate children believed to be ADD when in fact, it could be a matter of developmentally inappropriate expectations, curricula, and strategies, this kindergarten teacher shared the same concern, suggesting, "Children are so medicated, so drugged their comatose!" Needless to say, in the last couple years, she indicated that on average, five to seven kindergartners out of a class of 20 were retained. From her perspective developmentally, "Every child is being left behind – every single one of them at the hands of a politician who doesn't know them nor understands their needs." In kindergarten, this has translated into the following responses at her school similar to Beth's school:

> Kindergarten teachers taking down centers (blocks, housekeeping); limiting social and communication skills; limiting building experiences and talking about it; less problem solving; and more seatwork. Recess trend is that a lot of schools NOT allowed anymore – NO recess after lunch at a lot of schools. There are developmental repercussions for no recess/outdoor play. All learn same thing at same time and penalize anyone for not knowing...(Field Notes)

Like Vicki, who questioned the trend at her school to encourage kindergartners to begin writing, this Pre-K teacher refused to teach a 90-minute reading block in kindergarten insisting, "It's killing them! No joy anymore in kindergarten!" Tragically, as a consequence of these trends, this teacher left kindergarten after 32 years in protest. She insisted, "Other than when my Mother was dying, this was the saddest time of my life."

Based on her experience, the only 'safe place' left in Florida's inner-city schools where teachers still have the freedom to teach appropriately and children still have the freedom to learn is in Pre-K.

Given her extensive background and experience, she was convinced that Florida's accountability system is, "All ass-backwards. Retention is absolutely the RUINATION of public schools – a downhill spiral for everyone." According to her school's lifeworld, Florida's A+ Plan and mandatory retention have resulted in 'a culture of fear:'

> Fear of our school receiving a bad grade. Fear of not getting a salary increase. Fear in children failing a test. Fear of being retained. There's a lot of fear! That's not what education is about. That's the ANTITHESIS of education! (Field Notes)

By antithesis, she suggested that education should be the opposite of fear. Fear debilitates. Education should ideally be the source of courage that empowers. The guidance counselor agreed as she also described a 'lifeworld of fear' that her students face daily, "Fear of eviction and homelessness; fear of abandonment by parents; fear of drive-by shootings; fear of illness; fear of going to bed hungry; and fear of abuse. Kids are at war!" For these young children who already live in a violent culture of fear, schools provide no escape from fear, as the State of Florida has created one more source of fear in their already fear-filled lives in the form of mandatory retention based on FCAT scores. According to this counselor, there is no escape from fear in the lives of these third graders.

Fear Knows No Boundaries

Although the teachers and staff at Vicki's school gave no indication of personal fear or stress in relation to their students passing the FCAT, this was not to say that they

were completely immune to any form of "fear" at all. The meeting that was arranged with the third grade teachers willing to attend (as described earlier) was not only for recruitment purposes but was needed to convince them of my intentions as a researcher. Again, the general sense among the third grade team at Vicki's school was that they were in the business to teach and children were there to learn. Regardless of how badly they felt for other struggling schools in their district, they largely wanted to be left alone to go about their business of educating future generations of citizens. They were not particularly interested in drawing attention to themselves.

Their school district has also implemented a new program evaluation system in which all school principals were required to visit each classroom with a palm pilot, inputting information that was automatically recorded and sent to the district office. Neither teachers nor principals saw the results or interpretations of the data that was eventually placed in personnel files. The notion of having another individual enter their classroom, record data used later for interpretation beyond their control, had little appeal. As much as these teachers wanted to see FCAT go away, this did not mean that they were eager to participate, risking their own reputation or job security.

As one third-grade teacher shared during the meeting, one mother from her class returned the parent and child participant letters that were sent home, and wrote that neither she nor her daughter would participate in the study. Likewise, she did she want the teacher making any comments or references about her child. This was clearly enough to make this teacher nervous, fearful that she might say or do something that could

potentially anger her parents and come back to haunt her. She therefore chose not to participate.

A fear of potential repercussions for participating in the study was also shared by one of the veteran teachers with the school principal at Beth's school. According to Beth's principal, the teacher approached her later in the week after the interview. He told her that he was concerned as to whether he responded correctly as he described his views and experiences with Florida's high-stakes testing. The principal assured him that the purpose of the study was to explore multiple perspectives to this complex debate surrounding the use of high-stakes testing to increase achievement and performance. With great trepidation, he responded, "I just hope this doesn't get back to the superintendent!"

The fear of "speaking out" was also indicated by participants at inner-city schools. The Pre-K teacher agreed, and out of sheer frustration admitted, "A LOT of teachers are as outraged as I am but don't join FCAR (Florida Coalition for Assessment Reform). They don't speak out. It amazes and dismays me a lot!" The guidance counselor further explained the lack of response by principals in her district as follows:

> Principals are fearful of speaking out. Due to possible repercussions, they feel they cannot speak out to the press as a school employee without approval - only as a private citizen. That's how government builds FEAR through INTIMIDATION. You mucked it up and now just shut up and do as we say. (Field Notes)

She continued, "There's immense pressure on you if your district does not conform or promote FCAT and end social promotion at every grade level." The power media of money is effectively applied in this accountability system to reward a 'culture of

conformity' while punishing schools for failure to comply (withholding funds) by not achieving needed test scores.

A retired principal in the same school district said that in his opinion, the grading of schools in the State of Florida is the "nemesis of public education." He argued, "This system will never be equitable because schools vary so much." According to him, he had grown weary of "fighting the good fight." A fear of the powerful media of law that uses the steering mechanism of lawsuits constrains a principal's ability to meet the needs of individual school communities today.

According to the guidance counselor, the Florida Chancellor of the Department of Education has a worldview perspective that it is 'important to struggle in order to achieve.' The guidance counselor smirked, "That's a life altering message, creating a situation worse than separate but equal!" To further advance this worldview complementary to a culture of fear, the counselor insisted that, "The Manhattan Institute, a think tank funded by Governor Bush's Administration to complete studies to prove the validity of vouchers and retention, has become the 'WEAPON OF MASS DESTRUCTION' needed to prove social promotion is the 'bane of existence' in public education today;" a view that closely coincides with how this research is equally perceived as MASS DECEPTION, by Bracey.

She declared, "In this culture of violence, tests are used as punishment and threat that will somehow motivate, turning schools into prisons." A reading teacher at an inner-city high school that has ranked as an 'F' school for consecutive school years observed that at the secondary level, multiple retentions eventually lead to clinical depression with

students who still could not read. In these instances, she felt that retention translated into 'institutionalized child abuse.'

In spite of the fact that counselors do not attain tenure in her district, meaning she could be let go in a heartbeat, the guidance counselor professed,

> It's a tight rope when speaking your mind and being rebellious. I refuse to reject my role as a child advocate. Anybody who does not speak out on behalf of children participates in the system. If we don't object, we are culpable and we devalue our own professionalism. If I get fined for speaking out – at least it won't be for stupid stuff! It's for the sake of my profession! (Field Notes)

According to the guidance counselor, during the 2004-05 school year 1,116 students in the State of Florida were enrolled for the third time in 3rd grade. Of those students, 154 third graders were from this school district alone. Since 1999, more than 1 million children have been retained in the State of Florida. Unless policies and procedures drastically change, it has been predicted that within the next two years (by 2008), Florida will have the highest dropout rate in the nation among poverty minority kids.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Like the affluent parents of struggling readers at the veteran teacher's school who described their fears toward mandatory retention in Chapter 4, my husband and I also have a daughter who has struggled in reading. As a Pre-K teacher in Florida, I witnessed firsthand our schools' lifeworld response to Florida's A+ Plan for school reform, as described in Chapter 1. At the same time, I also grew increasingly distraught over the rumors that circulated regarding the possibility of mandatory retention in either third or fourth grade based on FCAT reading. As a mother, I too feared for our daughter's emotional welfare, concerned that she could fall victim to future retention mandates.

While we also had the resources available to place our daughter in private education, my husband and I have always been public education advocates. We graduated from public education in the Midwest, valued public education, and wanted our children to participate in public education. According to our lifeworld perspective, unlike the parents interviewed, we did not consider private education as a credible option. In our own final act of defiance as parents, we left Florida and returned to my home state of Iowa, the only remaining state in the nation without state-level standards and more importantly, no retention mandate.

As parents, living in Iowa provided us with the satisfaction of avoiding the punitive consequences of high-stakes testing for both our daughters. As an educator much like the Pre-K teacher who left kindergarten as her own act of defiance, I too refused to participate in a system that ran counter to my own beliefs and perspectives about learners

and teaching practice. However, as a former Florida educator, I could not ignore the subsequent trends that have escalated in Florida since we left (including mandatory retention in third grade and teacher merit pay) and what this could mean in particular for less fortunate students, families, and entire school communities. As a social actor who has lived experiences and subsequent lifeworld perspectives (stock of lifeworldly knowledge) concerning Florida's high-stakes testing as both a parent and educator, I felt increasingly compelled to act in some meaningful, purposeful way.

This qualitative study was designed to reveal important insights and deeper understanding regarding the phenomenon of what high-stakes testing can mean for different learners and teachers and subsequent teaching practice in different lifeworld school communities. Therefore, the research purpose of this study (emphasizing an interpretive approach) focused on the phenomenon of what happened in relation to learners and teaching practice as a beginning and veteran teachers' life histories, stock of lifeworldly knowledge, and school lifeworlds specifically intersected with Florida's high-stakes accountability system.

Of the many insights gained, three overarching themes central to learners and teaching practice emerged: (a) consequences of high-stakes testing followed a continuum of response that meant that the greater the lifeworld needs of the school community (e.g., high mobility rate, low socio-economic status) the greater the response in terms of instructional and curricular accommodations designed to increase FCAT test scores; (b) the greater the colonization of the lifeworld perspective by Florida's accountability system rationale, the greater the likelihood that various social actors experienced fear in

relation to FCAT; and (c) school reform efforts both past and present (including Florida's

high-stakes accountability system) have consistently resulted in less educational

opportunity for those learners who need it the most. Based on these insights

(enlightenment), the practical purpose (according to critical theory) was to then

contemplate the kinds of system rationale, steering media and mechanisms needed to

support teaching practice (emancipation) that can best satisfy the lifeworld rationale to

increase educational opportunities for all learners regardless of need.

A Continuum of Instructional and Curricular Response to FCAT

The aim of theorizing in social research is to give an account of a practice (such

as teaching) that extends beyond the self-understandings of its practitioners. Habermas'

theoretical framework provided the impetus needed to extend, criticize, or challenge the

beginning and veteran teachers' self-understanding of the teaching practice they engaged

in (including their school communities), how they responded to high-stakes testing, and

what this meant for learners and teaching practice.

Habermas insisted that the kind of knowing that is needed to understand the

phenomenon of what happens in the lives of communicative actors must begin with what

actors know of themselves and experience in their world according to their life histories.

By inserting present experience into the flow of lived experience, individual teacher

biographies emerged with each teacher's own stock of lifeworldly knowledge based on

situational experiences.

Likewise, the ideas, people, and events could not be fully understood in this study

apart from the circumstances in which and through which they naturally occurred. The

life experiences and beliefs of teachers, parents, and students together constructed both individual and group identities; guided attitudes, behavior, and action; and contributed content, meaning, and character representative of their school community lifeworld. To take an event or experience out of its context would have invariably resulted in a distortion that would have ultimately changed its meaning or relevance in accordance to its location in time, space, or circumstance from which it occurred. Exploring the phenomenon experienced by the beginning and veteran teacher had to include an understanding of each school's unique lifeworld as it was depicted by the conscious experience of every day life and social action by various communicative actors within each school community.

<u>Differences in Teacher Life Histories</u>

Exploring the life histories of one beginning and one veteran teacher in this study proved essential to understanding how their different lived experiences and subsequent stock of lifeworldly knowledge informed and guided the instructional and curricular decisions they made and what this meant for learners within a high-stakes testing culture. Both the beginning and veteran teachers had taught third grade for three years since Florida's enactment of mandatory retention based on reading scores. The year that the beginning teacher completed her student teaching experience in third grade was also the first year that the third grade retention mandate was implemented statewide.

The veteran teacher's varied life experiences and multiple perspectives (i.e., mother, den mother, school volunteer, preschool teacher, beginning teacher, fifth grade teacher, veteran third grade teacher, and supervising mentor teacher) prior to high-stakes

testing provided her with important insights and understandings different from the

beginning teacher. The beginning teacher's life history was limited to her own lived

experiences as a Florida third grader and as a beginning third grade teacher (and student

teacher) since Florida's mandate to end social promotion based on FCAT reading scores.

This meant that while the veteran teacher's stock of lifeworldly knowledge was shattered,

superseded and integrated with several old identities, perspectives, and experiences into

an ongoing organized whole, the beginning teacher's stock of lifeworldly knowledge

integrated fewer identities, perspectives, and experiences that resulted in a newly

organized whole that was very different from that of the veteran teacher.

Differences in School Community Lifeworlds

An examination of each school's lifeworld community revealed important

differences in relation to the culture, society, and personality of each school's lifeworld.

These differences included: (a) each school's history of academic achievement; (b) the

racial background and socio-economic status of students and families; (c) the mobility

rate of students and families; (d) the level of parental involvement and support; and (e)

student preparedness for learning and formal education. Together, these differences

uniquely guided, informed, and influenced the collective consciousness (lifeworld) of

each school community that, in turn, influenced the individual careers of the two

teachers.

The veteran teacher's school community was predominantly white, had a tradition

of high academic achievement, always ranking as an A+ school (having earned an A+

grade the previous year), comprised of a higher-income population, and active parental

involvement and support. Children started school with a wealth of experiences, information, and skills needed for school success. On the other hand, the beginning teacher's school community had ongoing struggles with academic achievement, did not always earn an A+ school rank, had a larger low-income population, and struggled to engage and maintain parental involvement and support. Children were not as well-prepared to begin their formal education experience. The beginning teacher's school had a large transient population with a high mobility rate that resulted in students and families coming and going throughout the school year. However, this was not a significant problem at the veteran teacher's school where the majority of students enrolled in kindergarten attended her school through fifth grade.

It was within each school lifeworld that the different communicative actors spoke, listened, met, and reciprocally raised claims that what they said and did according to their beliefs, understanding, and experience (stock of lifeworldly knowledge) fit into the world as they encountered it. The communicative action found in the different school lifeworlds demonstrated the practical reasoning, common sense knowledge, and subsequent rationality used by the different social actors as each school acquired and used knowledge to fulfill the school's lifeworld rationale, purpose, and goals for learning and instruction. The communicative action used was representative of each school's lifeworld perspective (and response) to high-stakes testing.

According to the beginning and veteran teachers and both school principals, the lifeworld rationale for public education is to encourage life-long learners through a fully-lived experience. While both school lifeworlds insisted on the use of cooperation,

collaboration, respect, and responsibility among students and staff needed to advance the lifeworld rationale for a fully-lived learning experience, the actual communicative action used to achieve this rational differed markedly between the two school lifeworlds.

The kinds of curricula and teaching practices used by the beginning and veteran teachers at the different school communities differed dramatically as each teacher's life history, subsequent stock of lifeworldly knowledge, and school lifeworlds simultaneously converged with Florida's high-stakes testing culture. Therefore, the consequences for learners at the two schools differed dramatically as well.

Veteran teacher's approach to curriculum and instruction. As a beginning teacher, the veteran teacher indicated that she used a more traditional, direct instruction approach to teaching that was more text-centered, following the curriculum for the sake of the curriculum. She also did not question or challenge her instructional decisions (or decisions made by others) nor did she use educational research to inform her decisions.

However, she now approaches learning and designs teaching practice according to: (a) a student-centered curricula; (b) classroom management dependent on student participation, cooperation, and ownership based on individual learning needs; (c) an inclusive learning community across learning needs and abilities supported by needed specialists within the general education setting; (d) educational research concerning best teaching practice; (e) ongoing authentic assessments; (f) literacy-based approach to language arts completed during readers and writer workshops; and (g) partnerships and collaborations with colleagues that capitalize on teacher strengths and talents needed to meet the needs of all learners. She works equally hard to maintain ongoing

communication needed to actively partner with her students' parents in order to advance her students' learning growth and development.

The veteran teacher felt that Florida's high-stakes testing has had some positive outcomes for learners and instruction in third grade that include: (a) narrowing the achievement gap across racial groups; (b) identifying children at an earlier age for needed intervention; (c) increasing parent and educator awareness of learning needs while raising expectations; and (d) using assessment data to inform and guide instruction. On the other hand, the veteran teacher had many more grave concerns with regard to how the various steering mechanisms combined with FCAT are being used to satisfy the system rationale to increase achievement according to tests scores. Her fears and concerns included: (a) failure to design and use assessments, curricula, teaching practice, and learning expectations that are developmentally appropriate according to individual learning needs at all grade levels; (b) the misdiagnosis of ADD and learning disabilities due to unfair expectations; (c) the use of standardized tests as the sole measurement of learning; (d) the elimination of unstructured play (such as recess) and extra-curricular activities that promote social, emotional, physical as well as language (communication) development in favor of academic tutoring; (e) the use of retention practice as a form of academic intervention; (f) interns' and beginning teachers' overemphasis and focus on test scores at the expense of exploring and developing learning and instructional skills according to research on best practice; and (g) the use of merit pay to increase teacher performance that, in actuality discourages, full-inclusion of struggling learners in general education classrooms.

A democratic lifeworld. The veteran teacher's school principal described the lifeworld community as a culture of partnership between the different community members (i.e., students, parents, teachers, and administrators) needed to increase quality instruction, student achievement, and lifelong learning. This approach to building community was teacher-respected, child-respected, and education-respected. Teachers were empowered as instructional leaders to mentor, guide, and facilitate parent training as well as to foster and contribute to the professional growth and development of their colleagues.

The value of promoting a democratic lifeworld community that encourages and values active participation of various community members is both conducive and consistent with the observations of the veteran teacher's classroom learning environment. The veteran teacher promoted the kind of communicative action (what social actors say and do) that challenged each community member to more than act in behaviorally acceptable ways, but more importantly, to act, talk, and think in meaningful, purposeful, and valuable ways. The communicative activities included turn-taking, multiple perspective-taking, decision-making, cooperating, and collaborating in ways that were mutually respectful while maximizing opportunities to contribute and participate in the construction of new ideas, relationships, and understandings within a social context.

Beginning teacher's approach to curriculum and instruction. The beginning teacher's life history and subsequent stock of lifeworldly knowledge was based solely on her former experiences as a third grader and ongoing experiences as a beginning third grade teacher. Likewise, her experiences as a beginning teacher were restricted to the

spatial-temporal context of high-stakes testing. This limited her subsequent insights and understanding to just these two perspectives in comparison to the veteran teacher.

According to the beginning teacher's lived experiences as a third grader in Florida in comparison to her third grade students today, the beginning teacher felt her third grade experience was essentially the same in terms of the skills, content, and curricula that are taught in third grade today. In spite of the similarities in content, the beginning teacher believed the greatest difference in third grade in Florida past and present has been the instructional timeline for when skills and content are taught and this in turn, directly influences how the curriculum is subsequently taught.

Based on her lived experiences as a former third grader, the beginning teacher believed that her third grade students learned skills and content much earlier in the school year and at a faster pace than when she was in third grade. Although both teachers taught in the same school district and were required to satisfy daily 90-minute instructional blocks in reading and math, the beginning teacher found this arrangement to be more restrictive in the instructional and curricular choices she could make than the veteran teacher.

The beginning teacher did not use project-oriented learning or cooperative learning to the same degree that she experienced herself as a third grader due to the strict instructional timeline for skill completion. Likewise, the beginning teacher found it necessary to minimize the instructional time spent on non-tested subjects such as social studies, science, and written language in favor of the required emphasis on reading and math that were assessed on the FCAT. With fewer instructional options due to time

pressures and restrictions, the beginning teacher relied more on: (a) a text-centered

curricula; (b) teacher-directed classroom management based on a behavioral reward

system; (c) a direct teach, lecture approach to instruction; (d) mini-lessons using a skill-

drill format needed to quickly instruct and review skills and concepts that would be tested

on the FCAT; (e) educational research on strategies designed to increase achievement

according to standardized test scores; and (f) competition that ranked, sorted and

displayed student work according to measured points, scores, and grades earned by

students.

Thorndike, during the Efficiency Movement, advocated for this kind of

standardized achievement using standardized curricula and assessments to increase

educational outcomes according to merit. Test scores as a steering mechanism, when used

to increase uniform achievement, has the greatest negative potential across school

communities with the greatest diversity and socioeconomic disparities (and resulting

disadvantages). The push to increase uniform achievement (as advanced by high-stakes

accountability systems like Florida's A+ Plan) across a widely diverse student population

(like those found at the beginning teacher's school and inner-city schools) meant the

same level of progression had to be achieved regardless of learning rate, style, and needs

of individual learners. Schools with the greatest diversity become the most vulnerable,

forced to ignore differences in favor of pursuing sameness by teaching increasingly to the

perceived "average" (as defined by grade-level skills, concepts, and content) using the

same teaching strategies and materials that may not be developmentally appropriate or

satisfy learning needs.

The beginning teacher's middle-class background and childhood experiences were also very different from her third graders' experiences. Parents of children in her classroom were not as actively supportive or as involved with their children's education as the beginning teacher's own parents were in her education or parents of third graders at the veteran teacher's school. The beginning teacher struggled to maintain ongoing communication and support with her students' parents whose socio-economic status was generally lower, with fewer economic resources available, longer working hours, frequently changing jobs and residences with a higher mobility rate that resulted in multiple school enrollments. The beginning teacher also observed many of the students at her school to be less prepared to begin school with fewer enrichment experiences than when she was in third grade.

An autocratic lifeworld. According to the school principal at the beginning teacher's school, Florida's A+ Plan and third grade retention based on FCAT reading resulted in a data-driven culture for her school community. In this culture, data (particularly test scores) became the powerful media used to inform, guide, and facilitate (drive) learning, instruction, and curriculum development in order to satisfy the system rationale for increasing teacher and student accountability and achievement according to standardized test scores. This resulted in the following steering mechanisms and media: (a) all teachers' serve as reading specialists with the competence and expertise needed to increase reading achievement on FCAT; (b) ongoing assessment of reading problems to guide and facilitate reading intervention (e.g., DIEBELS); (c) use of research (e.g., brain research or action research) to support engaged learning; (d) adopting curriculum such as

Houghton-Mifflin's basal reading series aligned with Florida Sunshine State Standards and FCAT; (e) the elimination of recess to allow for computer lab time with Successmaker (test-prep software aligned with Florida Standards and FCAT); (f) the implementation of Read Naturally to increase fluency scores on the DIEBELS and FCAT; and (g) self-contained third grade classes (SLD and LEP) for instructional purposes (meritocratic utilitarian selection).

The teachers and school administrators at the beginning teacher's school were the decision-makers who determined (controlled) and prescribed the appropriate conduct and desired communicative action required for successful student participation. Observable behaviors were emphasized at this school and used to define communicative action including how the social actor is to conduct himself while walking in the hall, how to stand in line, and how to ask questions and participate in class discussion. Like some of the teachers at her school, the beginning teacher identified her approach to teaching and classroom management as, 'old school.' This meant that as the adult (authoritarian) it was her responsibility to establish the classroom rules and expectations for student participation and to model the correct conduct to be used at all times.

The physical arrangement of her classroom environment was designed so that the teacher could elicit and direct communicative action at all times. The beginning teacher frequently interrupted instruction and class discussions to redirect student behavior. Like the veteran teacher, the beginning teacher wanted her students to act cooperatively, collaboratively, respectfully and responsibly but as passive, compliant social actors whose communicative action was completely controlled and directed by the teacher.

Increased Colonization Corresponded with Increased Fear in Relation to FCAT

A pattern of fear toward mandatory retention also emerged among parents and students across race and socioeconomic status. The beginning and veteran teachers and their respective lifeworld communities suggested that schools with the greatest struggles academically and socio-economically appeared to be the most vulnerable for colonization (subvert the lifeworld rationale of providing a fully-lived learning experience for all students with the system rationale to increase academic achievement based on test scores). Therefore, Florida's subsequent punitive consequences were a direct result of the meritocratic utilitarian selection of schools by grade performance (D and F schools) and for learners (who were retained up to three consecutive years in third grade) that demoralized entire lifeworld communities.

Even within the culture of partnership promoted at the veteran teacher's school that emphasized teaching to the whole child for lifelong learning, this learning atmosphere could not protect or immunize affluent parents and students completely from the fear of retention based on FCAT reading. This was particularly true for struggling learners and their parents. As one mother described the FCAT experience, it's like a "Monster coming to eat up the kids."

Third graders at both schools experienced physical symptoms that included migraines, nausea, vomiting, and difficulties sleeping attributed to test anxiety. Likewise, students' narratives at the two elementary schools revealed feelings of fear toward FCAT ranging from "so nervous, very scary, or nervous wreck" to the other end of the continuum in which children expressed feelings of "confident, not scared, or feel smart."

While varying levels of fear were expressed, only 31 out of 143 students (22%) did not express any indication of fear at all. At the extreme level of fear experienced, one student declared, "I'm scared! I'm nerves! I don't want to fall agian! I don't want to be the oldest kid in the class!"

Compelling testimony in relation to an emerging culture of fear was also provided by inner-city educators and staff. According to a guidance counselor at an inner-city school, children who attend her school already live in a violent culture of fear in their private (lives) spheres in which they are fearful of: (a) eviction and homelessness; (b) abandonment by parents; (c) drive-by shootings; (d) illness; (e) going to bed hungry; and (f) various forms of abuse. She exclaimed, "Kids are at war!"

This guidance counselor reported that she counseled retained third graders who were 11 and 12 years old on a weekly basis. She insisted that multiple retentions do serious harm, causing third graders at her school to be 'anxious beyond anxious.' For these young children, the State of Florida has created one more source of fear in their already fear-filled lives in the form of mandatory retention based on FCAT scores. According to this counselor, there was no longer any escape from fear (in public or private spheres) in the lives of these third graders.

A preschool teacher also described varying sources of fear among different social actors at her lifeworld school community as a result of the punitive use of FCAT as a steering mechanism based on meritocratic assumptions that included: (a) educators' fear of school failure according to a D or F performance grade; (b) teachers' fear of not getting a salary increase; and (c) students' fear of failing a test and subsequent in-grade

retention. She declared, "There's a lot of fear! That's not what education is about. That's the ANTITHESIS of education!" Furthermore, she witnessed other kindergarten teachers making instructional and curricular accommodations that she viewed as developmentally inappropriate that included: (a) eliminating developmental centers (blocks, housekeeping); (b) minimizing social and communication skills; (c) limiting building experiences and talking about it; (d) less problem solving; (e) more seatwork and (f) eliminating recess after lunch (at a lot of schools). She argued that all of these decisions held developmental repercussions in the growth and development of young children.

School Reform Efforts have Failed to Increase Opportunity for All Learners

In the course of social evolution, Habermas (1987) noted that modern society, as an entity, becomes differentiated as both a lifeworld and system in response to increasing demands for economic markets within a capitalist society. The lifeworld represents the normative consensus of beliefs and values of any social group expressed and interpreted by actors through communicative action. As the development of modern economies emerged, the need for systems with steering capacities that could regulate and manage the new economies resulted.

Habermas identified the system as the social mechanisms that operate according to instrumental, functional reasoning needed to achieve specific goals and outcomes such as school mandates, policies, and procedures (according to Weber's theory of rationalization). As noted earlier, in contrast to the lifeworld, systems tend to be highly rationalized and associated with social organizations that are comprised of management designs and protocols, strategic and tactical actions, policies and procedures, as well as

efficiency and accountability assurances. Habermas further speculated that when media-controlled subsystems of the economy and the state intervene with monetary and bureaucratic means in the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld, a colonization of the lifeworld can result. In this colonization of the lifeworld, systems are no longer designed to support and advance but instead, subvert the lifeworld beliefs, values, or traditions of the institution or organization.

In order to gain deeper insights and understanding in relation to what Florida's high-stakes accountability system can potentially mean for learners and teaching practice, Habermas' (1987) theory of communicative action was used as the theoretical framework to examine and analyze: (a) the implications of historical school reform movements in America in relation to the Standards Movement; (b) the phenomenon of what happened as the life histories of one beginning and one veteran third grade teachers intersected Florida's high-stakes accountability system at demographically different school (lifeworld) communities; (c) how each teacher's subsequent stock of lifeworldly knowledge intersected with their school's lifeworld and determined their response to high-stakes testing; and (d) how the two school lifeworlds used communicative action to reproduce the school culture (at the classroom level), socialize students and teachers, and influence personality competences employed to reach understanding, achieve goals, and assert individual autonomy.

A review of the Efficiency Movement, Equity Movement, and Excellence Movement in relation to the current Standards Movement using Habermas' (1987) theory of communicative action examined the social practice of public education within each

school reform movement according to: (a) the system rationale, media, and mechanisms employed; (b) the possible colonization of the lifeworld rationale for public education; and (c) the consequences for learners and teaching practice. This analysis revealed that within each school reform effort, past and present: (a) the functional paradigm has consistently dominated the system rationale (and subsequent colonization of the lifeworld rationale) for public education based on meritocracy; (b) scientifically-based standardized tests have been employed as the powerful steering media used to support and advance the functional paradigm through meritocratic utilitarian selection mechanisms; and (c) subsequent learning opportunities and eventual economic rewards have been distributed in accordance (commensurate) to students' assumed merit (ability). Although the intent for selection may arguably vary from an exclusive meritocratic perspective to a liberal egalitarian perspective of inclusive meritocracy (like NCLB, 2001) the outcome of distributing educational and economic opportunity commensurate with ability remains the same.

The functional paradigm, based on meritocratic beliefs and assumptions about learning and instruction, is the same ideological foundation underlying Florida's high-stakes accountability system (rationale and steering mechanisms) designed to increase teacher and student performance and achievement according to FCAT scores. The State of Florida has effectively used the power media of: (a) law (Florida's A+ Plan, mandatory retention statute [§1012.225], and graduation requirements), (b) money (incentive programs) and (c) "scientific" measurements (FCAT scores) to define, steer,

and drive the system rationale to increase teacher and student achievement and accountability according on FCAT scores.

Florida's accountability system rationale relies on the same scientific assumptions that uniform measures can be developed and applied in order to substantiate direct evidence of student learning, teacher effectiveness, and school quality. As the defining scientific measurement for achievement, FCAT reading and math scores are currently used in Florida to justify meritocratic utilitarian selection that ranks and sorts: (a) schools according to performance grading; (b) students according to retention or promotion; (c) high school students for graduation; and (d) teachers according to student achievement. The power media of money is subsequently distributed by the State in the form of: (a) monetary rewards for schools, (b) opportunity grants (vouchers) for students (families) at D and F schools used to attend other public schools, and (c) merit pay for teachers. This distribution is intended to further support and ensure the implementation of the steering mechanisms needed to satisfy the system rationale to increase achievement and accountability according to test scores.

Steering mechanisms used to offset rather than resolve SES disparities. The beginning teacher explained that to offset the negative consequences of transient populations in Florida, a steering mechanism was created in which student FCAT scores were assigned to individual schools according to the date of enrollment. As an educator at a school with a high mobility rate among the student population, it was logical that she would want her teaching performance to be based on the students whom she had taught from the beginning of the school year. Any transferred students' test scores after the

enrollment date were calculated for the school in which the student was first enrolled. Unfortunately, the beginning teacher suggested that teachers might view students differently. According to the beginning teacher, time spent on improving academic achievement of students who continued to enroll at her school was viewed by teachers as time well spent. On the other hand, time spent on students with high mobility rates was frustrating to teachers who in turn, felt it was largely wasted time and effort on students who will only leave to attend another school. This creates a scenario based on enrollment in which students may be prioritized according to whose test scores count for the school that they currently attend while potentially minimizing the academic priority of students whose test scores will not count, thereby leaving this disadvantaged group even further behind.

Habermas (1987) would interpret this policy or bureaucratic steering mechanism as an expression of juridification, that is, "a tendency toward an increase in formal law observed in modern society" (p. 357). Habermas described four global waves of juridification, identifying the last (current) stage in modern society as the "democratic welfare state." In modern society today, the juridification of social situation definitions has introduced an "if-then structure of conditional law" in matters of economic and social distribution that is foreign or detached from social relations, social causes, dependencies, or needs. This policy was not designed to address or resolve the socio-economic origins of mobility among low-income families, but instead, disconnects this situation from the lifeworld context in order to deal with the problem administratively.

This steering mechanism was not designed to support or address the specific needs of transient populations by resolving social inequities. Instead, it is a familiar mechanism found in welfare-state mass democracy created for the purpose of pacifying class inequities by subduing antagonism through administrative means that gives the appearance of fairness. While the beginning teacher's school principal believed that test data can be used in productive ways to increase accountability and achievement, she also warned of the tendency to view children not as whole individuals, but as "numbers" to be controlled and manipulated for administrative purposes.

The preschool teacher, guidance counselor, and other professionals at inner-city schools were all veterans who have worked in the school district for more than 20 years. They described the same socio-economic trends over the past 20 years that were witnessed by veteran teachers at the beginning teacher's school. From their perspective, the number one problem facing Florida schools is no longer race-related but is now exclusively income-related.

Colonization of the lifeworld by the system rationale. As previously described, both school principals insisted that the lifeworld rationale for public education is to increase learning opportunities for lifelong learning for all learners regardless of need (ability). Yet, the instructional and curricular decisions made by the beginning and veteran teacher and further supported by the communicative action within each school lifeworld were very different. Academic achievement is a largely accepted outcome for public education. However, an emphasis placed on one limited measure of this objective causes a serious distortion and disconnection from the lifeworld rationale of educating the

whole child through a fully-lived experience toward the system rationale of increased achievement according to test scores as the newly colonized lifeworld rationale for education. These hyper-rational steering systems press social actors to internalize the values of the test and the authority of the state.

Again, the veteran teacher's school had a tradition of academic achievement and had always ranked as an A+ school. With parental and community support, this school was not forced to make the kinds of academic accommodations that struggling schools like the beginning teacher's school has made. The veteran teacher and other third grade teachers at her school insisted that they were in the business to teach and students attended their school to learn. Based on her experiences, the veteran teacher believed that as long as teachers teach children what they really need, teach them the skills, and instill in learners the joy of reading, writing, and math, students will achieve and perform as needed on standardized tests.

The beginning teacher, who taught at a lower-income school that struggled academically according to test scores and had a large mobility rate in their student enrollment, experienced much greater pressure to increase her student test scores. As a beginning teacher, her stock of lifeworldly knowledge was very different from that of the veteran teacher and her entire teaching experience was limited to the realm of high-stakes testing.

As an educator who was largely in the early stages of her professional development in terms of knowledge, skills, talents, expertise, and philosophy about learners, instruction, content, and management, she had yet to fully develop her ongoing

beliefs and lifeworld view of education. This may suggest that as a beginning teacher, she was far more vulnerable to having her beliefs and worldviews colonized by the system rationale than veteran teachers. In addition to the curricular and instructional accommodations that the beginning teacher made, other evidence that the beginning teacher's lifeworld rationale had been colonized by the system rationale included her belief that: (a) what gets tested gets taught; (b) the FCAT determines the curricular emphasis for each grade level; (c) academic achievement is equal to high test scores; (d) increased test scores were indicative of teacher performance (effective curriculum and instruction); and (e) extrinsic rewards in the form of points, test scores, or grades motivate student learning and achievement.

Tragically, the beginning teacher admitted that while teachers were well aware of the compromises made instructionally, students, on the other hand, cannot miss content, skills, strategies, or learning activities that they have never had. In other words, they can't miss what they don't know or have never experienced. Students' lack of engagement and misbehavior (perceived off-task behavior) testify to feelings of dissatisfaction, boredom, frustration, and stress toward learning and instruction.

The inner-city veteran teachers, unlike the beginning teacher, understood the colonization of their schools' lifeworlds by Florida's high-stakes accountability system rationale to increase achievement and accountability based on FCAT scores. They were willing and eager to stand up in open defiance of the trends experienced at their schools. In an act of public protest, the preschool teacher interviewed left after 32 years teaching kindergarten, refusing to compromise her beliefs about learners and teaching practice.

She now teaches pre-k in order to have the "freedom to teach" and in order for her students to "have the freedom to learn" in developmentally appropriate ways without the pressure of FCAT.

As noted in Chapter 4, the guidance counselor reported that 1,116 students were enrolled for the third time in third grade during the 2004-05 school year. Of those students, 154 third graders were from this school district alone. More than 1 million children have been retained in the State of Florida since 1999. According to the data in this study, children from lower SES backgrounds with high mobility rates are most likely to be retained. Unless state policies and procedures drastically change to counter these trends, by 2008, the State of Florida will have the highest dropout rate in the nation among poverty minority kids.

<p align="center">Recommendations</p>

This study, in the final analysis, contemplated whether Florida's high-stakes accountability system specifically: (a) colonized the lifeworld rationale of one beginning and one veteran teacher and their different lifeworld communities using high-stakes steering media and mechanisms; (b) encouraged teachers and schools to subsequently design and implement teaching practice and curricula to satisfy the system rationale to increase achievement according to standardized test scores; and (c) enabled and advanced the reproduction of a "culture of fear" for various lifeworld community members in relation to the level and extent that colonization took place. The new insights gained from this examination (enlightenment), as noted earlier by Peterson (1989), can then be used to

contemplate the conditions that are needed to improve instruction in such a way that will

benefit all learners (emancipation), including those who struggle academically.

According to the beginning and veteran teacher, their school principals, other

third-grade teachers as well as inner-city school educators and personnel who participated

in this study, the lifeworld rationale for public education is to increase access to learning

opportunities needed for lifelong learning for all learners regardless of need (presumed

ability). To support and advance this rationale for public schools, policies and procedures

(system rationale, steering mechanisms, and media) must then be designed and

implemented in ways that will make that vision possible.

Goodlad (1999) recommends shifting the focus for school change from "systemic

reform" to "school renewal." Instead of focusing almost exclusively on measuring and

evaluating goals, methods, and outcomes in education (central to state-level

accountability systems like Florida's A+ Plan), "school renewal" places greater emphasis

on the people (the social actors) in and around schools (community lifeworlds) and

needed improvements in practice and collaborative mechanisms necessary to better their

individual schools (from a lifeworld perspective). Noddings (1999) agrees, adding that

renewal must equally emphasize a democratic education that cultivates knowledge,

virtues, and skills (needed to further achieve the lifeworld rationale to increase learning

opportunities and experiences for all learners regardless of need). To achieve this kind of

school renewal, the data from this study not only revealed the obvious need to abandon

the current punitive steering mechanisms based on meritocratic utilitarian selection

central to Florida's A+ Plan accountability system, but further suggests various school

initiatives needed to improve the professionalism of education, increase partnerships, and the use of a broad spectrum of educational research that provides multiple perspectives for the many issues facing public schools today.

Increase Partnerships

Rather than creating mechanisms of punishment such as in-grade retention and performance grading of schools based on standardized test scores that this study has shown to invariably place the greatest burden on low-income schools with high mobility rates, states should instead, advance incentives that encourage and support parental involvement and volunteerism. Florida legislators and school district administrators need to recognize schools that have created effective democratic learning communities like the veteran teacher's school in which critical deliberation and reflection were actively encouraged among the different social actors (administrators, teachers, parents, and students) and utilize these school administrators, teachers and personnel as educational leaders who can guide, facilitate, and advance the professional growth and development of colleagues at other schools. Policies (steering mechanisms) must then be designed to advance the kind of parent training, in-house staff development, and partnerships with higher education, as described by the veteran teacher's principal, needed to ensure a democratic learning community in which all members are valued and participation is maximized.

Increase Teacher Practicum Experience

This study revealed that the beginning teacher's struggles to grow and develop her skills and expertise in the areas of written language and math instruction were consistent

with the veteran teacher's own experiences working with interns as they attempted to develop their skills in math instruction as well. This relationship suggests that teacher preparation, practicum, and teaching experiences must assign beginning teachers and interns to a variety of educational settings that are conducive to risk-taking and decision-making processes essential to the design and implementation of curriculum and instruction according to current educational research on best teaching practice.

In the area of written language, for example, the beginning teacher described how her mentor teacher modeled written instruction using a largely traditional, direct-teach approach to expository writing that provided a specific format for learners to explicitly follow. The veteran teacher, on the hand, used a constructivist approach to writing poetry that was student-centered according to individual learner's interests; allowed for error-informed experimentation as students played with wording, used descriptive adjectives, and attempted different writing styles; and brainstormed, composed, and edited their writing in a variety of instructional groups based on mutual respect and cooperation (thus satisfying the requirements for a constructivist approach to learning according to DeVries, et al, 2002). In order for beginning teachers and interns to learn and understand different philosophical approaches (and assumptions) to learning and teaching practice, they must be provided with different learning opportunities and experiences as they concurrently develop and construct their own philosophical beliefs, professional skills and expertise (their ongoing stock of lifeworldly knowledge).

While the veteran teacher at the affluent school described her involvement with many teacher interns from a local Florida university, there was no reference or evidence

that interns were actively placed at the beginning teacher's school. Beginning teachers and interns require teaching experience in a variety of placements with varying demographics (lifeworlds) and teaching styles and strategies (communicative action) that best serve to advance a democratic learning environment in which learners are treated as respected, engaged participants rather than as passive, compliant spectators. Likewise, teacher education programs at higher education institutions must advocate for the placement of teachers in a variety of lifeworld school communities, not just schools that may advance the same philosophical beliefs of the teacher education program. Interns have the potential to serve as "goodwill ambassadors" who can bring current research on best practice into school communities.

Mentor teachers, like the veteran teacher and the mentor teacher (described by the beginning teacher) need to possess the skills and expertise required to democratically partner and collaborate with beginning teachers and interns in ways that are mutually respectful. Likewise, this study demonstrated the need for mentor teachers to be supportive and possess the skills, knowledge, and expertise needed to guide and facilitate the novice teacher's professional growth and development in various academic subjects according to educational research that promotes developmentally appropriate curriculum and instruction. For example, while the beginning teacher's mentor exclusively used a traditional direct-teach approach to written language, the veteran teacher was learning to explore less conventional approaches to writing that allowed for greater creativity and exploration through poetry within a writing community.

The beginning teacher's continued struggles to increase her own instructional mastery and expertise in math and written language (as noted on her professional improvement plan) in this study further demonstrated the need to formally continue teacher mentorship for beginning teachers beyond their first year of teaching. Therefore, district-level teacher mentor programs should operate longer than one year to maximize the beginning teacher's professional growth and development. Mentorship programs between school administrators and entire school communities are needed to allow for professional communication and collaboration that utilizes individual talents, skills, and expertise among colleagues as witnessed at the veteran teacher's school. Ideally, mentorship programs should encourage educators to spend time observing, collaborating, and supporting the professional growth, development, and teaching efforts of their colleagues within school communities and at other schools as well.

Encourage the Use of Educational Research to Inform Teaching Practice

To further support collaborations among school professionals at different school lifeworlds (like the two diverse elementary schools in this study) as well as increasing partnerships with higher education faculty, increased funding for research opportunities is needed. The different instructional choices made by the veteran and beginning teachers in this study demonstrated the need to understand and implement best teaching practice that can satisfy the lifeworld rationale to increase educational learning opportunities for all learners regardless of need (e.g., reader's workshop, writer's workshop, integrating curriculum; cooperative learning, project learning, class meetings).

Likewise, this study revealed the academic advantages of inclusive practices (such as differentiated instruction) coordinated with needed supports (including specialists and assistive technology) as demonstrated by the itinerate resource teacher who collaborated with the veteran teacher to meet the individual needs of learners within an inclusive setting. This arrangement maximized individual learner's access to the third grade curriculum and skills required for student participation in learning and community membership.

Equally important is the need to employ research that informs developmentally appropriate approaches to learning and development that ensures all learners the basic right to a "well-balanced school day" that includes a "healthy dose" of unstructured play during outdoor recess. The beginning teacher and other veteran third grade teachers at her school as well as the inner-city Pre-K teacher and guidance counselor all commented on the increasing trends to medicate "restless" children as well the guidance counselor's explicit concerns regarding increased obesity among inner-city students.

According to the research, Jarrett (2002) found that people of all ages across different careers consider breaks as essential for job satisfaction and alertness. Chinese, Taiwanese, and Japanese children have an eight-hour school day that includes frequent recess, long lunch periods, and after school activities. Asian elementary schools appear to strive for a balance among academic curriculum, play, social interaction, and extracurricular activities (Pellegrini & Bjorklund, 1996; Stevenson, 1992). In a study by Toppino, Kasserman, and Mracek (1991), student recall improved when learning was spaced rather than presented all at once. While both school principals referred to the need

to employ brain research to inform and guide instructional and curriculum decisions, which research is used (or neglected) directly impacts the decisions that are made. For example, Jensen's (1998) review of brain research has shown that attention requires periodic novelty, that the brain needs downtime to recycle chemicals crucial for long-term memory formation, and that attention involves 90- to 110-minute cyclical patterns throughout the day, having strong implications for learning and instruction. Likewise, Healy (1998) found that physical activity fuels the brain with a better supply of blood and provides brain cells with a healthier supply of natural substances needed for brain growth in young children and increase the number of connections between neurons.

In fact, experimental studies have shown that elementary school children become progressively inattentive when recess is delayed, and the longer the confinement, the more restless they become, resulting in more active play when recess occurs (e.g., Pellegrini & Davis, 1993; Pellegrini, Huberty, & Jones, 1995). Furthermore, Jarrett, Maxwell, Dickerson, Hoge, Davies, and Yetley (1998) found that fourth graders were more on-task and less fidgety in the classroom on days when they had recess, and children labeled as "hyperactive" were identified among the children who benefited the most!

In this study, one veteran teacher at the beginning teacher's school also reported that seven out of eighteen students (39%) in his class were on some form of medication. Was this purely coincidental or is there a potential relationship between the incidence of students medicated and the elimination of recess to increase academic instruction in third grade at the beginning teacher's school?

Is it any great surprise that a meta-analysis of nearly 200 studies on the effect of exercise on cognitive functioning completed by Etnier, Salazar, Landers, Petruzzello, Han, & Nowell (1997) suggested that physical activity supports learning? The social benefits of recess and play have been well documented and include the following: sharing folk culture, making choices, and development of thought and reasoning (such as creating rules for play) in social settings (Bishop & Curtis, 2001; DeVries, 1998).

Research cited by Waite-Stupiansky and Findlay (2001) indicates that physical inactivity poses one of the greatest health risks for children, as seen in the tripling of childhood obesity since 1970 (a trend that the guidance counselor at the inner city school in this study has also witnessed in recent years), in addition to increases in other health problems such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol. The National Association for Sport and Physical Education and the Council on Physical Education for Children (2001) both assert that physical education is NO substitute for recess. PE provides a sequential instructional program for physical activity. Recess, on the other hand, satisfies the need for unstructured playtime that allows children to make choices and develop rules for play.

The 1989 NAESP (National Association of Elementary School Principals) surveyed superintendents and discovered that 90% of school districts had at least one recess period during the day. Tragically, the American Association for the Child's Right to Play (IPA/USA) reported that many school systems have since abolished recess (as cited in Pellegrini, 1995). With increased national and state-level pressure like Florida's A+ Plan and third grade mandatory retention for increased accountability and achievement, according to the IPA, nearly 40% of the nation's 16,000 school districts

have either modified, deleted, or are considering deleting recess from the daily elementary school schedule (cited by the National Association of Early Childhood specialists in State Departments of Education, 2001). At a time when policy makers and administrators are concerned with increasing performance in the "basics" according to standardized test scores, research indicates that policy makers should be seeking ways to guarantee children full access to unstructured activities and settings such as recess, NOT minimize or eliminate these opportunities that are essential to cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Equal Opportunity Requires Equal Resources

The lifeworld rationale to increase learning opportunity for all learners regardless of need cannot be achieved without equal access to state of the art technology. It is no longer acceptable to find the kinds of disparities in resources that exist among the different elementary schools within the same school districts in Florida. Legislating social equality may be beyond the scope of public education, ensuring that all schools have equal access to information, qualified professionals, and resources is not.

In this study for example, only one computer was available for students to use in the beginning teacher's third grade classroom yet there was a computer lab that contained four to five computers for students to use in the veteran teacher's third grade classroom. This meant that while the beginning teacher's students were largely limited to using the class computer for the Accelerated Reading Program, the veteran teacher's students used the computers for typing final written products to put in their writer workshop folders and to access the internet for research reports (such as the science unit on birds). Therefore, a

commitment must be made to establishing quality education that increases access to information and learning opportunities for all learners as the standard rather than the exception. Likewise, the effective employment of technology by educators equally demands adequate professional development on how to effectively integrate technology with curriculum and instruction to further satisfy the needs of all learners (Staples, Pugach, & Himes, 2005).

Social Reciprocity is the Golden Rule

To achieve these goals and outcomes for public education, parents and educators alike must embrace a belief system that Brantlinger (2003) referred to as the 'ethics of social reciprocity' or otherwise known traditionally as the "golden rule" that requires all social actors to "see others as being as valuable as self and in which one's actions toward others are consistent with the way one wants to be treated" (p. 193). As a counter approach to the traditional hierarchical ranking and resource distribution schemes based on meritocracy that dominates Florida's high-stakes accountability system, social reciprocity appeals to the need to increase democracy (needed for lifelong learning) and participation (Barber, 1984; Harvey, 1996; Young, 2000). Maybe then, as Greene (1993) noted, Dewey's vision of schools as an inclusive "Great Community" or Lester Frank Ward's vision for increased access to knowledge through universal education needed to achieve equality for all classes, can finally be realized.

Ultimately, this study reminds us as social actors that the lifeworld as we know it is essentially an "adult world" constructed, manipulated, managed, maintained, and controlled by adults in both public and private spheres. Children are the most vulnerable

and susceptible social actors who either reap the social benefits or endure the punitive consequences that result from the choices adults make. Regardless of the intentions and motives that have been used to promote Florida's A+ Plan, third grade retention mandate, and teacher merit pay, this study has revealed a full-continuum of negative consequences for learners and teaching practice that can result with the immersion of the neediest lifeworld school communities into a "culture of fear" from which there is no escape, particularly for the children involved. Rawls (1971) argues that from the perspective of political theory of justice, equity for all social actors requires more than fair treatment of people. Equity for all learners can only be achieved when protective safeguards such as the steering mechanisms (policies and procedures) recommended here are employed for the betterment of all our community members, including our lowest income minority children and struggling learners.

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APPENDIX A

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

(Based on October Enrollment for 2005-06 School Year)

	Elementary School #1			Elementary School #2		
Groups	# Female	# Male	School %	# Female	# Male	School %
White	141	126	40.6	289	283	81.4
Black	101	109	31.9	41	41	11.7
Hispanic	54	70	18.8	17	14	4.4
Asian	5	6	1.7	3	5	1.1
Am Indian						
Multiracial	18	28	7.0	6	4	1.4
Disabled	21	44	9.9	44	63	15.2
Econ. Dis.	196	217	62.8	55	45	14.2
LEP	49	49	14.9	18	14	4.6
Migrant						
Female	319		48.5	356		50.6
Male		339	51.5		347	49.4
Total	658		100	703		100

APPENDIX B

ELEMENTARY EDUCATOR QUESTIONNAIRE EXAMPLE

Please complete the following information. Your participation is voluntary and respondent anonymity is guaranteed.

NAME OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL:_____

TEACHER INFORMATION:
What is your gender? ____ *Female* ____ *Male*

Mark the appropriate age range for your age: ____ 21-30 ____ 31-40 ____ 61+

____ 41-50 ____ 51-60

Mark ALL of the following categories that best describe you:
____ African American
____ American Indian
____ Asian
____ White
____ Pacific Islander
____ Hispanic
____ Other, please specify _____

College Degrees: ____ BA/BS   Area(s): _____

____ MA/MS   Area(s): _____

____ Ph.D/Ed.D Area(s): _____

____ Other   Area(s): _____

Grade level taught during the 2004-05 school year: _____
Other grades taught_____
Total years of experience in current grade level assignment_____
Total years of experience teaching at current school_____
Total years of experience as an educator_____
Are you Florida certified to teach at the third-grade level?____ Yes ____ No

APPENDIX C

PRIMARY TEACHER'S BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Beginning Teacher (Beth)	Veteran Teacher (Vicki)
Sex: Female	Sex: Female
Race: African American	Race: White
Age: Early 20s	Age: 50s
Schooling: Attended Florida public schools and university	Schooling: Attended Florida public schools and university
Marital Status: Single (Married in April, the week during classroom observations)	Marital Status: Married
Children: None	Children: Yes (grown, not living at home)
College Degree(s): BS: Elementary Education	College Degree(s): BS: Liberal Studies/Health Science MS: Elementary Education
Certified to Teach 3rd Grade in Florida: Yes	Certified to Teach Third Grade in Florida: Yes
Teaching Experience: Years Teaching 3rd Grade: 3 years (including current school year) Total Years Teaching: 3 years Other Grades Taught: None	Teaching Experience: Years Teaching 3rd Grade: 3 years (including current school year) Total Years Teaching: 9 years Other Grades Taught: 5th grade and Preschool
Taught in Other States: No	Taught in Other States: No
Related Experience: None noted	Related Experience: Boy Scout Den Mother School Volunteer

APPENDIX D

INVENTORY OF OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS FOR TEACHER INTERVIEWS

Unfortunately, I am only able to spend a week with you during this visit to your school community. What would you most want me to notice about your teaching?
Walk me through what you would want me to notice. What would you most want me to notice about your students and their learning?

What would you most want me to notice about your classroom?
What about that is especially significant that you would want me to notice and remember about it?
Do you think your answer is the same now as it would have been three years ago? Five years ago? When you first started teaching?

Do you think that if I had asked this question when you were in school studying to be a teacher your answer would have been the same, as you thought ahead to when you actually would be in a classroom?
Did you accomplish your targeted student learning goals?
What did you do as a teacher?
What did the students do?
Is there anything you would do differently? Anything you would change?

Is this what you thought teaching and learning would be like when you first started teaching? Is there anything you would like to change?
Do these views compliment and support your own teaching philosophy about learners and learning?
Have your beliefs about learning changed from three years ago? Five years ago? When you first started teaching?

What do you like most about teaching at the third-grade level? What do you find most rewarding? What would you change?
As a teacher, is there anything you find particularly challenging about teaching at the third-grade level today? Was that true three years ago? Five years ago? When you first started teaching?

If you were to share your teaching experiences at the third-grade level with college students, what would you want them to know? Would you encourage them to teach at the third-grade level?
Do you think most elementary school teachers want to teach at the third-grade level in Florida? Would you have given the same response three years ago? Five years ago? When you first started teaching?

Do you think that student learning has improved or increased overall at the third-grade level for all students in comparison to three years ago? Five years ago? When you first started teaching? When you were a third-grade student?
Would you want to be a student in a third-grade classroom in Florida today in comparison to when you were in third-grade? Would your response be the same three years ago? Five years ago? When you first started teaching?

If your principal asked you whether or not you wanted to continue teaching at the third-grade level, what would you say? What reasons would you give for why you would want to stay in third-grade? What reasons would you give for considering leaving third-grade?

APPENDIX E

INVENTORY OF OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS FOR PARENT INTERVIEWS

Do you remember how your child felt on the first day in third-grade at _____?
Describe that day for me. Was he/or she excited to go to school? Was he/or she
concerned about going to school? How did you feel on their first day? Were you excited?
Were you nervous? Why?

What was your child's Fall semester in third-grade like? What did he/or she learn? Was
he/or she excited to go to school everyday?

If your son/daughter came home and said, "Mom/Dad, I had a great day at school today,"
what would you like your child to say? What would be a good day to you? What would
be the ideal thing(s) that your child could say about his class? What would you like your
child to say about his or her teacher? What would you like your child to say about
school?

How does your child generally describe his/or her school day? What does he/or she
generally talk about? What does he/or she enjoy the most? When is he/or she most
excited? What does your child like the least?

Did you attend public school in Florida? Do you remember what it was like when you
were in third grade? What do you remember most about school? Was there anything you
did not like about school?

How do you think your child's third-grade experience is the same as your experience?

How do you think your child's third-grade experience is different from your experience?

What do you think is better about your child's experience compared to your experience?

Is there anything you wish were different about your child's third-grade experience?

Would you want to be a third-grader in Florida's public schools today? Why or why not?

If you sat with your state legislator to discuss public education in Florida today, what
would you want your state legislator to know?

APPENDIX F

THIRD GRADE STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction: Hi, my name is Shelly Counsell. I am a teacher and I used to live in
____ before moving to Iowa. I am talking to different teachers, parents, and
students at your school to find out what it's like to be in third-grade in Florida.
Your teacher recommended that I talk to you and your mom and/or dad said that it
would be "okay."

Instructions for Assent: Read the informed assent to the student, explaining the
meaning and purpose of the study while reassuring the student that the activity can
be stopped at any time. After the student signs the assent, the interview then
proceeds.

Can you remember what school was like when you were in kindergarten? Did you
like kindergarten? What did you enjoy the most? Is kindergarten different from
third grade? What kinds of things did you do in kindergarten that you don't do in
third grade?

Close your eyes and think back to your first day in third grade. What was that day
like? How did you feel? What did you do? What do you remember most? Have
there been any surprises?

If I were a new student in third grade at your school, what would you want me to
know about third-grade? What would you show me in your classroom? What
should I be excited about? Is there anything to worry about?

When you hear the name, "FCAT," what comes to mind? How does thinking about
FCAT make you feel? Why? Do your friends talk about FCAT? How does it make
them feel? Do you ever think about it? When do you think about it? Why?

Does anyone you know ever talk about FCAT? What do they say? Does your
teacher talk about FCAT? What does she say? How does she feel about it? Does
your mom/dad talk about FCAT? What do they say? How do they feel? How does it
make you feel when they talk about it?

APPENDIX G

STUDENT POETRY SAMPLE: STRESS RELATED TO SCHOOL TESTS

3/06

Stress at school
Oh no! a test
this is hard!

What answer is it?
a b c or d

What if I get it
wrong my parents are
going to kill me if I
get a bad grade
ohh!

do I get on a
b c d or f?

huh! It's not an
a not a B not
a C not a B and
no no it's an A+

APPENDIX H

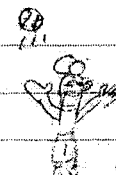STUDENT POETRY SAMPLE: STRESS RELATED TO SPORTS

Stress, Stress,
I can't get work done,
I get yelled at alot,
My brother and sister just
can't stop!
I try to tell them,
I made them cry,
I get punished
that's what I call
Stress!

Stress, stress,
My friend yelled at
me, for all the wrong things,
I can't get work done,
and I get the blame
that's what I call
Stress!

Stress, stress,
when I'm up to
bat, 0-2 bottom
of the 6th zone!
keep hitting foul balls,
Will I get a hit?
a line drive! single
Stress is over.

- Johnny Evans and illustrated by
Jeremy

APPENDIX I

STUDENT POETRY SAMPLE: STRESS RELATED TO MOVING

April '06

My New House

I wonder if my new house is
going to be good, because if it's
not, I might always hide in my jacket
hood. I wonder if the floor boards creak,
If they do, I probably won't be
able to speak. I wonder if I will
have good neighbors, if I don't, instead
of playing, I'll be doing bad neighbors.
I hope my new house is good,
because I don't want to hide
in my jacket hood!