TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF POST NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ELEMENTARY
TEACHER AND STUDENT TEST ANXIETY

Elizabeth V. Heath

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Penny L. Burge, Chair
Lois M. Atkins
Lisa G. Driscoll
Thomas H. Ollendick

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Requirements

Teacher Perceptions of Post No Child Left Behind Elementary

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Abstract

The purpose of this pilot and main study was to examine teachers' perceptions of the post No Child Left Behind (NCLB) elementary classroom, the perceived changes, and the implications for teachers' feelings of empowerment and student test anxiety. Previous investigators have agreed that the teacher's voice has been missing, but needed in test anxiety research. By engaging veteran teachers who had experience both before and after the enactment of NCLB in reflective conversation about their experiences, valuable information was gained concerning whether or not teachers felt empowered to perform their duties and what impact they perceived that high stakes standardized testing has had on both teacher anxiety and student test anxiety. This information could be used to inform educational practice and decision making.

Triangulation of data sources included narrative data collected through face-to-face interviews with the teachers, the writing of field notes, interview process notes, and reflective journal entries from both the pilot and main studies. Three clear themes emerged that fit the division of the data by the research questions: change in the teachers' experiences, change in teaching vocabulary, and change in the students' experiences. These themes emerged through a process of categorical-content perspective analysis for coding the data and sorting it into themes. The Hermeneutic narrative analysis approach was used to analyze and identify the meaning of these related experiences and stories. The context of the pilot and main studies was elementary schools in a rural school system in the Southeastern United States. The participants were eleven elementary teachers from grades three through five with experience before and after NCLB enactment who taught core academic subjects. Member checks of the interview transcripts and data analysis enhanced the credibility of these reports. The analysis revealed both positive and negative perceptions of the changes in the classroom experience of these elementary teachers, their feelings of empowerment, and the impact of the changes on the test anxiety of their students. Participants across the pilot and main studies indicated that increased stress, pressure, frustration, and professional struggles have had a negative impact on teacher anxiety, teacher efficacy beliefs, and student test anxiety.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my husband, Roby, my daughter, Amelia, and my son Patrick, who have given me their undying patience, confidence and support in this seven-year odyssey. I also dedicate it to the loving memory of my father, Calvin Clayton Vernon, who was my inspiration and my rock, and taught me to never give up. Finally, I dedicate this work to my mother, Ethel Cox Vernon, a gracious lady who spent her life teaching the love of education and learning to all those with whom she came in contact.

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ATTRIBUTIONS

Elizabeth V. Heath was the researcher and the major author of both articles included in this dissertation, having written the original drafts and subsequent revisions of the manuscripts based on the suggestions of the dissertation committee.

Penny L. Burge was the dissertation committee chair, major editor of both manuscripts included in the dissertation, and assisted with research design and methodology decisions.

Lisa G. Driscoll and Thomas H. Ollendick were dissertation committee members and provided editorial suggestions and comments for both the manuscripts in the dissertation.

Lois M. Atkins was a dissertation committee member and provided editorial suggestions and comments for the second manuscript in the dissertation.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Reason for Concern

"High stakes testing leads to under-serving or mis-serving all students, especially the most needy and vulnerable, thereby violating the principle of 'do no harm'" (American Evaluation Association, 2005, ¶ 1). "If states persist in making a student's fate rest on a single test, the likely result over the next few years will be nothing short of catastrophic, resembling what might without exaggeration be described as an educational ethnic cleansing" (Kohn, 2000a, p. 325).

Context for the Study

A large body of literature on the causes and treatments of test anxiety has been established over the last two decades (Friedman & Bendas-Jacob, 1997; Hembree, 1988; Kennedy & Doepke, 1999; McDonald, 2001; Swanson & Howell, 1996). This phenomenon has been researched both within the educational system of the United States and internationally (Bodas & Ollendick, 2005; Hong, 1999; Klingman & Zeidner, 1990; McDonald, 2001).

The research into causes of test anxiety has centered on cognitive difficulties (Friedman & Bendas-Jacob, 1997). Sarason (1984) defined these cognitive difficulties, or cognitive interference, as a key term in test anxiety research and identified four factors affecting cognitive interference: tension, worry, test-irrelevant thinking, and bodily reactions. This was in agreement with the findings of Liebert and Morris (1967) who had differentiated between mental and physical reactions to test or performance situations. Test anxiety interventions have fallen into four different categories: behavioral (Hembree, 1988), cognitive behavioral (Kennedy & Doepke, 1999), study and test-taking strategies (Beidel, Turner & Taylor-Ferreira, 1999), and relaxation therapy training (Cheek, Bradley, & Reynolds, 2002; Glanz, 1994; Kennedy & Doepke, 1999). The teacher's role in creating or feeding test anxiety among students has been cited as a concern in need of study (McDonald, 2001; Sarason, Davidson, Lighthall, Waite, & Ruebush, 1960), but virtually overlooked in the test anxiety versus performance puzzle except as the implementer of intervention strategies (Klingman & Zeidner, 1990).

The test experience itself has undergone a change since the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, U.S.C., 2002). Before the push for standardized testing, the elementary test experience largely consisted of frequent performance assessments in the form of

oral reading or recitation, and performance checks, such as quizzes and homework (Sarason et al., 1960). Test anxiety was a reaction to these requests. Early elementary students had a lack of experience with frequent high stakes testing (Sarason et al., 1960). Sarason et al. also noted the importance of feedback and remediation to the young learner due to their dependency on the teacher (Smock, 1957). This process of assessment, feedback, and remediation was ongoing throughout the school year. Elementary students were not exposed to longer-term subject exams until fifth or sixth grade experience. These exams were usually semi-annual to annual in occurrence and still involved feedback, if not as much remediation. High stakes, end of the year, pass or fail tests that could be a barrier to grade progression did not become the requirement for elementary students until the enactment of NCLB. If students cannot repeat the test and pass it, they must repeat the grade and then take the test again.

The role of the teacher has necessarily changed in the process from supportive and guiding to ambiguous and unresponsive during testing situations (Sarason et al., 1960). Test results are used as a determiner of school quality, creating a top down pressure on teachers to produce high pass rates. From my perspective as an elementary school assistant principal, I perceived that the elementary school experience had changed as a result of the modified elementary test experience focused on high stakes testing; consequently, an increase in test anxiety in elementary students could be predicted.

<div align="center">Statement of the Problem</div>

As noted by Sarason et al. (1960), elementary children have a dependent connection with their teachers. As Sarason et al. described it, the very nature of all the test or test-like experiences faced by the elementary student is determined in large part by the teacher. The teacher holds an unusual position of power and importance to the child. The authors also noted that the teacher enjoys a position in relation to the elementary aged child not unlike that of the parent, in which the teacher as the authority figure conveys expectations and either negatively or positively reinforces the child's performance with a repertoire of available rewards and punishments.

The enactment of NCLB regulations requiring end of grade testing in elementary school had negative repercussions for the elementary teacher. Cizek and Burg (2006) listed more time spent on test-preparation, fear of being fired, working under pressure to increase test scores even where unethical measures are required, lowered morale, personal stress, blame throwing, and multiple-choice teaching as some of the negative teacher effects. They also cited incidences of

greater stress levels where teachers were urged to practice test-like activities with their students or reminded of the use of test scores to judge school quality, both of which are now common practices in public schools. Cizek and Burg cited Steinberg (1996) in mentioning two interesting and noteworthy points: teachers report higher incidences of student stress than do parents, which could be a reflection of the amount of time that children spend with teachers, and the tendency of many parents to leave matters of education to the school. Cizek and Burg pointed out that study results indicated a higher correlation between teacher test anxiety and student test anxiety than with student test anxiety and any other variables, a finding that within itself would merit more study of the connection between teacher and student test anxieties.

Phillips, Pitcher, Worsham, and Miller (1980) claimed that test anxiety is related to the school environment and should be viewed in an ecological perspective. Bandura (1982) said that test anxiety develops in a social context. According to his social-cognitive theory, test anxiety develops in a learned or observational way, such as the student observing the actions and reactions of the teacher. Bandura credited this to the interaction of the student and the teacher or the student with other students as a kind of reciprocal-determinism in which thoughts, feelings, and reactions are developed in interaction with the classroom environment.

Poortinga and Van de Vijver (1987) noted three types of contextual variables that are important in a study concerning test anxiety: interpersonal variables (concerning connections between the people in the classroom, i.e., the teacher and the students), ecological variables (concerning interconnections of the teacher and the students in the classroom environment), and psychological variables (concerning mental or emotional perceptions of the current classroom environment). The perceived level of school stress is one of the contextual variables suggested by Bodas and Ollendick (2005). These authors also noted the lack of attention given to contextual variables in the study of test anxiety in Western culture and the impact that contextual variables have on developing and maintaining test anxiety. Examination of the contextual variable of school stress in the theoretical framework of these interpersonal classroom connections between teachers and students had not yet been done.

Sarason (1980) criticized the experimental approach to examining student test anxiety that has been the traditional research approach. Sarason said that researchers have failed to show that the results obtained from experimental research have ecological validity, or in other words, that these principles apply to the classroom. Sarason held understanding the interpersonal

dealings in the school experience as critical in solving the problem of student test anxiety. According to Sarason, "In the context of schooling, … more emphasis needs to be given to indirect and distal factors, or factors that are imbedded in the school environment, and that are opaque to superficial observation and analysis" (p. 342).

For the student, test anxiety is multifaceted or multidimensional. Meichenbaum (1985) said that stress results from an exchange that is ongoing between individuals and their environments and that this should be the focus of assessment and change. Test anxious children are driven to avoid criticism and disapproval (Sarason, 1980). Not only do the students strive to avoid the disapproval of the teacher for performing poorly, but they may also be trying to avoid the disapproval of peer students for performing better than they do (Phillips, 1978). Sarason (1980) said that understanding the connection between teacher and students and its influence on student ability to perform is essential. One way to avoid the experimental research downfall of having an interaction between experimenter and students, as noted by Sarason, would be to use the teacher as the reporter. Self-reports of teachers' thoughts and feelings concerning the contextual variable of school stress can be very informative.

<div align="center">Background of the Problem</div>

NCLB changed testing requirements for elementary school (Cicchinelli, Gaddy, Lefkowits, & Miller, 2003). Annual testing in reading and mathematics for students in grades 3-8 by the 2005-2006 school year was mandated. Not only are schools required to have a percentage of the total students passing these tests, but it is also required that subgroups of students make adequate yearly progress (AYP) achieving defined levels of growth. These defined levels increase over time until the end of the 2013-2014 school year when all students are required to meet or exceed proficiency levels. Accountability and pressure extend from federal and state level government, to local administrators, to teachers, to students. While the causes, correlates and treatments of test anxiety have been widely studied, the context of elementary test anxiety has been changed by NCLB. Accountability and the difficulty of meeting high performance standards at the elementary level make further study of elementary test anxiety necessary.

Kohn (2000b) verbalized five perceived problems with standardized testing in elementary schools: a preoccupation with achievement that causes the focus to be test achievement rather than learning; coverage of content rather than understanding of content becoming part of the test focus; increased testing for the purpose of promotion and funding decisions increasing anxiety;

pressure starting with the government and extending down to the teacher adversely affecting school climate; and, finally, the standards movement emphasis increasing difficulty of curriculum. This matches the concerns of other scholars (Bandura, 1986; Cizek & Burg, 2006; Sadker & Zittleman, 2004; Sarason, 1980).

Pekrun (1985) and Wigfield and Eccles (1989) concurred that the classroom would naturally be a prominent consideration in the origin and maintenance of evaluation anxiety. Wigfield and Eccles cited research in stating that classrooms that are predominantly evaluative in nature (as elementary classrooms have become since NCLB) have a negative impact on the motivation and self-perceptions of students. Doyal and Forsyth (1973) also found a significant correlation between the manifest anxiety level of 10 female third grade classroom teachers and their students' mean anxiety scores. Most elementary school teachers are females, which lends credence to the importance of this finding. Studying the interpersonal connections in the elementary classroom can give insight into the nature of the connection between teacher and student test anxiety and be useful in facilitating effective educational practice.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine teachers' perceptions of the post No Child Left Behind elementary classroom, the perceived changes, and the implications for teachers' feelings of empowerment and student test anxiety. The overall guiding question in the pilot and main study was: How do elementary teachers perceive the classroom testing experience and its impact on their anxiety levels and the test anxiety of students? The three research questions that were explored in this study were:

1. How has implementation of high stakes testing in elementary school changed the way teachers experience their roles in the classroom?

2. How has implementation of high stakes testing in elementary school changed teaching vocabulary?

3. How do elementary teachers describe their experiences with the implementation of high stakes testing that could have an impact on the test anxiety of students?

By obtaining data to address these three research questions, I hoped to gain a better understanding of the experience of selected elementary school teachers in a high stakes testing environment. The hope was that further study and improved practice in the face of high stakes testing in elementary school will follow.

Overview of the Methodology

The methodology for the pilot study and main study was descriptive in nature combining Seidman's (2006) guidelines for purposes: a narrative descriptive history focusing on the details of the teachers' experiences of interest (the teaching experience in the elementary school classroom since the enactment of NCLB), and how the teachers reflected on the meaning of those experiences. Participants were purposefully selected from teachers in grades three, four and five in a rural school district in the South East who taught core academic subjects and had experience in teaching both before and after the enactment of NCLB legislation. Individual interviews were audiotaped, first for the pilot study and then for the main study. These interviews were conducted with teachers at their schools using an interview protocol guide and demographic questions. The writing of field notes began in the planning stages of this study. The writing of interview process notes and reflexive journal entries was also done during and following the interviews to contribute to triangulation of findings. Credibility and rigor as defined by Rossman and Rallis (2003) was achieved by utilizing participant validation or member checks of the data and analysis, discussing findings in a community of practice, and using a peer debriefer to assist in developing possible analytic categories and explaining results.

A narrative analysis approach (Thorne, 2000) was used to identify and describe indigenous categories and themes (the emic view) that described the connections teachers made among their teaching methods, their feelings of empowerment, high-stakes testing, and student test anxiety. Through critical self-reflection about the process as defined by Rossman and Rallis (2003) and identification of themes, I hoped to gain understanding of the meaning of an experience of selected elementary educators. A pilot study was conducted prior to the main study.

Significance of the Study

Existing literature focuses largely on experimental studies into the causes, correlates, measurement, and treatment of test anxiety. Only a small portion of this body of literature is relative to elementary aged children. Study of school conditions affecting performance is just beginning to emerge (Dibattista & Gosse, 2006; Dorgan, 2004; Enderlin-Lampe, 2002; Graham, 2006; Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006; Hurren, Rutledge, & Garvin, 2006; Lepper, Corpus, & Iyengar, 2005; Liftig, 2006; Markanoff & Meekins, 2006; McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne, 2006;

Moore & Margison, 2006; Sideridis, 2006; Sunderman, Tracey, Kim, & Orfield, 2004).
Literature on the conditions in the elementary classroom since the enactment of NCLB is virtually non-existent. Even though, as previously shown, scholars have noted the importance of the classroom culture, environment and ecology relative to a study of test anxiety, this angle of study has remained virtually unexplored. As noted by Zeidner (1998), this focus of study needed to be explored using qualitative methodology to understand the qualitative nature of the situation. This study focused on the perceptions of what occurs within the classroom. This can provide understanding of teachers' experiences that may contribute to improved practice and assist in meeting high stakes performance standards for elementary schools. The propinquity of the need for teachers, schools, and local education agencies to be able to meet standards requirements makes this kind of study paramount.

<center>Limitations of the Study</center>

Limitations in the pilot and main studies included the scope and nature of the information available for analysis. Questions can be posed as to the transferability of findings as teachers were selected from one rural area in the South East. Questions may also be raised about the value of the self-reports given by the teachers. The findings are valuable and informative, nonetheless, as an examination of teachers' experiences as analyzed by qualitative research procedures. Transferability of the results of this kind of study would be defined by the similarity of specific situations in which teachers work.

While Bodas and Olledick (2005) proposed three types of factors for the purpose of comparing cultures from different countries (individual, interpersonal, and institutional or ecological indices), the pilot and main studies explored only the interpersonal experiences of the teacher and the teacher's values and expectations in the classroom, and how they perceived this as impacting their students. This study did not explore the perceptions of the students themselves, or those of their parents.

<center>Definitions of Terms</center>

In a discussion of standardized testing designed for a particular curriculum, several terms are reoccurring. *Anxiety* can be discussed both as *trait anxiety* and state *anxiety*. Both are defined in this section; however, the focus of this study was concerned more with state anxiety, specifically *test anxiety*, which is defined in this section. The identified concern resulting from test anxiety, *cognitive interference*, is defined. The meaning of *teaching vocabulary* is explained.

Finally, the terms *standards, standardized testing, teacher research, motivation, empowerment, efficacy,* and *performance* are defined.

 Anxiety actually has two separate definitions for *trait anxiety* and *state anxiety*. Cizek & Burg (2006) defined *trait anxiety* as an enduring characteristic of a person over time. *State anxiety*, on the other hand, is defined as anxiety that manifests itself only in specific situations, and is, therefore, triggered by those situations. Test anxiety is triggered by and specific to tests: tests of performance (like giving a speech or jumping a hurdle) or academic tests (like quizzes, exams, or standardized tests).

 Test anxiety can be defined by looking at the developmental progression and synthesis of key terms relative to the concept. Friedman and Bendas-Jacob (2001) defined the phenomenon of test anxiety as, "a specific category of anxiety observed in evaluative situations …. an affect or feeling of apprehension and discomfort accompanied by cognitive difficulties" (p. 1035). Indeed, the major concern over test-anxiety is due to the manifestation of these cognitive difficulties. Sarason (1984) defined these difficulties, or cognitive interference, as, "intrusive thoughts that keep the individual from directing full attention to the task at hand" (p. 932). Through one of three studies, he also identified four factors of concern in studying test-anxiety that affect this cognitive interference: tension (jittery feelings), worry (troubled thoughts), test-irrelevant thinking (off-task thoughts), and bodily reactions (somatic symptoms) (p. 931). Hong (1999) differentiated between mental and physical reactions to test or performance situations using Liebert and Morris' (1967) factors of worry and emotionality (p. 432). They identified worry as cognitive concern impacting test anxiety and performance. Emotionality was identified as somatic reactions that did not show a significant relationship to test-anxiety and performance. Therefore, the focus in test-anxiety study became the worry component and its impact on cognitive interference.

 Cognitive interference was defined by Sarason (1984) as " … intrusive thoughts that keep the individual from directing full attention to the task at hand" (p. 932). Amen (1998) gave the following neuro-psychological explanation of cognitive processing affected by anxiety. Anxiety causes the basal ganglia (anxiety regulator) to become overactive, immobilizing thought processes. In a perceived threat situation, the hypothalamus (limbic system) provides an automatic, uncontrolled reaction to a perceived emotional or physical threat acting as a circuit breaker between the prefrontal cortex (thinking) and limbic (emotional) systems. When the

hypothalamus sends a signal, the limbic system goes into action. Emotions take over and thinking and problem solving stop. Reactivation of the cortex (thinking processes) is not possible until the perceived threat no longer exists. The neuro-psychological evidence provided through imaging establishes the cognitive interference that results from test-anxiety as fact rather than theory. Many scholars have reported on the educational perspective of that which happens to the student with test anxiety. Educational concerns for students with cognitive interference related to test anxiety have included off-task thoughts, nervousness, worry, lost motivation, manifestation of somatic symptoms, damaged self-concepts, and negative attitudes towards education (Cizek & Burg, 2006; Hancock, 2001; Hong, 1999; Sarason, 1984; Swanson & Howell, 1996). Thus, cognitive interference has been examined according to theory, physical occurrence, correlations with occurrences, educational perspective, and treatment (Amen, 1998; Hembree, 1988; Hong, 1999; Sarason, 1984).

Teaching vocabulary is defined by curriculum objectives and content. Traditionally, teachers work together as a group to develop curriculum maps that outline the content and vocabulary to be taught in each subject at each grade level (a document related to the county in which the study was conducted). Yinger (1987) referred to this as the language of practice: conversation using language framed by a practitioner's interaction with materials and the setting. However, curriculum vocabulary has not included terms necessary in the teaching of test taking and test-taking strategies. Study of current elementary classroom teaching vocabulary was proposed to determine if terms peculiar to teaching test taking and test-taking strategies were emerging.

Standards and *standardized testing* are now commonly used terms in education. *Standards*, according to Jones, Jones, and Hargrove (2003), has a different meaning for teachers than it does for political advocates of the accountability movement. To the teacher, *standards* "…means a vision of teaching and learning in which students are engaged in high-level conceptual learning" (p.4). In accountability movement discussion, *basic skills* has become synonymous with standards. *Standardized testing* is testing for the amount of this basic knowledge acquired.

Teacher research as used in this study encompassed both study of teachers in practice and study by teachers of practice. *Motivation* is defined as "… the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained" (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996, p.4). *Empowerment* means

enabling teachers to gain knowledge that builds their confidence, their sense of authority, and their enthusiasm for their profession (Lichtenstein, McLaughlin, & Knudsen, 1992). *Efficacy* is the extent to which one believes in one's capability to perform a task or achieve a goal (Bandura, 1995). *Performance* is an indicator of whether or not a job is done effectively.

<div align="center">Contextual Framework</div>

Since no examination of the teachers' context of test anxiety had been done, work in the field of psychology provided a contextual framework to define the study. Pike (1967) defined two system approaches to examining behavior in a cultural context: etic and emic. First, according to the etic approach, one examining the subject's behavior from outside a particular system is considered acceptable because the particular situation in which the subject is placed is not thought to influence the subject's behavior. Conversely, according to the emic approach, the subjects are examined in the context of the situation in which they are placed because the ecology is thought to influence behavior. An emic approach examining the teachers' experiences from within the classroom and their perceptions of the influences on the students and teachers in that context was the framework for both the pilot and main study.

<div align="center">Organization of the Document</div>

This document is divided into six chapters. Chapter One contains a statement of the problem studied, its background, the purpose of this study, the research questions, an overview of the methods used, the significance of the study, limitations of the study, and definitions of key terms in the study. Chapter Two provides the scope of the literature review, the content of the literature review, and the research synthesis. The content of the literature review is divided into two sections: test anxiety research and teacher research. In Chapter Three, the qualitative research design is presented, the researcher's role is discussed, and the procedures and methods by which data were collected and analyzed are presented. Chapter Four is a manuscript accepted for publication in *The Teacher Educators' Journal* (*TTEJ*) relating the results and narrative analysis of a pilot study. Chapter Four was submitted for publication in November of 2006. Online publication is scheduled for the Winter of 2007. The hard copy publication is scheduled to occur in March. Chapter Five is a manuscript submitted for publication to *American Educational Research Journal* expounding the results and narrative analysis of the main study. Chapter five was submitted for publication in December of 2006. The researcher was the primary author of both articles. Finally, Chapter Six presents overall conclusions of the pilot and main

studies, implications for future study, and thoughts for future journal publications.

Chapter Summary

While much research had been done focusing on test anxiety, a gap existed in the literature regarding elementary teachers' experiences with high-stakes standardized testing in post NCLB classrooms and the qualitative nature of those experiences. In addition, the differences in the elementary test experience since NCLB and their effect on test anxiety had not been explored. Many scholars have noted the problems presented by a highly evaluative classroom and its impact on performance. This researcher proposed to explore the qualitative nature of the elementary classroom experience post NCLB and the impact of the now highly evaluative classroom on teachers and students as reported by some of those teachers.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Scope

There is much debate in the field of education over the merit of the standards reform movement. This movement reached its pinnacle with the enactment of The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. In anticipation of this legislation and in its wake, states began requiring standardized testing to be done in elementary schools in third and fifth grades to be in compliance with the NCLB requirements. While the requirements under the Act were graduated in performance levels, the ultimate goal of the legislation is for all students in tested grades to be achieving a passing score on the standardized tests by the end of the 2013-2014 school year (Cicchinelli et al., 2003). Here is where the debate begins.

This chapter is divided into six main sections: the scope of the issue, the literature search and review process, test anxiety research literature, teacher research literature, the summary and synthesis of test anxiety and teacher research literature, and the research direction. Test anxiety has long been a topic of interest and debate to both educators and researchers. Many scholars have contended that investigation of the test anxiety picture should include the teacher as more than the administrator of tests or the administrator of attitudinal scales and inventories designed to measure test anxiety and its various attributes (Cizek & Burg, 2006; King & Ollendick, 1989; Ollendick & Ollendick, 1997; Sarason, 1980; Sarason et al., 1960). Meichenbaum (1985) emphasized that stress is a bidirectional and transactional concept, and that this transactional connection needs to be the focus of assessment and change. Therefore, in reviewing the literature, the researcher will first show the three literature bodies that are background to this study: test anxiety, the standards movement, and teacher research. Secondly, the overview of existing literature concerning test anxiety will be presented. Next, teacher research and the concerns of motivation, empowerment, efficacy, and performance will be discussed. Finally, the researcher will synthesize these two areas and show how the research questions for this study were developed.

Literature Search and Review Process

The initial search began with an Internet search using the search term "test anxiety." This search yielded many hits for nonempirical sources in the form of websites designed by state and federal governments, higher education institutions, professionals, and professional organizations.

Next, I searched electronic databases for peer-reviewed articles. This literature search yielded articles and books from 1957 to the present. Some of the articles were found in electronic databases utilizing the following search terms: anxiety, elementary, test anxiety, treatment, student performance, and study. Databases utilized have included Education Full Text, ERIC from Ovid, MetaPress, Journal Storage (JSTOR), Electronic Collections Online, ScienceDirect Elsevier Science Journals, and WilsonWeb. Articles were also found through reference lists of articles located in scholarly journals. The exploration of the additional related search terms of worry and anxiety disorders uncovered more literature pertaining to the targeted elementary age group and also yielded many sources of related information on worry and anxiety in children as a psychological disorder not limited to, but inclusive of the school experience. The inclusion of this material with previously found information on test anxiety also helped to distinguish the elementary test anxiety experience from that of older students. Next, a search using the terms teacher, qualitative and study was done in an attempt to locate any studies similar in purpose and method to the proposed study. This search yielded 38 returns in the Education Full Text Database. Articles and books found in the reference lists of these articles yielded additional information. Finally, the terms empowerment and efficacy were used as search terms and yielded many sources contributing to understanding and analyzing the data.

A relatively small portion of the test anxiety literature dealt specifically with elementary aged students. The great majority of empirical test anxiety literature found was quantitative in nature with most using anxiety scales of a self-reporting inventory style, and some with semi-structured interviews. Some quantitative measures in the form of grades and standardized tests were also used in the studies. Some researchers used random selection for control and experimental groups. Some studies used availability of subjects for selection criteria. Other researchers attempted to achieve control by using pretest and posttest measures. The focus of the literature fell into three categories: measuring test-anxiety, documenting possible causes or correlates, and remediation of test-anxiety.

The body of qualitative literature related to research concerning teachers largely dealt with empowerment issues and the connection of teacher empowerment to practice, including efficacy, motivation and performance issues. Teacher researchers conducted some of this research. The methodology included ethnographic studies, case studies, and studies utilizing narrative analysis. The body of work on efficacy largely grew from the works of Albert Bandura

(1982, 1991, 1995, 1997). In the search, I found no information dealing with the qualitative differences in classrooms since the implementation of NCLB. There were also scholarly articles and books critical of standardized testing practice. Publication dates on this body of literature ranged from 1964 to 2006.

The Issues: Test Anxiety, the Standards Movement, and Teacher Research and Concerns

Test Anxiety and the Standards Movement

Test anxiety in its current context is an issue inseparable from the standards movement. The literature concerning test anxiety from the past 25 years is reflective of this standards movement. Therefore, discussion of the problem of test anxiety involves discussion of the standards movement, and discussion of the standards movement involves discussion of test anxiety.

Researchers originally examined the test anxiety issue involving students, largely from junior high through adulthood, as evidenced by the abundance of literature concerning this age group. As early as 1960, Sarason et al. stated that because of the dependent connection of the elementary student to the teacher and the lack of differentiated attitudes of children toward themselves, in comparison to the differentiated attitudes of adults, that test anxiety in elementary students was an area of concern for research. Sarason (1980) pointed out that researchers had come to the consensus that " … test anxiety results from the child's reactions to evaluative experiences during the preschool and early school years" (p. 88). But, Sarason contended that studies had failed to show that the findings of research applied to the classroom. Because of the interaction of experimenters with children in the process of conducting research, Sarason held that the studies lacked what he called "ecological validity" (p. 340). Sarason also claimed that it was important to consider other factors in the school experience that influence school stress other than actual test or practice test situations.

Some scholars have pointed out the different characteristics of test anxiety or test anxious children. Supon (2004) noted three types of test anxious students. The first category lacks the study skills to adequately prepare for tests, and, therefore, lack the knowledge to perform well. The second category of test anxious students, according to Supon, has the study skills necessary to prepare for the test, but has a fear of failure that impairs their ability to perform in test situations. Meichenbaum (1985) said that this fear and avoidance of test situations leads to a general lack of self-confidence. Children in the third category of test anxiety proposed by Supon

believe they have the study skills, but they do not. Resulting poor preparation for the test causes anxiety. McDonald (2001) in a review of test anxiety literature described test anxiety as a continuum of impairment, rather than something that is either present or not present. Casborro (2004), a school administrator, proposed that using standardized testing as the sole means of measuring progress is in itself responsible for an increase of test anxiety over the course of the standards movement. Other scholars echoed this sentiment. (Cizek & Burg, 2006; Kohn, 2000b; Phillips, Pitcher, Worsham, & Miller, 1980; Sadker & Zittleman, 2004).

Indeed, even in the advent of the current standards movement, Cronbach and Snow (1977) proposed prerequisites that would contribute to questioning the educational validity of standardized testing. Cronbach and Snow postulated that it would be possible to bring all students to achieve mastery of the same material if close monitoring, adequate time for each individual on each unit, and diagnostically guided instructional and remedial methods were used. Adequate time is the critical issue that impacts the individual student, the classroom, the teacher, and the school. With NCLB requirements for standardized testing annually on a set curriculum at designated grade levels, states, localities and schools are forced to mass measure all students on the same curriculum content at the same time. Cronbach and Snow predicted that such a broad program on a fixed time schedule would result in many falling short of mastery. The adequate time they indicated to be imperative is a differential concept based on individual needs. By their own analysis, only the fast learners would achieve mastery in a limited amount of time. This is contradictory to the spirit of the NCLB legislation. Davies (1972) said that the effectiveness of education could be measured, or more properly indicated, by the disappearance of the relationship of outcomes to general ability, or the flattening of the normal curve. This is the purpose to which NCLB ascribes. However, Carroll (1963) said that such programmed instruction as results from curriculum that was designed to be tested for mastery at regular intervals by standardized tests simply trades differences in ability for differences in learning time. As cited in Cronbach and Snow, Carroll said, "The pervasive correlations of general ability with learning rate or outcomes in education limit the power of ATI (attribute-treatment interaction) findings to reduce individual differences" (p. 500). Failure to allow sufficient time for some students to master the standard curriculum could be predicted to result in an increase in test anxiety for teachers and students alike.

In reference to the concept of standardized testing, Kincheloe (1991) said that positivist empirical expectations have been imposed upon teachers and students. Students are evaluated based on their performance on standardized tests that are in turn used to measure the performance of teachers. Kincheloe criticized this means of testing student knowledge as being a test based on replication of knowledge that students are credited with knowing, rather than interpretation and application of knowledge that students have the ability to use. Kincheloe said, "Schools reflect positivist assumptions when they affirm that the most significant aspects of school can be measured" (p. 64). Oldroyd (1985) referred to teachers under these conditions as "disenfranchised peasants" and called the schools they work in " …. a Third World culture with hierarchical power structures, scarce resources, (and) traditional values … " (pp. 113, 117). Paulo Freire (1972) used a similar metaphor and continued to say that teachers spend their time trying to survive by crisis management and attention to necessities. Kincheloe referred to this as "bad work" (p.6). Kincheloe also said that the purpose of evaluation has changed through the course of the standards movement. He proposed that evaluations were originally designed to measure the success of programs; whereas, now he says the programs are designed to insure the success of the evaluations (p. 75). The politically espoused spirit of NCLB (Cicchinelli et al., 2003) would claim the former. However, critics of the standards movement (Casborro, 2004; Kohn, 2000b; Sadker & Zittleman, 2004) would claim the latter. Dewey in 1929 saw teachers as the best authority on the subject of the success and failure of schools. NCLB delegates this power to the government under the authority of the legislation (Cicchinelli et al.). All this might seem removed from the question of test anxiety, until we remember that as pointed out by Cizek and Burg (2006), the meta-analysis done by Hembree (1988) found a higher correlation of student test anxiety with teacher test anxiety ($r = .64$) than with any other variable. Stipek (2002) said that students reflect what they see in their teachers. If this is true, as the correlation statistic found by Hembree would indicate, then the frustration and anxiety experienced by the teacher in this high-stakes educational environment are likely to be felt by the students also.

Other scholars have considered test anxiety to be interactional or transactional. Bandura (1982) echoing Sarason's (1980) concern for ecological validity in test anxiety research said that test anxiety develops in a social context. Bandura described reciprocal determinism as the constant interaction of personal, behavioral and situational factors that decide what one thinks, feels, or does in reaction. Spielberger and Vagg (1995) described a transactional process model

for test anxiety. They perceived test anxiety as an interactive process that takes place during the test situation. They postulated that it would be necessary to analyze the intrapersonal processes that occur during a test situation to determine the cause of the adverse effects of test anxiety on test performance.

Still other scholars, consistent with the interactional and transactional theories of test anxiety, have emphasized the context of worry or anxiety. Ollendick and Ollendick (1997) in addressing childhood worry or excessive anxiety said that we " … must explore the rich familial context in which the child exists and determine the manner in which this context (as well as other contexts) nurtures, maintains, and exacerbates worry and excessive anxiety" (p. 92). The school is one of these other contexts within which anxiety is nurtured, maintained and exacerbated. Within the school, King and Ollendick (1989) indicated a need for research on the role of teachers in the management and identification of anxious children. The classroom, a setting in which students spend a large portion of their waking hours, is headed by the teacher who is responsible for the atmosphere or climate within that classroom. Vroom (1964) in researching motivation in the workplace said, " … depriving the worker of control over his (or her) own methods of work has negative affective consequences. Prescribing a single method for all workers to follow may increase productivity but will lead to reduction in worker satisfaction" (p. 139-140). The workplace in question in this study is the classroom. The productivity indicators in the context of this study are standardized test scores. Methodology for teachers to use in evaluating students has been prescribed, or mandated, by NCLB. Standardized, multiple-choice tests are the only choice the teacher is given for evaluating curriculum mastery. Richardson (1990) advocated research on teaching as a means to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to have a positive impact on student learning. Research on teacher perceptions and reactions to policies can also be used to positively affect student learning.

Current Data

Since the enactment of NCLB, there has not been a great deal of literature published in relation to test anxiety. Most of the current literature focus on treatment of test anxiety (Carter, Wehby, Hughes, Johnson, Plank, Barton-Arwood & Lunsford, 2005; Casborro, 2004; Cheek, Bradley, & Reynolds, 2002; Dibattista & Gosse, 2006; Ergene, 2003; Markanoff & Meekins, 2006; Rotenberg, 2002; Supon, 2004), are an expansion of the body of literature on the causes and correlates of test anxiety (Goonan, 2003; Schutz, Davis, & Schwanenflugel, 2002), or are a

commentary on the negative aspects of the standards movement (Kohn, 2005; Sadker & Zittleman, 2004; Slavin, 2006). In my search, I found one qualitative study relating the efforts of an elementary school to meet standardized testing requirements (Dorgan, 2004). However, this study was based on data from the 1999-2000 school year, prior to the enactment of NCLB. I also found one book by Jones, Jones, and Hargrove (2003) concerning the consequences of high-stakes testing that contains some qualitative research findings from teacher interview data after the enactment of NCLB. However, the authors stated that, " … there has been relatively little research on how high-stakes testing has affected teachers' instructional methods" (p. 47) and cited a need for such research.

Sunderman et al. (2004) surveyed teachers in Fresno, California and Richmond, Virginia in 2004 to determine their opinions of the success of NCLB in leading to school improvement. The researchers stated that "…there is limited knowledge about the effects of these policies or how they might work in practice" (p. 10). While the teachers surveyed agreed that NCLB had the potential to improve instructional methods, the survey results showed that a majority of the teachers believed "…that NCLB may be establishing conditions that undermine rather than support a school's instructional progress" (p. 22). A July, 2006, National Education Association survey of members (Jehlin, 2006) showed similar results. No other current data examining the classroom and how it has been impacted by NCLB has been found.

Bodas and Ollendick (2005) reviewed the theories of the causes of test anxiety, and the history or progression of assessment tools and treatments in Western culture. Theories included cognitive interference, low ability and deficits in study habits, cognitive deficits in information processing and organization deficits combined with retrieval problems, unrealistic parental expectations combined with school failure, emotionality versus worry, varying levels of physiological arousal either facilitating or debilitating test performance, and the tendency of test anxious children to have a more generalizable anxiety disorder or comorbid disorders. Assessment tools included questionnaires (first developed for adults, and then children), measurement scales, multidimensional scales (two dimensional scales of emotionality and worry factor analysis, and four dimensional using the four factors identified by Sarason in 1984), cognitive processing and social factors (including the three dimensions of cognitive obstruction, tenseness, and social derogation), thought patterns (attention, and positive and negative thoughts), self-report narratives, measurement of somatic changes, and behavioral observations.

Treatments have included relaxation therapy, systematic desensitization, cognitive behavioral approaches, test taking strategies (including study skills), focus on the effect on individuals, and the effect according to socioeconomic status (the only contextual variable that has been considered).

The History of Test Anxiety

Dombeck, Siegle and Ingram (1996) referred to Soren Kierkegaard's Knight of Faith in a discussion of the history of test anxiety. In *Fear and Trembling,* Kierkegaard's (1843) discourse on test anxiety in particular, the author referred to the Biblical test of Abraham and God's command for him to take the life of his own son as an act of faithful sacrifice. Kierkegaard characterized Abraham, and anyone who faces such an extreme test, as the Knight of Faith who is able to deal with this inconceivably stressful situation because of an unshakeable faith or belief in something. For Abraham it was his certainty that his God would somehow restore life to his son once the sacrifice was given. Abraham had an unshakeable belief in the promise God made to build an innumerable nation through his son Isaac. This faith was also what enabled Abraham not to consider himself a grievous monster for taking the life of his own son, according to Kierkegaard. He went on to explain how people have differing levels of ability to deal with stress or anxiety. Both Dombeck, Siegle and Ingram, and Meichenbaum (1985) referred to the definition of coping given by Lazurus and Folkman (1984). Coping, according to Lazurus and Folkman, is the effort involved in managing stress and stressful situations in avoidance of distress that could be caused by these situations. This is also how the Knight of Faith dealt with the stress of the situation with which he was faced. Kierkegaard's Knight of Faith was able to block out the negative thoughts, or cognitive interference, that might have caused him to feel anxiety over that which he was charged to do.

The focus of the body of literature on test anxiety to date includes documentation of the phenomenon (Hancock, 2001; Hembree, 1988; Hong, 1999; Ma, 1999; McDonald, 2001). It includes measurement of anxiety levels (Friedman & Bendas-Jacob, 1997; Reynolds & Richmond, 2000; Sarason et al., 1960; Spielberger, 1980; Spielberger, Edwards, Lushene, Montouri, & Platzek, 1973). Finally, it includes remediation of test anxiety (Beidel, Turner, & Taylor-Ferreira, 1999; Cheek, Bradley, & Reynolds, 2002; Kennedy & Doepke, 1999).

Many other notable scholars have emerged in the field. Morris with other scholars contributed to defining the separation of cognitive and emotional components, insight into

understanding the impact of feedback and test importance on test anxiety, and identified coping strategies (Liebert & Morris, 1967; Morris & Engle, 1981; Morris & Fulmer, 1976). Meichenbaum (1985) identified cognitive-behavioral strategies as a successful way of remediating or coping with test anxiety. Sarason et al. (1960) contributed research concerning discrepancies in performance and potential, voiced the importance of the teacher's role, and developed two scales for measuring child anxiety levels: Test Anxiety Scale for Children (TASC) and General Anxiety Scale for Children (GASC). Hembree (1988) contributed a meta-analysis that summarized, analyzed, and synthesized a large body of existing literature from all age groups. McDonald (2001) reviewed a large number of studies and offered insight into methodological problems. Finally, Zeidner (1998) contributed further research into coping strategies and teacher implemented strategies.

The History of American Education and the Standards Movement

American education began as an ideal, the perpetuation of a democratic society (Alexander & Alexander, 2001). This was the original standard set for education in the United States. The system that began from that ideal has undergone a process of growth and change since its inception in the 1700's. In 1983, A Nation at Risk verbalized an indictment of the achievement of American students in comparison to other advanced nations. NCLB upon its enactment in January of 2002, mandated accountability for standards achievement.

Prior to this legislation, the American education system had undergone continuing change, not unlike the metamorphosis of a child growing to maturity. In its early days, American education was a simple system of apprenticeships and basic knowledge maintained by the designation of support based on township holdings. From this the system grew to include education beyond the initial elementary, or basics level, and incorporate preparation for those who wished to pursue higher levels of education. Land grants supported institutions of higher education. As the era of the Industrial Revolution began and grew, vocational education became an important focus of the system in preparing American citizens to provide for their livelihood and the livelihood of the nation as tax paying citizens. This phase reached its peak during the early twentieth century with high schools focused largely on vocational training, while still providing the original ideal of preparation for higher education. After World War I, the emphasis began to split between vocational preparation and child-centered schooling (Ravitch, 2000).

Cronbach and Snow (1977) defined aptitude as characteristics that can be used to forecast

the likelihood of success under a given treatment. Civil service examinations that had been in use in Great Britain since the 1860's, evolved into scholastic aptitude tests for admission to college preparatory programs in high school and to institutions of higher education in the United States (Cronbach & Snow). Measurement of aptitude was used as classification research for prediction and decision-making concerning the jobs to which soldiers were best suited during World War II. During the mid-twentieth century, when the race to become the most highly evolved nation and to identify the most highly capable within the nation was beginning, it evolved into a test of aptitude (Cronbach & Snow; Ravitch, 2000; Rothman, 2001). This Social Darwinist philosophy of survival of the fittest for the purpose of propelling the most fit to positions of leadership and influence became the standard for acceptance into both government positions and higher education (Cronbach & Snow; Persons, 1950). As the race to become the superior nation continued through the Cold War era and into the post Cold War era, and as the world witnessed the fall of the Iron Curtain, a symbol of the race for superiority, the standards movement in the United States grew and gained momentum (Spring, 1976). Companies were born and grew around the business of developing and scoring tests of skills, aptitudes, and finally curriculum mastery (Ravitch). The standards movement had its most glorious moment of victory in the enactment of NCLB, the spirit of which was to guarantee that democracy was protected and Social Darwinism was no longer the rule in that all children would have equal opportunity and be held to equal standards (Cicchinelli et al., 2003). But, as the standards movement reached its pinnacle, the protest that had its roots in the Civil Rights Movement had grown as well (Alexander & Alexander, 2001; Chubb & Moe, 2001; Ravitch, 2000; Spring, 1976). Protest concerning what was considered to be the unrealistic goal of standardized testing to level the playing field and bring all students to the same level of mastery echoed in the halls of scholarly debate (Carroll, 1963; Cronbach & Snow, 1977; Davies, 1972; Kincheloe, 1991; Kohn, 2000a; Kohn, 2000b). The problem was, as scholars against the standards movement identified it, that one could not eliminate the variable of general, innate ability, the difference in talents with which individuals are born (Carroll, 1963; Cronbach & Snow, 1977; Davies, 1972; Galton, 1869). Standardized testing, according to the critics, measures the ability to effectively recall and identify facts, without really qualifying the ability to use those facts for any constructive or practical purpose. It is the simple act of remembering the curriculum that has been taught. Neither is there any accounting of talents (musical, artistic, mechanical, technological, and

athletic) that fall outside the academic realm of the taught curriculum (Kincheloe, 1991).

National educational leaders are not insensitive to the dilemma and debate over the NCLB legislation and the feasibility of accomplishing its intended purpose, equality in education. Former United States Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, with a consortium of education, community, legal and military leaders released a report on November 14, 2005, making recommendations for addressing problems which they labeled diversity issues (Riley, Miller, Stuart-Wells, Bolden, & Frank). In this report, the experts acknowledged that providing sufficient time for learning is key to improving the academic skills of all students. The solution they proposed incorporates use of after-school and community programs, the funding to support them, and increased funding of Title I programs. They further suggested that school communities have to take over the burden of improving academic achievement " … to free up and expand the ability of teachers to focus on their core academic mission and meet the new accountability standards of NCLB" (p. 11). In principle this sounds wonderful; however, there is a fundamental problem that must be overcome to accomplish this monumental change in accountability: the communities that have the students with the greatest need for increased learning time and opportunities are the same communities that have the most socio-economically and educationally disadvantaged parents. So, this will be a long, arduous, and problematic process at best, if it is truly feasible. It will necessarily require the support of and action taken by the business and financial leaders of these communities or those closest to these communities. Even the authors acknowledged the problematic nature of the proposed solution by saying our nation is " … for equality but unwilling to create and sustain policies that ensure equal opportunity" (p. 13). They acknowledged that despite legislative efforts to provide " … the American ideal of equal opportunity and equal education for all children … too many of our schools still are being used as sorting machines – sorting children into those who are college bound, those who will learn basic skills and those who will be left behind" (p. 14).

NCLB changed testing requirements for elementary school (Cicchinelli et al., 2003). Annual testing in reading and mathematics for students in grades 3 to 8 by the 2005-2006 school year was mandated. Not only are schools currently required to have a percentage of the total students passing these tests, but it is also required that subgroups of students make adequate yearly progress (AYP) achieving defined levels of growth. The Department of Education is attempting to bring the calculation of required levels into reasonable alignment with reality.

Currently AYP calculation is based on attendance, percentage of total students passing tests, and percentages for subgroups of students passing the tests; therefore, a school may meet the requirements for attendance and total students passing and fall short in a subgroup causing them not to achieve AYP (Haycock & Wiener, 2003). United States Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, announced the authorization of a pilot program allowing selected participating states to use growth or value-added formulas to calculate AYP (Lewis, 2005); however, all students are still required to meet or exceed proficiency levels by the end of the 2013-2014 school year.

Accountability and pressure are abundant. First, school administrators are held accountable; test scores are determiners of school quality and allocation of funds, and (in cases where schools fail to make AYP) parents can be given the freedom to choose the school to which they wish to send their children. Administrators are also faced with the monumental task of finding and retaining highly-qualified (as defined by NCLB) teachers and teaching assistants to carry out this task.

Secondly, the teacher is held accountable. Pressure for high pass rates comes down the chain of command to the teacher. Classrooms become focused on test preparation (Kohn, 2000b; Sadker & Zittleman, 2004). An increase in the stress levels of teachers and higher attrition rates can be predicted from the test focus of classrooms. This is the context within which study of the change in elementary classrooms and teacher concerns can be framed.

Finally, the elementary student is held accountable. Promotion from grade to grade, or the lack thereof, is an ominous penalty for not passing a single test (Harris & Coy, 2003; Supon, 2004). Therefore, there is an inferred increase in elementary test anxiety stemming from the change in requirements.

Meeting these high performance standards will require a concerted effort, including study strategies, test taking strategies, curriculum content, remediation of low performing students, and control of test anxiety. What can be done within the classroom to control test anxiety is a topic that is timely and important. Many scholars in the United States and in other countries have studied test anxiety, its causes and correlates, and treatment strategies. NCLB legislation changed the context of elementary test anxiety. Accountability and the difficulty of meeting high performance standards at the elementary level make study of elementary classroom and the anxiety therein necessary.

Teacher Research

That which is referred to as teacher research in this study encompasses both study of teachers in practice and study by teachers of practice. Kincheloe (1991), a teacher himself, was a vocal supporter of critical social science and its concern for the practical. Kincheloe advocated that teachers be involved in action research to better their own job situations and teaching strategies. Kincheloe held that the process of organizing educational methods to focus on efficient conveyance of a standard curriculum and measurement of the success in accomplishing that by definition left out the critical intent of knowledge acquisition. According to Dewey (1916), the content of knowledge is a historical concept, that which has already happened and is a matter of record. But, Dewey contended that the reference of knowledge is a concept of future occurrence. According to Aronowitz and Giroux (1985), knowledge as defined by Dewey provides a frame of orientation for understanding the present and what action is necessary based on reference to and assimilation of knowledge from the past in a process of making critical connections.

Kincheloe (1991) argued that high-stakes testing of a standardized curriculum robs the teacher of a voice regarding what constitutes mastery of a curriculum. He contended that the single-minded view of educational excellence as high performance rates on standardized tests undermines the principles on which our democratic system of education was founded. He claimed that the standardized evaluation system rather than addressing questions of justice and ethics, instead creates questions about the same. Kincheloe said that true mastery can only be measured in qualitative terms utilizing more subjective methods, not by scientific analysis of standardized test scores. On the basis of this argument, Kincheloe said that positivistic research is irrelevant to teacher practice, and other scholars concurred (David, 1988; McNay, 1988; Orteza, 1988). Kincheloe further expounded on the value of the vantage point of the teachers, the classroom, and the value of the practical knowledge they gain from their experiences in the classroom. This practical, acquired, experiential knowledge combined and in collaboration with outside perspectives provides the vehicle, Kincheloe said, for making teachers self-directed professionals capable of defining for themselves what constitutes educational excellence, and for whom and for what purpose educational excellence is achieved.

Besag (1986) believed that classification of that which is information is a subjective human judgment. In particular, questions of what constitutes educational improvement and what

components of education are the most important, as Kincheloe (1991) pointed out, require more than empirical quantitative data for answers. Broaddus (1999) understood that teachers need to participate in a reflexive practice of using strategies and improving on them in a continuous process. Dewey (1933) held that professionals have a moral responsibility to treat their actions as experimental and reflect on those actions and the consequences that follow. Richardson (1990) said that the purpose of research on teaching is to determine the skills and competencies that have a positive effect on student learning. Likewise, as proposed by this study, research on teacher perceptions and reactions to policies can be used to positively affect student learning.

Summary of the Issues

While the existence of test anxiety and the authority of standardized testing are not in question, there is plenty of room for study concerning the question of the merit of standardized testing and its impact on test anxiety for elementary aged students, as well as their teachers. Arguments for and against standardized testing are divided. On one side those who ascribe to the positivistic scientific school of thought endorse the value of testing as a measure of the effectiveness of schools and teachers in accomplishing the education of students. Those who ascribe more to a post-positivist critical philosophy of inquiry endorse more subjective means of evaluating student mastery of curriculum. One utilizes easily measurable, objective, and uniformly administered tests to determine the effectiveness of schools and teachers in conveying knowledge to all students. The other argues that more subjective measurement that allows the student to demonstrate critical and practical usage of knowledge constitutes true mastery of the curriculum. Neither challenges the existence of resulting test anxiety in either case. However, the impact of the implementation of NCLB on classrooms, teachers, and, therefore, student test anxiety needs to be examined.

Test Anxiety Research

Sources of information on test anxiety are varied and plenteous. For the purpose of this literature review, the information will be divided into three categories: measurement literature, literature concerning the correlates and concerns of cognitive obstruction and interference, and treatment literature.

The Literature on Test Anxiety Measurement

It is impossible to discuss test anxiety intelligently without a basic understanding of anxiety disorders and a basic knowledge of the developmental considerations. Ollendick and

Ollendick (1997) reported that anxiety does not exist independent of developmental and contextual factors that must be considered in assessment and treatment. Further, they conveyed that these anxiety disorders most frequently occur as comorbid with other disorders, or existing in conjunction with other childhood disorders, such as attention deficits or learning disorders. Coping with anxiety, according to Ollendick and Ollendick, is a matter of the child's adaptability. Strategies used by children in coping with stress include worry, physiological distress, and/or avoidance of the stress-causing situation. King and Ollendick (1989) identified anxiety disorders peculiar to school situations. One of these was test anxiety. Ollendick, Grills, and King (2001) held that with school as the frame of reference, poor performance that is at least in part attributable to deficient or maladaptive anxiety coping strategies may have long term consequences for the child. Unfortunately, the elementary student who is in an earlier development stage cognitively is poorly equipped to cope with these stresses in comparison to older counterparts.

Most of the literature on measurement of test anxiety concerns adolescent to secondary and post-secondary aged students. Friedman and Bendas-Jacob (1997) developed a measurement scale specifically designed to draw on adolescent aged student self-reports and, therefore, more accurately reflect their thoughts and worries. The Test Anxiety Inventory (TAI) developed by Spielberger (1980) has been widely used with adolescents through secondary aged students.

Liebert and Morris (1967) distinguished between worry and emotionality components of test anxiety. Many researchers have used this delineation to guide their research efforts. Among these was Sarason (1984) who built on this delineation and further distinguished tension (jittery feelings), worry (troubled thoughts), test-irrelevant thinking (off-task thoughts), and bodily reactions (physiological symptoms). Sarason also developed a measurement instrument, the Reactions to Tests (RTT) scale, to help measure whether a student was experiencing those components of test anxiety that would interfere with cognitive performance. As related earlier from the review done by Bodas and Ollendick (2005), there has been a progression of instruments designed to measure test anxiety, but since the development of the Test Anxiety Scale for Children (TASC) and the General Anxiety Scale for Children (GASC) by Sarason et al. in 1960, most scales have been designed for use with students beyond the elementary level. Wren and Benson (2001) presented their work on development and validation of a measurement scale, the Children's Test Anxiety Scale (CTAS).

McDonald (2001) wrote a review of test anxiety literature looking specifically at the prevalence of test anxiety in school-aged children. McDonald found that the reported rate of children affected by test anxiety ranged from 10% to 41% of children from 8 to 12 years of age. He also indicated that these figures increased over time, and suggested that this might be due to more frequent testing and testing at a younger age. McDonald stated that most of the 74 studies examined reported a negative correlation between test anxiety and performance, ranging from -0.2 to -0.6. The results of a study done by Rosenthal and Rubin (1982) showed that a correlation of 0.2 can actually mean a difference of 20% in the number of subjects passing or failing a test. This would certainly be considered a reason for concern in any classroom. McDonald also indicated that the literature showed that females were more affected by test anxiety than males. Hembree (1988) reported similar findings in his review of the literature. Beidel (1991) and Beidel, Turner, and Taylor-Ferreira (1999) had also reported similar figures. Moore and Margison (2006) in a study of gifted students cited a need for intervention studies to help females experiencing test anxiety and studies to help students have a sense of control over their own academic performance.

The Literature on Correlates and Concerns of Cognitive Obstruction and Interference

The literature concerning the correlates of test anxiety is also abundant. In 1967 Liebert and Morris identified worry (cognitive concern) as the overwhelming significant correlate of an expectancy for poor performance in research done with college students ($p < .005$). Swanson and Howell (1996) conducted a study utilizing the TAI instrument with students with learning disabilities and behavior disorders. They found that test anxiety had a significant correlation with cognitive interference for these students ($p = .05$, $r = .580$). This is consistent with the research done by Sarason (1984) in which he found that cognitive interference had a significant correlation with the low performance of subjects with high test anxiety levels ($p < .05$). McDermott et al. (2006) described a "preoccupation with mental incapacities" (p. 15) in schools striving to meet standardized testing requirements that made categorization as learning disabled a matter of practicality. Rotenberg (2002) showed in her research that test anxiety varies inversely with language proficiency. She also found this to be true of weak readers who were native English speakers. Hong (1999) conducted research to determine if there was a temporal effect of test anxiety and if the perceived difficulty of the test had an impact. He found that perceiving the test as difficult impacted performance only through the interaction with worry (test anxiety). He

also found that the student's self-assessment of performance resulted in an increase in anxiety over time, before, during, and after the test. Similarly, Hancock (2001) conducted research to determine how the threat of evaluation affected motivation. He found that there was a significant interactive effect ($p < .05$) of test anxiety and evaluative threat that resulted in lowered performance scores for the graduate students participating in the study.

Hembree (1988) in his meta-analysis of 562 studies provided much information on correlates of test anxiety. Hembree found that test anxiety has a negative correlation with ability level ($r = -0.23$ for grades 3 through postsecondary). However, he cautioned interpretation of this finding since IQ scores are gathered by testing and could be confounded by test anxiety. Females displayed higher test anxiety levels than males, and blacks displayed higher test anxiety levels than whites. Socio-economic status had a relatively low negative correlation with test anxiety. Children who were later in birth order had higher test anxiety levels than children lower in the birth order. He found no difference in test anxiety levels based on whether a stranger or a teacher administered the instrument. Students who were classified as at-risk had higher levels of test anxiety than those who were not classified as at-risk. Hembree identified a sharp rise in test anxiety for students in grades 3 to 5. He also found that elementary aged students that were high test-anxious students expressed a lower need to achieve (a factor one would associate with motivation), and a strong inverse relationship between self-esteem and test anxiety. Test anxiety was strongly related to defensiveness. High test-anxious students tended to blame others for their poor performance. Hembree found no difference in sociability between high and low test-anxious elementary students; however, this pattern changed with grade progression showing college age students with high test-anxiety to be less sociable and have less self-confidence, self-control, responsibility and intellectual efficiency. This finding would indicate a definite need to find a way to counteract this effect of test anxiety as students progress through school. However, the most striking correlation found by Hembree was that between teacher anxiety and student anxiety ($r = 0.64$). This finding highlights the need to study the teacher and the causes of teacher anxiety to shed more light on how to reduce student test anxiety.

Treatment Literature

Literature on the treatment of test anxiety is abundant. The types of treatment have included the use of feedback, coping strategies, cognitive-behavioral strategies, study skills training, and relaxation therapy. Morris and Fulmer (1976) determined that feedback has a

powerful influence on test anxiety. The more uncertainty to which the student is subjected, the higher the student's worry scale scores, therefore, the higher the student's test anxiety. Dibattista and Gosse (2006) echoed the need for immediate feedback to reduce test anxiety. Morris and Engle (1981) found that defense mechanisms used as coping strategies predominantly had a negative correlation with test performance. Klingman and Zeidner (1990) found a cognitive training program to have a positive result for 80% of the students participating. This same program also showed a positive effect on the test anxiety awareness of the teachers participating in the implementation of this program. Silvestri, Dantonio, and Eason (1996) used a combination of awareness training and problem solving (labeled a self-development treatment group), and a relaxation training treatment group. Neither of these treatment groups showed significant results. Kennedy and Doepke (1999), on the other hand, in a case study with a college student found a multi-component treatment including muscular relaxation, systematic desensitization, and cognitive-behavior therapy (positive self-talk) to be very effective. The subject's GPA went from 1.0 before the treatment to 3.2 after the treatment. Beidel, Turner, and Taylor-Ferreira (1999) used a combination of teaching study skills and test-taking strategies with elementary aged students from 9 to 12 years of age. They called their remediation program the Testbusters program. The results showed that the students who participated in the program experienced a significant decrease in test anxiety ($p < .001$). These students also showed a significant improvement in overall grade point average ($p < .01$), with improvement in all individual academic areas except math. Carter et al. (2005) found small but significant results with students with high-incidence disabilities from implementation of test-strategy instruction. Glanz (1994) conducted a study on the effect of relaxation therapy on test anxiety with 28 learning disabled students. In this study the students were taught Tai Chi. The treatment resulted in a significant reduction of test anxiety at test time ($p < .01$). Cheek, Bradley, and Reynolds (2002) conducted a study with 16 students from third through fifth grades who had not met the 70% passing rate on standardized testing and who had exhibited symptoms of test anxiety. These researchers utilized a school counselor relaxation-therapy training program first with these individual students, and then with the other students in the school. The results were that 75% of the targeted treatment group of students passed the reading portion of the standardized test and 94% of the group passed the math portion of the test after treatment. Markanoff and Meekins (2006) advocated implementation of a spirit week to build confidence and enthusiasm and reduce test anxiety.

Supon (2004) advocated that teachers use a positive approach in relieving the test anxiety of students. The positive strategies she suggested included positive teaching methods, positive and constructive feedback, desensitization and relaxation therapy.

Various public, private, and professional organizations offer assistance for test anxiety through websites. The United States Department of Education, the state of Tennessee, The University of Missouri-Rolla, Huntington Learning Center, and the United Federation of Teachers are just a few of the organizations offering information online for coping with test anxiety. The information available includes test-taking strategies, information on the symptoms of test anxiety, and information for parents on how to communicate with their children concerning test anxiety, studying, and school success.

Condition Effects

Hembree (1988) reported on different test conditions in his meta-analysis of 562 studies. He found that test instructions with ego involvement improved performance for low test-anxious students. He found that incentives, frequency of testing and feedback of results had no significant results. He found that low test-anxious students were negatively impacted when test items were arranged by item difficulty. Memory support strategies were found to help high test-anxious students. The presence of distractions had a significantly higher negative impact on the performance of high test-anxious students than low test-anxious students. The presence of music, particularly unobtrusive classical music, during testing was found to have a significant enhancing effect on scores.

Treatment Effects

    Effects on test anxiety.

In the same meta-analysis, Hembree (1988) reported on the significance of treatment effects on test anxiety. Hembree reported on behavioral treatments of test anxiety. He found that systematic desensitization had a significant effect in reducing test anxiety, with more significant results for college students than for younger students. Likewise, he found that relaxation-training, modeling, covert positive reinforcement, extinction, and hypnosis all had significant effects in reducing test anxiety. Hembree also reported on cognitive-behavioral treatments of test anxiety. For these treatments, cognitive modification, attentional training, insight therapy, anxiety management training, and stress inoculation training all had significant results in reducing test anxiety, and with no significant difference across age groups. Study-skills training

alone was found not to have a significant effect on test anxiety. Testwiseness training had moderate results. Combining the two methods made no significant difference. Pseudotherapy also yielded no significant results.

Ergene (2003) in a meta-analysis of 56 studies reported similar results to those of Hembree (1988). He found an overall mean treatment effect of $E = 0.65$ for test anxiety reduction programs. He translated this standard score into a percentage: receiving treatment for test anxiety had a significant anxiety reducing effect for 74% of the subjects receiving treatment. Ergene found that a combination of cognitive and skill-focused techniques had the greatest effect size ($E = 1.10$). It was generally the case that interventions used in combination showed higher effect sizes, although behavioral interventions alone also showed a significant effect size ($E = 0.80$). Further, Ergene found that interventions using both an individual and group setting in combination showed a larger effect size ($E = 0.84$) than group ($E = 0.67$) or individual alone ($E = 0.34$). This reflects the results found by Cheek, Bradley, and Reynolds (2002) mentioned earlier.

Effects on performance and grade point average.

Hembree (1988) found that treatments also had significant effects on performance and grade point averages. Systematic desensitization, relaxation training, hypnosis, modeling, cognitive modification, attentional training, insight therapy, and anxiety management training all showed a significant mean effect on performance, ranging from .13 (relaxation training) to .60 (hypnosis and modeling combined). Systematic desensitization was effective in raising grade point averages. However, relaxation training was not. Cognitive-behavioral treatments and study-counseling combined with other treatments yielded significantly higher grade point averages.

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Summary

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Information is readily available and the body of literature is large concerning test anxiety research. Information on measurement of test anxiety, the correlates and concerns of cognitive obstruction and interference, and remedies and treatments of test anxiety can be found. The one piece missing from the body of literature is research on the role of the teacher in the classroom in relation to test anxiety.

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Teacher Research

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Teacher research encompasses both research done by teachers and studies done on teachers, both for the benefit of improving practice. For the purpose of this study, I will focus on

teacher research literature concerning motivation (of the teacher and as related to student motivation), empowerment (again, of the teacher and as related to student empowerment), and finally performance (teacher efficacy and the resulting classroom or student performance.)

Motivation

The motivation of the teacher to teach and the motivation of the student to learn are inextricably linked. Anyone who doubts the validity of that statement needs only to look at the related literature. Schunk (1991) also said that motivation is reciprocal to learning and performance.

Vroom (1964) stated that a basic assumption in dealing with people in the workplace is that giving the worker influence over decision-making, and thereby, some control over their work environment increases job satisfaction. Kornhauser (1965) said that there is a connection between how a job enables a person to use their abilities and the mental health, anxiety, hostility, life satisfaction, and personal morale of that person. Although, Kornhauser was referring to industrial workers, the same could be implied in relation to workers in the field of education, or any other workplace. Vroom also said, " … depriving the worker of control over his (or her) own methods of work has negative affective consequences" (p. 140). He held that this would lead to reduced job satisfaction. Marriot and Denerly (1955) pointed out findings from their study that an inability to control the pace of one's work has a negative effect on job satisfaction. Vroom linked satisfaction to attrition. He emphasized that higher job satisfaction was a strong motivation and decreased the likelihood of one leaving his or her job voluntarily. These are all factors that we would do well to consider in motivating teachers not to leave the profession. Bandura (1995) commented on the weak sense of commitment, the increased burnout rate and a "group sense of academic futility" (p. 21) that result from adverse working conditions in schools.

Kohn (2005) argued the offensiveness of the gap in educational rhetoric, partly credited to high teacher attrition rates in the high-stakes standards movement, and partly attributed to the frustration over and reactions to the frustration of having control of their methodology taken away. Kohn said that this has all resulted in what he called conditional teaching. Makri-Botsari (2001) found that students need unconditional acceptance and unconditional teaching to maintain their interest in and enjoyment of learning, or in other words, their motivation. But, Kohn and Noddings (1992) pointed out the delineation between valuing excellence and showing approval only of those students who fulfill the teacher's demands. (Both authors actually used the word

expectations instead of demands in this discussion; however, I hesitate to use this word since it has connotations of a self-fulfilling prophecy. This was not the content of the discussion. Expectation was used as a synonym for standards.) Noddings further pointed out that unconditional acceptance was a necessary prerequisite to self-confidence and risk taking ability.

Kohn (2005) and Watson (2003) pointed out that this acceptance need carries over into classroom discipline. Since high levels of test anxiety correlate negatively with self-esteem, defensiveness, tolerance, problem solving ability, good study habits, and performance; and high levels of test anxiety correlate positively with emotionality and blaming others (Hembree, 1998), one would expect that students with these same characteristics would also be students who have difficulty complying with rules in the classroom. Unfortunately, this is exactly what Kohn said happens; teachers expect the students with poor performance to be a problem, thereby unconsciously setting up a conditional acceptance of these students from the time they enter the classroom. Hinshaw (1992), Patterson, Capaldi, and Bank (1991), and Rutter (1979) concurred that students with a low sense of cognitive efficacy could be predicted to be aggressive and antisocial.

Licht (1992) said that children begin to understand that their ability to perform is judged in relation to the performance of their peers in about the second grade. The concept of academic competition is apparent. Children come to understand the negative relationship between effort and ability at around 10 years of age, according to Nicholls (1978) and Nicholls and Miller (1984). In other words, children come to understand that for those for whom understanding comes easily, less effort is required. Nicholls and Miller said that before age 10, children feel that they can improve their ability with increased efforts. Maehr and Midgley (1991) gave insight into how to overcome this dilemma. By encouraging children to focus on mastery of a task with the goal being to accomplish something that is challenging, children can be taught to value learning and view mastery as dependent on effort, rather than associating effort with inability. The difference in motivation is apparent. The problem here is that the current high-stakes testing for elementary students causes children to adopt an ability focus rather than a task focus. Students are intent on avoiding being judged not able (by the teacher or the test – which become synonymous) rather than being task focused and seeking understanding and attainment of skill that results in a sense of accomplishment. Studies using strategies designed to promote task-focus have shown the ability to improve motivation, even with at-risk students (Powell, Ames, &

Maehr, 1990; Tracey, Ames, & Maehr, 1990). One would expect the converse to be true and that the creation of an ability focused classroom would be detrimental to motivation, especially with at-risk students. Research supports this conclusion (Maehr, 1991; Meece, Blemenfeld & Holye, 1988; Nicholls, Cobb, Wood, Yackel & Patashnick, 1990; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991; Powell, 1990).

Maehr and Midgley (1991) emphasized that schoolwide policies and procedures could undermine the teacher's efforts in the classroom. How much more so would this be true of state and federal policies and procedures? These authors also pointed out that teachers, when given the choice, will choose the way instructional and planning times are allotted, thereby controlling the schedule of learning. This choice has been taken away from teachers by federal, state, and local mandates that begin with and come under NCLB. Standardized testing by definition requires evaluation on a set timeline. Whether or not mastery is achieved becomes inextricably linked to student ability interacting with teaching skills, despite the best efforts of both students and teachers, due to placing the same time restriction on students with differing ability levels. McDermott et al. (2006) said that in reality, this creates a compulsive competitiveness and measures "…how much faster or slower various children learn" (p. 15). Research has shown that student evaluation that is public, linked to ability, and that measures failure rather than making mistakes a part of learning has a negative effect on student motivation (Butler, 1990; Covington, 1984; Covington & Omelich, 1984; Crooks, 1988; Jagacinski & Nicholls, 1984, 1987). Research has also shown that a variety of evaluation practices should be used and that task-specific feedback from teachers has a more positive influence on the student's interest and commitment to learning than praise or grades (Butler & Nisan, 1986).

Pacing guides and testing windows control time. Further, teachers are no longer allowed to be the primary authority in determining student mastery of subject matter by relying on evaluation of students with differing ability levels using various means. The standardized, multiple-choice test is mandated. The teacher who is the head of the classroom operates under authoritarian rule from outside the classroom. Thus, we are brought back to what Vroom (1964) and Bandura (1995) pointed out, lack of control over one's work methodology has a negative impact on job satisfaction and motivation, for teachers as well.

Stipek (2002) pointed out that students model the actions and attitudes of the teacher. If the teacher is excited and enthusiastic about learning, so will the students be. On the contrary,

frustration and anxiety experienced by the teacher are likely to be felt by the students also, and therefore, affect their motivation in a negative way. It is evident that standardized testing is not the way to motivate either the teacher or the student.

Empowerment and Efficacy

Empowerment by definition implies giving the teacher authority and a sense of confidence. According to Bandura (1995) a person's actions are based more on what they believe than objective truth. Efficacy for the teacher is that sense of confidence, or belief in his or her ability to successfully manage and handle a situation or the task at hand (Bandura). Researchers have acknowledged the teacher as the focal point of implementing educational change and critical to educational reform. In fact, the level of teacher acceptance of and involvement in the change process is pivotal in the success or failure of reform (Fullan, 1991, 1993; Sarason, 1990, 1996). Teachers will resist reform when the methods do not match what teaching experience has taught them and what they believe (Bailey, 2000; Bandura, 1995). Teachers are more likely to assume responsibility for change and reform if involved in both the planning and the implementation, and more likely to solve the problems that arise as change takes place if they feel ownership in the change (Sarason, 1996). With requirements such as those that result from standardized curriculum and standardized testing of curriculum mastery, teachers are not empowered, but required to follow set curriculum materials that come with prescribed resource materials and methodologies, and be dependent on others for how they teach, as well as what they teach (Buswell, 1980; Fagan, 1989). In a discussion of the need for including teachers in decision-making, Enderlin-Lampe (2002) commented on the substantive effect on teacher empowerment and efficacy and the subsequent effect on the relationships between teachers and students. According to Young (1971), the prescribed teaching and testing methods fail to show students a connection between the classroom and the outside environment. As noted earlier, it becomes a matter of simple recall and identification of facts, without really qualifying the ability of students to use those facts for any constructive or practical purpose outside the classroom (Kincheloe, 1991). This does not fulfill the responsibility of the teacher to empower the student to be successful in the real world through literacy (Fagan, 1989). Students don't learn the skill because they are not given the opportunity to transfer content knowledge to the context of the outside world. Teachers are responsible for giving students this empowerment, but their ability to empower students is limited by their own lack of empowerment (Young) or low sense of efficacy

(Bandura).

The solution to the lack of teacher empowerment lies in teacher research (Houser, 1990; Kincheloe, 1991). While dependency on curriculum materials is seen as the opposite of empowerment (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 1996; Fagan, 1989), the answer to what teachers need to feel empowered lies in the classroom with the teacher. As Houser put it, " … it involves a synthesis of research and practice, a characteristic which provides real opportunity for teacher involvement in defining and shaping not only professional life, but the profession itself" (p. 55). Empowerment means enabling teachers to gain knowledge that builds their confidence, their sense of authority, and their enthusiasm for their profession (Lichtenstein et al., 1992). While the overriding goal of politicians and administrators has become high standardized test scores, the goal of the teacher should still be improving the student's ability to function in life (Elliot, 1981). The policy makers, federal, state, and local education agencies, have deemed the knowledge being taught as important. The teacher, on the other hand, being in the classroom with the students and dealing with them as individuals, each with their own involved set of circumstances that influence their background knowledge and predisposition to learning, would be far more conscious of the long range benefit of the curriculum to the student as an individual, rather than an abstract concept like students in general. "Research on teaching is meant to provide teacher educators with the competencies known to positively affect student learning" (Richardson, 1990, p. 5). Research on teacher perceptions and reactions to policies can also be used to positively affect student learning. The qualitative knowledge to be gained by asking teachers about their experiences and attempting to interpret the meaning of these experiences can bring new understanding to the teacher's perspective and the classroom experience, both for the teacher and the outside observer (Kincheloe, 1991). According to Kinchloe, understanding teacher experiences can empower the teachers, the administrators in the schools, and the students as ideological restrictions and lived experiences pave the way to emancipatory action. Recognizing the similarities and differences in teacher experiences and educational situations helps others to understand and anticipate what might happen if they were in a similar situation (Kincheloe & Pinar, 1991). Knowledge of the perceptions and experiences of other teachers can be empowering.

Performance

Performance and empowerment tend to be somewhat overlapping concepts in that they

are both concerned with how a job is done. The difference is that performance implies doing a job effectively, while empowerment implies enabling one to do a job effectively. Therefore, I feel it is worthwhile to look at what the literature says about effective teacher performance, or practice, and efficacy beliefs as separate from, although linked to teacher empowerment.

Effective practice for teachers, according to the literature, seems to be synonymous with reflective practice. Indeed, teacher preparation programs have made an effort to focus schools, universities and educators on reflective practice (Richardson, 1990). According to Dewey (1933), as mentioned earlier, a professional has a moral obligation to view their actions as experimental and reflect on their actions and the consequences of those actions. Teaching is a reflective action by nature. Decisions on time spent on a concept or the varieties of ways in which a concept is presented have traditionally been based on the teacher's reflection on the responses of the students.

Bloom (1953) said, "Reflective practice is as much a state of mind as it is a set of activities" (as cited in Clift, Houston, & Pugach, 1990, p. ix). According to Grimmett, MacKinnon, Erickson, and Riecken (1990), reflection helps in the effective implementation of research proven practices, but it can also improve the effectiveness of current practice, to help one choose between competing versions of good teaching practice. Schon (1983) referred to this as knowledge-in-action. He also emphasized reflective practice as a means by which teachers could resolve value conflict, such value conflict as that which must occur when the teacher is forced to choose between spending enough time on the curriculum for all students to achieve mastery, or moving on before all students achieve mastery in order to have time to cover all the material in the curriculum that will be tested (Dorgan, 2004). Schon said reflective practice is based on " … the past experiences of the practitioner interacting with the particular situation. Interacting with a situation brings forth and expands upon a type of tacit knowledge in an individual that is not consciously articulated at the time" (as cited in Richardson, 1990, p. 11). This type of research, reflective practice, can show how teachers are thinking, feeling, and reacting to the NCLB policy, how it is affecting their practice, and how that practice is affecting their students (or at least give their perception of how it is affecting their students.) Teachers need to be able to communicate their perceptions and frustrations in their community of practice. This communication becomes a vehicle for change and improving practice, thereby, improving the conversation of practice. The feeling of isolation that results from high-stakes testing

standards and that places responsibility for students passing or failing one test on the individual teacher is replaced with a means to improve practice and improve the teacher's feeling of self in relation to their performance (Richardson).

"Reflection is thus used as a way to make knowledge problematic through deconstruction. . . . It seeks to empower the voiceless" (Valli, 1990, p. 49). The voiceless in the standards movement have been the teachers. The field experience of elementary teachers in dealing with high-stakes testing is the foundation of the development of skills in dealing with this new teaching experience. Teaching in the high-stakes testing era leads to less student-centered methods (Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003), and could lead to the kind of value conflict about which Schon (1983) spoke, which could in turn lead teachers to question whether or not what they are doing in the classroom is good practice (Grimmett et al., 1990).

The importance of whether or not teachers believe themselves capable of providing instruction that will result in all students meeting performance requirements cannot be overstated. According to Bandura (1995), motivation and action are results of beliefs rather than objective evidence. "Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (p. 2). "Perceived self-efficacy to exercise control over stressors plays a central role in anxiety arousal" (Bandura, 1991, as cited in Bandura, 1995, p. 8). Therefore, if teachers believe themselves unable to achieve the desired outcome in their classrooms of having all students achieve the same proficiency minimums at the same time, by implication teacher anxiety would be expected to increase. Consequently, student test-anxiety would be expected to increase as indicated by the findings of Cizek and Burg (2006) and Hembree (1988).

Kincheloe (1991) said that there was no one correct way of viewing the classroom, intelligence or teacher or pupil success. It is a matter of value dimensions. But, again according to Kincheloe, the unique perspectives of teachers give them a special kind of educational knowledge: a practical knowledge and valuable knowledge extracted from experience. Teacher research allows patterns and insights to be extracted from that experience that give meaning to the events (James & Ebbutt, 1981; Wood, 1988). Through this cathartic process, referred to by Duke (1985) as debriefing, teachers can improve their teaching in response to student needs. Through being informed of these valuable teacher perspectives, teacher preparation, teacher empowerment and education policy can be improved in response to teacher and student needs.

Summary

According to Bandura's social-cognitive theory (1995, 1997), teachers will perform better if they believe they can. Teachers will also be more motivated to continue in the classroom, if they are empowered to do their jobs well and enabled to believe in their ability to do so. As noted by Sarson et al. (1960) and Stipek (2002) students, especially elementary students with their dependent nature on the teacher, will reflect the motivation, empowerment, efficacy, and performance of teachers. I believe that teacher research is a necessary means to empowering teachers.

Synthesis and Summary

The debate over the results achieved in elementary classrooms operating under the regulations of NCLB must be viewed as an argument over quality, rather than an argument purely over quantitative results. To ignore the quality of the education that is being delivered is tantamount to ignoring the humanity of the students who are being educated. However, the argument becomes somewhat circular, since we are judging the quality of educational programs by quantifiable results. The paradox is obvious and causes value conflicts for those involved in the educational process. Value conflicts cause anxiety. Test anxiety already affects the performance of students, with a myriad of factors interplaying in the picture. While effective treatments to help reduce test anxiety have been identified, there is always that constant search to enable us to eliminate circumstances that contribute.

Teacher research, both research of teachers and by teachers, can provide insight to help improve motivation and teacher efficacy, and empower teachers to improve their performance and, consequently, the performance and efficacy of their students. Reflections of teachers' on their experiences can inform practice and provide valuable information for both improving practice and improving test scores, through empowering teachers to better the conditions within their classrooms. But, the point is that teachers are the key that has remained to this point unused, the key to unlocking the door to a better quality of education for our students. This is true whether we are considering standardized test results or the quality and usefulness of information conveyed to students.

Research Direction

The literature reviewed clearly shows the continuing need to investigate the role of the teacher in the classroom and how that affects both their own feelings of frustration or fulfillment, and the

test anxiety of students. It also shows the importance of teacher research involving reflection on classroom experiences. My investigation of these issues through interviewing elementary teachers concerning their experiences in the classroom since the enactment of NCLB provided insight into the meaning of those experiences that can be used to inform practice.

Development of Research Questions

Research Question One

 1. How has implementation of high stakes testing in elementary school changed the way teachers experience their roles in the classroom?

 The way teachers teach traditionally has been a product of teacher education before entering the field, staff development in the field, and field experience. State and local curriculum and endorsed research based teaching methods have changed this (Buswell, 1980; Fagan, 1989). Teachers are now programmed to teach using designated acceptable techniques and timetables. Ascertaining teachers' perceptions about how they should teach and analyzing the meaning they find in these perceptions gives insight into how the changes have affected teachers.

Research Question Two

 2. How has implementation of high stakes testing in elementary school changed teaching vocabulary?

 The subject being taught and the content of the subject matter have traditionally determined teaching vocabulary, or the language of practice. This is still basically the case, although necessary vocabulary that must be taught is now typically laid out in curriculum teaching guides. However, vocabulary peculiar to standardized testing is not part of this vocabulary. For example, the exclusive use of *multiple-choice questions* in evaluation, *bubble sheets* and *scanners for grading* in elementary school, and the teaching of *strategies for eliminating the wrong answer choices*, to name a few, are not traditional curriculum vocabulary. Documenting the usage of such vocabulary provides evidence of time spent on teaching test taking rather than curriculum or practical application of curriculum knowledge.

Research Question Three

 3. How do elementary teachers describe their experiences with the implementation of high stakes testing that could have an impact on the test anxiety of students?

 The stories the teachers have to tell need to be heard. Hembree (1988), in addition to reporting a higher correlation between teacher anxiety and student anxiety than any other two

factors, also identified that teachers report more student test anxiety than do parents. This is to be expected since the teachers are in the classroom with the students on a daily basis, including during test time. The teachers are the ones who can provide information from experiences inside the classroom that give insight into the intended and unintended consequences of NCLB on teacher empowerment and student test anxiety. Such insight can be used to help evaluate both the delivery of instruction and the measurement of the effectiveness of instruction in elementary classrooms under NCLB testing requirements.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Overview of the Study

The purpose of both the pilot and main study was to examine teachers' perceptions of the post NCLB elementary classroom, the perceived changes, and the implications for teachers' feelings of empowerment and student test anxiety. A narratological design (Riessman, 1993) was employed for the purpose of examining the experiences of a few purposefully selected elementary teachers in post NCLB elementary grades 3 through 5 who taught core academic subjects and had teaching experience both before and after the enactment of the legislation. From this study, I expected to gain an understanding of the meaning of those experiences. I also expected to be able to produce an accurate description based on these experiences of what it is like for these selected teachers to be a teacher in a post NCLB elementary classroom. Through providing this description, I expected to give the teachers the opportunity to participate in improving practice. The following questions guided both the pilot and main study:

1. How has implementation of high stakes testing in elementary school changed the way teachers experience their roles in the classroom?

2. How has implementation of high stakes testing in elementary school changed teaching vocabulary?

3. How do elementary teachers describe their experiences with the implementation of high-stakes testing that could have an impact on the test anxiety of students?

Chapter Three contains the research design for the pilot and main studies, the data sources and data collection methods, and the data analysis methods. The selection of the participants, the setting, informed consent procedures, the role of the researcher, and the establishment of the credibility and trustworthiness of the study are also discussed.

Research Design

The research design for the pilot study and the main study was modeled after Reissman's (1993) design of narratological, or narrative analysis, with an emphasis on interpretation and context, and influenced by phenomenology's emphasis on understanding lived experiences and perceptions of experience. As Graham (1993) noted, data can reveal social patterns through examination of individual experiences. Bochner (2001) stated that the stories people tell can stand on their own as data that is a narrative documentary description of experience. This method

lends itself well to studying organizations and collecting organizational stories, or tales of the field as described by Patton (2002). These stories and their interpretation are central in narrative analysis (Patton). This process of collecting data can also lend itself to ongoing program evaluation, monitoring, and development processes, or organizational learning (Patton). Mitchell (1979) said, "Where we can tell no story, we have not knowledge" (p. 34). The process of telling the story of the participants also facilitated the researcher's entry into the field because it presented a less threatening format than other methods of study (Patton).

The pilot study was conducted for the initial purpose of improving the skills of the researcher and improving the research design. As a result of the pilot study, the interview protocol was revised. Because valuable data were collected from the interviews with the two pilot study participants, a manuscript was developed to relate the perceptions of the two participants, and the pilot study was included in a synthesis of the study results.

Hermeneutic inquiry guided this research design and served as a guide in questioning ecological conditions in which the teachers' experiences occurred (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) to develop a deep understanding of those experiences (Patton, 2002). According to Thorne (2000), subjective experience contains the relevant reality within the social context and temporal orientation of the inquiry. The concern for the researcher was to discover knowledge about the thoughts and feelings of the participants in the circumstances in which they found themselves. As Thorne explained, this required the use of inductive reasoning to understand the meaning of the data, generate ideas for interpreting the data, and deconstruct the meaning of the phenomenon studied. Thorne continued to say that by allowing the participants to put their experiences into words, the researcher through narrative analysis of the stories told by the participants is able to create understanding of those experiences and provide insight into the lived experience. In Thorne's words, "Through analytic processes that help us detect the main narrative themes within the accounts people give about their lives, we discover how they understand and make sense of their lives" (p. 2).

Role of the Researcher

In narrative analysis, the researcher interacts with the data. According to Thorne (2000), the perspective from which the researcher examines the phenomenon, the data collection and analysis strategies, and meanings derived by the researcher all influence the data. The data is

transformed into a picture of the experience. The researcher is immersed in the data and through reflection and interpretation identifies deep underlying meanings in the human experience.

Currently, I am a Doctoral Candidate completing my dissertation. I began studying Educational Leadership and Policy Studies in August of 2000, to obtain my Master's Degree and continued to pursue a PhD in the same field of study. I was an exceptional children teacher in my professional career for 21 years. After completing my Master's Degree, I began to pursue an administrative position. I was Assistant Principal and School Testing Coordinator in an elementary school from July of 2004, until July of 2006. I am currently working as a special education teacher of sixth grade students with behavioral disorders.

As a part of this experience, as a teacher and as an administrator, I have continuing experience with testing using both norm-referenced tests for measuring student achievement, for placement and classification purposes, and using criterion-referenced tests for local and state testing designed to measure student mastery of the curriculum. Through my experience in working with exceptional children and my experience with testing, I became keenly aware of the difficulties that some students experienced in testing situations. As an assistant principal and school testing coordinator, I became keenly aware of the pressures and frustrations expressed by elementary teachers related to meeting performance standards. This was the context within which I approached this study. According to the suggestion of Guba and Lincoln (1981), any limitations created by my employment in the field at the time of the pilot study and the main study were offset by the insight gained from that inside experience.

It became my responsibility, as the researcher, to employ empathetic understanding in being sympathetic to the experiences of the participants while maintaining systematic rigor in research procedures as suggested by Patton (2002). My aim was not to prove a particular perspective or to manipulate data to support certain assumptions, but rather to understand the world of the elementary teacher as it unfolded while accurately reporting the multiple experiences of the teachers who participated in the pilot and main studies. Reporting a balance of confirming and disconfirming evidence with regard to any conclusions offered results from careful reflection and interpretation of the findings according to Patton.

The acquiring of an inside understanding by the researcher is essential in qualitative inquiry according to Schwandt (2000). The empathy that I had for the participants due to my employment in the field of study facilitated understanding. According to Wispe (1986), empathy

implies cognitive understanding of the stance, position, feelings, and experiences of the participants; whereas, sympathy implies emotional involvement. *Verstehen* is a tradition that stresses understanding of the meaning of human behavior, the context in which social interaction occurs, the empathetic understanding of participant experiences, and making connections between the mental states of the participants and their behavior. The researcher begins to empathetically identify with the participants according to Patton (2002). As suggested by Wirth (1949), this empathetic identification with the participants is the source of interest, purpose, point of view, value, meaning and intelligibility for the researcher. In the pilot study and the main study, as Patton noted in referring to this process, the perspective of the researcher was a part of the context for the findings of the research.

Patton (2002) also emphasized the importance of reflexivity on the part of the researcher to ensure self-awareness, political or cultural consciousness, or ownership of the researcher's perspective. This reflexivity is a deconstructive exercise that reveals the interaction of the researcher's, or author's, self with the data (MacBeth, 2001). Reflexivity guarantees that the researcher remains conscious of the researcher's own perspective and that of the participants (Patton). Through rich, thick, and accurate depiction of the participants' perspectives combined with an awareness of the researcher's own perspectives, the researcher participates with the reader in searching for meaning within the conveyed experiences (Patton). Reflexivity promotes researchers' awareness of how they affect the interviewee, what researchers hear, and how researchers understand the related experiences in the roles of both researcher and analyst (Patton). Because the researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative study, the voice of the inquirer is central throughout the report (Patton). But researchers must be open to new concepts that were not part of their preconceived ideas and change these preconceptions if the data are not consistent with them. The researcher must look for similarities in the data and inherent explanations in the data for dissimilarities (Kleining & Witt, 2000).

Selection Process

The selection process involved purposeful sampling. In qualitative research, the researcher seeks to find answers that will contribute to knowledge working within a specific disciplinary tradition (Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling of teachers who have a story to tell about how this legislative change had affected their classrooms and their students was a strength of the qualitative study design. Critical case sampling permits logical generalization and possible

application of the findings to other similarly situated classrooms, as suggested by Patton in referring to this type of study design.

The purpose of the pilot study and the main study was to examine teachers' perceptions of the post No Child Left Behind elementary classroom, the perceived changes, and the implications for teachers' feelings of empowerment and student test anxiety. I purposefully sought teachers in elementary grades 3 through 5 with varying ethnic backgrounds, of both genders, and with a range of teaching experience from 10 to 30 years. I sought veteran teachers who volunteered to share their experiences in dealing with high-stakes standardized testing, the differences they believed it had made in their teaching, and how they perceived that it affected their students.

Setting

From the pilot study and the main study, I hoped to be able to provide a rich, full description of the elementary classroom situation in which these teachers worked that would permit the reader to visualize the setting and empathize with the situation as suggested by Patton (2002). The report reflects the language and categories used by the teachers in describing their experiences to present an emic view of the classroom experience as recommended by Pike (1967). The hope was to give readers an inside view of that which was happening in these classrooms so that they could not only see what was happening, but also feel what it is like to be a part of a post NCLB elementary classroom as described by these teachers, as suggested by Patton. To facilitate understanding of the experience, as the reporter I sought to convey how these teachers thought, what they perceived and believed, and how they functioned in these elementary classrooms to allow that insider perspective for the reader as suggested by Powdermaker (1966) and Patton. The resulting reports of the studies have the potential to enlighten other elementary teachers as well as the outside reader, because, as Wax (1971) put it, " … while the outsider simply does not know the meanings or their patterns, the insider is so immersed that he may be oblivious to the fact that the pattern exists" (p. 3). My hope is that elementary teachers will be able to take a reflective look at the reports of the pilot and main studies to help them improve their classroom practice.

Within this geographic location and the school system in which the pilot study and main study were conducted, there are nine elementary schools. The participants who volunteered came from four of these nine schools and were teachers in grades 3 through 5 who were teaching core

academic subjects. All of these schools were following the same curricular and standardized testing guidelines.

The school system that was the location of the pilot study and main study is in the Southeastern part of the United States. It is a state in which requirements limit elementary class size to no more than 24 students for grades 3 through 5. The school system itself had an enrollment of 8,762 students in the 2004-2005 school year, and combined per pupil expenditure from the federal, state and local resources was $6,380. The system employed 1,313 people at the time of the study. There are 16 schools in this rural district, and eight of the nine elementary schools receive Title I funding. Despite these demographics, the dropout rate in the district has decreased over the past seven school years and remains below the state average. District elementary proficiency on standardized testing has steadily increased since the 1996-1997 school year to a 90% proficiency level reported in the 2003-2004 school year. Ethnic diversity in the system included a student population that was 3.09% black, 12.54% Hispanic, 1.73% multi-racial, 85.85% white, and less than 1% American Indian or Asian at the time of study (A document related to the county in which the studies were conducted). The percentage of children served by the exceptional children program was 16.52% (A document related to the state in which the studies were conducted). The school system employed an inclusion model for teaching exceptional children except for those students for whom the severity of their disability was such that an inclusion setting could not meet their individual needs. This school system was selected because my position as an employee of the school district at the time of study facilitated entry into the research sites.

Participants

Volunteers for the pilot study and the main study were solicited from the teachers in the elementary schools in the school district. It was anticipated that participants selected would have a range of teaching experience from approximately 10 to 30 years. From those that volunteered and participated in the studies, two teachers had six years teaching experience, and the other nine had 10 or more years of experience. Ethnic diversity and gender were also considerations in participant selection. One African-American teacher and two male elementary core subject teachers who fit the selection criteria volunteered and were study participants.

After discussing my plan and intent with the formal gatekeepers at each elementary school, I conducted face-to-face meetings or telephone conversations with potential participants

during which I described the procedures and risks (Appendix A). I also emailed a solicitation flyer to each of the elementary school principals in the school district to give to teachers who fit the study criteria (see Appendix B and Appendix C). It was estimated that there would be a maximum of 8 to10 interviews before data saturation or redundancy, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified it, was reached. Eleven participants were purposefully selected to obtain the perspectives of elementary teachers who had experience in tested grade levels teaching core academic subjects before and since the implementation of NCLB.

<div align="center">Informed Consent and Permission Procedures</div>

Full disclosure of the purpose of the research study must be given to the participants (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, & Sechrest, 1966). To ensure this full disclosure and guarantee that participation is voluntary, informed consent is necessary. The University's Internal Review Board also requires informed consent. According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), this informed consent must include information about the study's purpose and audience. It must ensure that the participants understand that to which they are agreeing, ensure that their consent is willingly given, and ensure that participants understand that they may withdraw from participation at any time. Patton (2002) included disclosure of how information from the study will be used, what will be asked in the interview, how responses will be handled, and the possible risks and benefits for the participant. All forms that were used in the pilot study and the main study were written to comply with these conditions.

Application for expedited approval was filed on November 14, 2005, and amended on February 4, 2006. Appendix D contains a copy of the informed consent document. This document was given to participants prior to their participation in the studies to give them the opportunity to review it and formulate any questions they might have wished to ask. The interview protocol can be found on pages 68 through 70 in this chapter. A copy of the signed informed consent along with the interview protocol was given to participants prior to the beginning of the interview.

Through verbal communication, permission was obtained from the superintendent of the school district to conduct this research study. The superintendent was also given a copy of the application for expedited approval that was submitted to the Internal Review Board.

Assurance of Confidentiality

Confidentiality in qualitative research, according to Rossman and Rallis (2003), presents two challenge elements: protecting the privacy of participants, and maintaining the confidentiality of what they share with you (or not revealing who made what comments). Especially when working in the academic community in which the study is being conducted, great caution is necessary to avoid the automatic impulse to share information with colleagues. While direct quotations were used in the final reports with pseudonyms used to identify participants, it may still be possible for someone who has knowledge of the organization to surmise the identity of an interviewee. All attempts were made to mask identities and identifiers. Regardless, participants were informed of this potential risk to privacy and reputation.

According to Patton (2002), and because I was in a leadership position in the school system, it was also important to gain the confidence of the participants. One of the data collection methods was face-to-face, audiotaped interviews. Without this confidence or comfort zone, the participants could have been reluctant to be candid and open with me in the interview situation. Ascertaining the level of confidence or comfort for the participant in interviewing with me was a part of the participant selection process. Lack of comfort with or confidence in the interviewer, as stated by Patton, is a potential problem and assurance of confidentiality is crucial to avoiding this problem. Patton also noted the dilemma of convincing the participant that confidentiality will be protected while at the same time requiring the participant to sign an informed consent form as required by the Internal Review Board. Again, establishing that level of confidence or comfort with potential participants was crucial to the selection process and to the ultimate value of the study. This was accomplished by conveying to the potential participants the great worth I placed on their thoughts and experiences while also respecting their contribution of time and trust as suggested by Patton.

The issues relating to confidentiality were discussed with each participant prior to the interview. All tapes, transcripts, field notes, interview process notes, and reflexive journal entries are stored in a secure location in my home. They have not been viewed by anyone else, other than my advisor and myself, to assure confidentiality. Pseudonyms were used for participants' names in field notes, interview process and reflexive journal entries, as well as the final reports. If a participant was referred to by name, the pseudonym for the participant was used. The name

of the participant's schools and the name of the school district were not used in the body of any written document relating to the studies.

Gaining Access and Entry

My professional affiliation as an assistant principal in an elementary school in the school district at the time of study made gaining entry into the field easier. My acquaintance with the administrators in the system and with some of the teachers facilitated entry. All the formal gatekeepers of the school district expressed their support of this study. The superintendent granted verbal permission to conduct the study within the school system. Conversation with the school principals helped in identifying possible obstacles, negotiating some reciprocity, and identifying teachers within the schools who were eligible to be participants in the study as suggested by Jorgensen (1989). Principals were emailed and asked to post solicitation flyers in the schools (see Appendices B and C).

Data Collection

Data collection included field notes, interviews, in-process notes, and reflexive journal entries. The interview is characteristic of qualitative study (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) and is essential for understanding how participants experience the world in which they live. The interview allows us to enter that world as verbally related by the study participant and allows the researcher to determine to what extent the view of individual participant is typical or atypical of the group (Patton, 2002). Interviewing allows the researcher to gain information that cannot be directly observed, such as thoughts, feelings, intentions, behaviors at a previous point in time, and situations that preclude the presence of an observer (i.e., how the participants have categorized the environment in which they work and the meaning they attach to their organizational methods.) To discover this kind of information, it is necessary to ask questions (Patton). Taking field notes, interview process notes, and making reflexive journal entries provide a data triangulation source and facilitated the data analysis process.

Field Notes

According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), researchers need to turn that which they see and hear into data by writing field notes. These field notes include a running record of observations made while in the setting that were not during the actual interview and comments on the data and the project itself. I began making some field note entries when I decided to pursue this topic of study, whenever I heard comments of teachers or administrators that I

believed to be relevant to the study. I continued making field notes throughout the process. These field note entries necessarily became more frequent and purposeful as I began the study process.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted with two volunteer participants. The initial purpose in doing the pilot study was to improve the skills of the researcher and to improve the research design. As a result of the pilot study, the interview protocol was revised. Also, valuable data were collected from the interviews with the two pilot study participants. A manuscript was developed to relate the perceptions of the two participants in the pilot study. This manuscript, *Two Elementary Teachers Reflect on Their Sense of Empowerment and Student Test Anxiety Post NCLB*, is included as Chapter Four of the dissertation. The data from the pilot study was then included in a synthesis with the main study in the overall conclusions of the two phases of the study.

Interviews

Interviews were audio taped in the school at which the participant worked or at some other location chosen by the participant. The semi-structured interview process was a combination of methodologies. I used a standardized open-ended interview protocol with a few interview questions that were asked of all participants in a particular order, and a guided interview process that allowed other possible questions to be asked as the interview progressed. The participants were able to respond freely. By allowing the responses given by the participants to identify other possible needs for inquiry, the design of the study continued to evolve. Because eleven participants were interviewed, because it was advantageous to the value of the study to allow the participants to share other information which they believed relevant to the topic that might not be covered on an interview protocol, and because participant responses prompted appropriate probing questions that were not covered in a protocol, this combination of methods was desirable, as suggested by Patton (2002). The standardized open-ended protocol provided standardized questions and anticipated probes that facilitated comparability across different sites or time periods, minimized interviewer effect and facilitated analysis, as suggested by Patton. Having a set protocol for the interview, as Patton recommended, provided an instrument that can be inspected by those who might use the findings of the studies, provided variation control, facilitated efficient use of time during the interview, and made organization of data easier for the research. As Patton also noted, it provided an opportunity to anticipate study limitations. This design also posed no issues relative to the credibility of the studies because each participant was

recognized as a unique individual with individual responses, again as recommended by Patton. Allowing the researcher to probe with unplanned questions in the event that the participant offered information that was unanticipated by the researcher in the study design addressed the one weakness in the standardized open-ended review method noted by Patton. It allowed the researcher to probe individual differences and circumstances that could be essential to fully understanding the perspective of the respondent. The interview protocol for the main study was modified as a result of a pilot study.

Interview Protocol

The following was the interview protocol after revisions based on pilot study interviews.

Research interview set questions.

(Lead in question: Tell me what it's like being an elementary teacher today?)

1. Tell me about your teaching position before the enactment of NCLB?
2. How has that legislation affected or changed your classroom environment?
3. How has that legislation affected or changed your teaching?
4. What classroom stories can you share about testing? Can you tell me more?
5. What classroom stories can you share about student test anxiety with end of grade or practice tests?
6. How has test anxiety affected student behavior or student interactions?
7. Describe your feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem in relation to performance of the requirements of your teaching position since NCLB.
8. Have your feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem changed since the legislation's enactment, and if so, how have they changed?
9. Do you use non-curriculum vocabulary in the classroom that is related to standardized testing? If so, please elaborate.

   The interviewer utilized the following anticipated probing questions as appropriate to the interview.

1. Does standardized testing affect your teaching methods? If so, please elaborate.
2. Do you believe your classroom is test-focused? If yes, describe your experiences with being test-focused.
3. What is your priority when teaching the curriculum? Have NCLB requirements

affected your priorities in relation to teaching the curriculum, and if so, how have

they been affected?

4. How do you think curriculum content is determined?

5. What do you feel is the greatest concern of teachers in relation to standardized end-of-grade testing?

6. What do you think the goal of education is? Has this changed since the implementation of NCLB?

7. How do you think NCLB requirements have impacted students?

8. What do you need to help you feel like you have more power to do your job and help students meet the requirements?

Final Research Interview Set Question.

10. What else should I have asked you about your classroom and the teaching experience since the No Child Left Behind Act was enacted?

Demographic questions.

1. What grade level do you teach?

2. What core subjects do you teach?

3. How many years teaching experience do you have?

4. What degrees and endorsements do you have?

5. Do you plan for teaching to be your lifetime career?

6. Tell me about the makeup of your classroom, the students you teach.

7. What EC support or other support services do you receive?

8. Do you have a teaching assistant? If so, for what portion of the day?

9. How are things organized in your classroom? How do you group your students?

10. What are your age, gender, and ethnicity?

<p style="text-align:center">*Interview Process Notes*</p>

Patton (2002) stated that process notes should be written as soon and as often as possible in research. Rossman and Rallis (2003) said that notes should be written in an exploratory, open-ended narrative style including tentative recording of ideas about the interpretation of the data that might be lost if not written immediately. These notes during an interview, again, according to Rossman and Rallis, include not a verbatim writing of dialogue when using an audio-tape, but attention to reactions of the participants, notes on emotional reactions, and a listing of major

points to facilitate coordination of the interview process notes with the appropriate sections of interview data and transcripts. I used this as a guide in taking interview process notes. Writing these notes during the interview process provided an opportunity to write additional probing questions. Then, I was able to later evaluate the questions and decide if they needed to be added to future interviews or if the questions were peculiar to the particular respondent.

Reflexive Notes

Reflexive journal entries were made throughout the process of preparing to interview, conducting the interviews, and analyzing the interviews. Systematic reflection is a part of the process of constructing understandings of the research topic through asking questions about the interview or the experience, reflecting on the context of the study, and relating to personal experience or past reflective journal entries (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The researcher interacts with the data in a process of interpretative knowledge construction. The researcher's past experiences and developing skills as the study progresses become a part of the study itself.

The relationship between researcher and participant is also reflexive. The researcher's reactions to the words and actions of the respondent include thoughts and understanding of the participant's perspective that provoke unexamined reflexes to what is heard and visualized in a reflective, contemplative process of introspection. This is a cyclical process of the researcher making sense as the interview progresses of what meaning individual participants place on their own actions and reactions to the environment in which they work. It is also a systematic and rigorous process (Patton, 2002). The journal entries included insights into possible interpretations of data, questions for further reflection, and other thoughts and feelings relevant to the study.

Data Quality Procedures

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Patton (2002) listed several essential questions that must be answered to ensure the credibility of a study:

1. What experience, training, and perspective does the researcher bring to the field?
2. Who funded the study and under what arrangements with the researcher?
3. How did the researcher gain access to the study site?
4. What prior knowledge did the researcher bring to the research topic and study site?

5. What personal connections does the researcher have to the people, program, or topic of study? (p. 566)

A researcher is required to relate any personal and professional information that may be perceived by the reader to positively or negatively affect data collection, analysis, or interpretation of data. This may include information about how the researcher was received into the study setting and what prior knowledge and opinions the researcher has related to the topic of study. (Patton, 2002). Patton continued to list four ways in which the researcher or the fact that research is being done can affect the findings of the study:

1. What reactions do the participants have to the researcher?

2. What changes does the researcher or the instrument being used undergo during the course of data collection and analysis (are there instrumentation effects)?

3. What are the predispositions, selective perceptions, and biases of the researcher?

4. Does the researcher have sufficient training and preparation to conduct the study? (p. 567)

Glesne (1999) posed the question of sufficient time spent by the researcher in the field. Has the researcher spent sufficient time interviewing and building rapport with the respondents to contribute to the trustworthiness of the data? Becoming acquainted with the participants, or at a minimum building enough of a rapport to gain their trust, increases the likelihood that the respondents will be open and comprehensive in what they tell the researcher. Conversely, spending too much time with the participants can increase reactivity (Patton, 2002). However, the researcher sometimes must accept that they may have a reactive effect and attempt to use it to the advantage of the study process (Denzin, 1978).

Member Checks

Member checks of the transcripts and the analysis summary of the transcripts were done to ensure the credibility of the pilot study and the main study. This allowed the participants to elaborate, correct, or extend the meaning and interpretation placed on their transcripts and comments in the analysis process. Rossman and Rallis (2003) called this process participant validation.

When each individual interview was transcribed and the single case narrative analysis was completed, the participants were mailed a copy of their own interview transcript and analysis, along with a self-addressed and stamped envelope for return of the documents. This

mailing included a cover letter instructing the participants to make changes, additions, or corrections to the documents on these copies. The participants were instructed to contact me to schedule a time and place to meet to make changes if they preferred to do it together. The letter then instructed them to initial and return the transcript and summary analysis when the documents met their approval. It was requested that they return the documents within a week of the receipt of the documents (see Appendix E). All the participants returned the member checks. There were no significant changes to the typed data.

Triangulation

Triangulation of data was achieved by using four methods of data collection: field notes, interview data, interview process notes, and reflexive journal entries. According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), multiple sources of data at different points in time using a variety of methods helps to build the holistic story or picture that the investigator is trying to discover. This increases the complexity of the studies.

Peer Debriefer

Utilizing a critical friend, in this case my advisor, as a reflective partner to help in study design decisions, analysis and interpretation of the data, and the written explanation of the findings also helped to ensure the credibility of the pilot study and main study. Rossman and Rallis (2003) referred to this peer debriefer as an "intellectual watchdog" who could objectively guard the integrity of the study (p. 69). My advisor assisted in the study design and development as a critic and a guide. Her experience in analysis and interpretation of study data adds to the credibility of the studies.

Transferability

Transferability of the qualitative study is referred to by Patton (2002) as fittingness for use in other settings. Fittingness is defined as the degree of congruence between contexts. Cronbach and Associates (1980) referred to it as reasonable extrapolation indicating that the application of the findings from the data can go beyond the original study to apply to other similar, although not identical, situations. This is based on logical, thoughtful, case-derived and problem-oriented thinking, rather than on statistics and probabilities. Information rich samples and designs can be particularly useful when targeting specific concerns about the present, the future, lessons learned and potential applications to future efforts. Patton indicated that purposeful sampling could be designed with the desire for extrapolation in mind. The purposeful

sampling used for this study design yielded thick, rich descriptions of the elementary classrooms of the selected teachers in post NCLB classrooms involved in high-stakes standardized testing and how it affected both the teachers and their students. Since this is a topic of current concern to many, the readers will determine the reasonable extrapolation value of the pilot study and the main study.

Dependability

According to Patton (2002), the dependability of a qualitative inquiry should be judged by its merit as a systematic process systematically followed, and its authenticity should be judged by the researcher's reflexive consciousness about his or her own perspective, appreciation for the perspectives of others, and the researcher's fairness in conveying the structure of the beliefs that hold the belief system in place. Triangulation is important in helping to capture and convey these multiple perspectives and understanding the particular context in which they occur. Utilizing ethical practice and reflexivity in acknowledging how my own experiences and background affected what I understood to be the meaning of the data from the studies was essential according to Denzin (1978), and Guba and Lincoln (1989). My aim was to describe and explain the stories related by the participants as accurately and completely as possible to depict their world and the way their experiences occurred as suggested by Patton. Again, triangulation of data collection, comparing the consistency of the data, and analyst triangulation in using a peer debriefer to review my findings contributed to dependability. Also, understanding the consistencies and inconsistencies between interviews of participants helped to give deeper insight into the meaning of their experiences. The process of member checking of transcripts and analysis also helped to learn about the accuracy, completeness, fairness and perceived usefulness of my data analysis. The combination of these qualitative methods built the dependability of the pilot study and the main study.

Data Analysis and Management

This portion of the paper presents the data analysis and management plan of the pilot study and main study. Past experience in the field and an ongoing interaction with the data as it was collected, transcribed, and analyzed influenced the data analysis. Ongoing peer debriefing and continued reading and studying in the field of qualitative methods and analysis also helped to formulate the final analyses.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was done on four types of collected data: field notes, face-to-face, audiotaped interviews, interview process notes, and reflexive journal entries. The raw data for analysis were the words collected as data. Initial data analysis began with the transcription of the interviews and the organization of all the data collected. I personally transcribed the interviews to provide additional interaction and familiarization with the data. The interviews were typed with subject and page number headings for each transcribed interview. Interview process notes were hand written on the protocol during the interviews. Reflexive journal entries were type-written and given subject and page number headings as appropriate.

Data analysis was a narratological approach utilizing the categorical-content perspective analysis of qualitative data expounded by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) to code the data and sort it according to themes. Similarities and differences in the perceptions and experiences of the two pilot study interviewees and of the nine interviewees from the main study were analyzed and interpreted. These analyses were synthesized in Chapter Six. Descriptive narratives for each participant were developed with a focus on their unique experiences. Codes emerged through individual readings of the separate transcripts, notes, and journal entries. Codes across the experiences of the two participants in the pilot study and, subsequently, the nine participants in the main study were revised, expanded, and refined through subsequent readings of the transcripts. Data was then organized into tables according to these codes and according to the research question to which the data applied. Open readings of the coded data then led to the identification of themes, and then broader categories, that defined the major content of the data emerging from the reading, as described by Lieblich et al. These categories emerged; matched the division of data by the research questions in both the pilot study and main study; and revealed patterns in the teachers' experiences, their perceptions of the changes in teaching methods, and their perceptions of the impact these changes have had on their students. Finding both the patterns and the inconsistencies in the data were results of the analysis.

For the purposes of the pilot study and the main study, *Change in the Teachers' Experiences* represents the perceptions of the teachers related to their experiences with teaching and testing under the standardized requirements of NCLB. This category contained the richest data and the largest number of themes. *Change in Teaching Vocabulary* represents the change in the language of practice used by teachers under the standardized requirements. *Change in the*

Students' Experiences represents the effects perceived by the teachers on the students in the post NCLB classroom. Each of the three areas is discussed in the manuscripts that make up Chapter Four (relating the pilot study) and Chapter Five (relating the main study) with exact words of participants.

If the participants did not categorize the data in their own language as they reported their stories, terms were developed to identify the categories inductively generated as suggested by Patton (2002). This process was a kind of creative synthesis that took place with immersion in the data to discover the patterns, themes, and interconnections through a progression of exploring the data and confirming or discarding ideas guided by analytical principles and ending with the creative synthesis of the meaning of the holistic experience. Sensitivity to the context of the related experiences was critical in this process as noted by Lightfoot (1983). The context provided clues for interpretation of the experiences of the teachers within the elementary classroom setting, without which accurate interpretation would have been unlikely.

The stories provided by the teachers gave a window into the meaning of their experiences, or in other words, what it meant to them to be an elementary teacher in a post NCLB classroom as suggested by Barone (2000) and Patton (2002). Patton proposed guiding questions for analysis of a study. In the tradition of Hermeneutic inquiry, what are the conditions under which the teachers' actions took place, that produced the thoughts, feelings, and emotions they experienced, and that made it possible to interpret the meaning of their experience? Patton referred to the *hermeneutic circle* as an analytical process aimed at enhancing understanding that emphasizes relating parts to wholes and wholes to parts. The researcher or analyst can eventually get out of this cycle of relating parts to wholes, whole to parts, and back again by discovering the true meaning of the text. Schwandt (2001) compared this to understanding the meaning of a poem by comprehending the meaning of the first few lines and understanding the meaning of the first few lines by grasping the overall meaning of the poem (as cited in Patton, 2002).

In the tradition of narrative analysis, Patton (2002) posed two guiding questions: what does this narrative or story reveal about the participants and the world in which they work, and how can this narrative be interpreted to understand and illuminate the life and interactions that created it? Narrative analysis focuses specifically on how to interpret these stories and to reveal the interactions or social patterns (or ecological patterns) through the lens of the individuals experiencing it (Bochner, 2001; Lieblich, et al., 1998). Examination of these stories as data

revealed the larger meanings of the experiences. The analytical focus of narrative analysis concerned the nature of this interpretation as suggested by Denzin (1989; 1997). Discovering meaning in the stories also came from comparing the stories and individual cases and led to questioning and interpreting the causes, consequences and connections of the individual stories as suggested by Patton. The assumption was that the subjective story telling of the teachers and the constant interaction of the researcher with the data as it emerged provided entrance for the researcher into the perspective of the participants as suggested by Garson (2005). The narratives themselves are a social phenomenon that vary by context, and, as proposed by Labov and Waletzky (1967) varied by the social context in which they were collected. This loaned credence to the value of interview data from different teachers in different classrooms and in differing points in their careers.

Data Management

Patton (2002) said that the data generated by qualitative methods are voluminous. Data was organized in file folders as it was collected. This allowed for comparison and reflection as the data collection progressed that helped to identify any gaps in the data that could possibly be filled by the collection of additional data before the study was concluded. It also helped to identify when the data saturation point was reached and the need for data collection was fulfilled. It was also necessary to maintain a proper system of labeling and notation for the data to facilitate retrieval. Labeling collected data with the pseudonym of the participant to whom it pertained and the data type facilitated retrieval of data. Personal transcription helped with data management by providing further opportunity for immersion in the data, as proposed by Patton, and helped in generating emergent insights. Typing the transcripts and organizing the interview process notes and reflexive journal entries helped to grasp the data as a whole.

The data for the pilot study and the main study were managed as it was collected from the beginning. As patterns and themes were identified, color-coding was used. Folders were used to organize field notes, interviews, interview process notes, and reflexive notes according to the interview to which they pertained. Once data was transcribed, an initial reading of the transcripts was done and marginal notes were written to help interpret findings and identify patterns or themes. Then, the data was reread numerous times to formally code the transcriptions, the field notes, the interview process notes and the reflexive journal entries as suggested by Patton (2002). This triangulation of data from interviews, field notes, interview process notes, and reflexive

journal entries helped in determining substantive significance based on the following: the consistency of the evidence, the extent to which the findings increased and deepened understanding, the extent to which the findings were consistent with other knowledge, and the extent to which findings are useful for improving teacher empowerment and the performance of elementary students in standardized high-stakes testing.

Summary

A narrative analysis approach with Hermeneutic inquiry was used to examine teachers' perceptions of the post No Child Left Behind (2002) elementary classroom, how they perceived the changes, and how it impacted the teachers' feelings of empowerment and student test anxiety. Guided by three research questions, data was collected from multiple participants until data saturation was reached.

The settings for the pilot study and the main study were in elementary schools located in one school district in the Southeastern United States. This site was chosen because the researcher was employed in this school district, and this facilitated entry into the individual school sites. The participants were elementary teachers in grades 3 through 5 who taught core academic subjects and were involved in end of grade standardized testing. Volunteers were solicited from this group of teachers.

Data collection procedures included field notes, face-to-face, audiotaped interviews with the teachers, the writing of interview process notes during the interviews, and the writing of reflexive journal entries. Data was analyzed using a narrative analysis approach. Results are presented through analysis of identified themes based on patterns that emerged from the data collected. These findings were used to discover and report the meaning of the experience of the selected participants. These reports are in the form of two manuscripts submitted for publication. The results of the pilot study were reported in the first manuscript submitted to *The Teacher Educators' Journal* in October of 2006, and accepted for publication in December, 2006. The results of the main study were reported in the second manuscript submitted to *American Educational Research Journal* in November of 2006, for possible inclusion in an NCLB theme issue in the Fall of 2007 (Hollingsworth, 2006).

CHAPTER FOUR

PILOT STUDY MANUSCRIPT

Introduction

The following chapter is a manuscript reporting the results of the pilot study. The manuscript was submitted for publication in October, 2006 to *The Teacher Educators' Journal*. It was accepted for publication in December, 2006. The initial purpose in doing the pilot study was to improve the skills of the researcher and to improve the research design. As a result of the pilot study, the interview protocol was revised. Since valuable data were collected from the interviews with the two pilot study participants, this manuscript was developed to relate the perceptions of the two participants in the pilot study. The data from the pilot study is also included in the synthesis with the main study in the overall conclusions in Chapter Six.

Two Elementary Teachers Reflect on Their Sense of Empowerment

and Student Test Anxiety Post NCLB

Abstract

Teacher empowerment and student test-anxiety are issues at the forefront of educators' concerns in implementing NCLB requirements. Participants in this qualitative study expressed their perceptions of post NCLB elementary classrooms and the perceived changes. Future research implications are discussed concerning investigation of teacher empowerment and student test-anxiety.

Key words: teacher empowerment, student test-anxiety, post NCLB elementary classroom

NEA Today (Jehlen, 2006) and the American Evaluation Association (2005) have protested the misuse of high-stakes testing under No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) in setting achievement standards. Researchers have acknowledged the teacher as the focal point of implementing educational change and critical to educational reform (Fullan, 1991, 1993; Sarason, 1990, 1996); yet, the teacher's voice has been missing in educational reform (Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003) under NCLB. The teacher's role in creating or feeding test anxiety among students has been cited as a concern in need of serious examination (McDonald, 2001; Sarason, Davidson, Lighthall, Waite, & Ruebush, 1960). However, the teacher's role has been virtually overlooked in the test anxiety versus performance puzzle except as the implementer of intervention strategies (Klingman & Zeidner, 1990) even though research has shown that teacher anxiety and student test-anxiety have a higher correlation than student test-anxiety and any other classroom factor (Cizek & Burg, 2006; Hembree, 1988).

Research on teacher perceptions and reactions to policies can bring new understanding of the teacher's classroom experience, both for the teacher and teacher educators (Kincheloe, 1991; Richardson, 1990). Recognizing the similarities and differences in teacher experiences and educational situations helps others to understand and anticipate what might happen if they were in a similar situation (Kincheloe & Pinar, 1991) and can lead to increased teacher empowerment. Empowerment, in this case, means enabling teachers to gain knowledge that builds their confidence, their sense of authority, and their enthusiasm for their profession (Lichtenstein, McLaughlin, & Knudsen, 1992).

According to Grimmett, MacKinnon, Erickson, and Riecken (1990), reflection helps in the effective implementation of research proven practices, but it can also improve the effectiveness of current practice to help choose between competing versions of good teaching practice. Schon (1983) emphasized reflective practice as a means by which teachers could resolve value conflicts that occur when a teacher is forced to choose between mastery and coverage of curriculum (Dorgan, 2004). When teachers communicate their perceptions and frustrations, communication becomes a vehicle for change and improving practice. The feelings of isolation that result from high-stakes testing standards and that place responsibility for students passing or failing one test on the individual teacher are replaced with a means to improve practice and improve the teacher's descriptions of self in relation to their performance (Richardson, 1990). The elementary teaching experience has changed in implementing high-

stakes testing. Teaching in the high-stakes testing era leads to less student-centered methods (Jones et al., 2003), and value conflict (Schon), which could lead teachers to question whether or not what they are doing in the classroom is good practice (Grimmett et al., 1990).

The unique perspectives of teachers give them a special kind of educational knowledge: a practical knowledge and valuable knowledge extracted from experience. Through debriefing (Duke, 1985) teachers can improve their teaching in response to student needs. Through being informed of these valuable teacher perspectives, teacher educators can improve preparation, also in response to the needs of the students. As noted by Sarson et al. (1960) and Stipek (2002) students, especially elementary students with their dependent nature on the teacher, will reflect the motivation, empowerment, and performance of teachers.

<div align="center">*Purpose*</div>

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions of the post NCLB elementary classroom, the perceived changes, and the implications for teachers' feelings of empowerment and beliefs about student test anxiety. The goal was to gain a better understanding of the experience of selected elementary school teachers in a high-stakes testing environment.

<div align="center">*Methodology*</div>

Context of the Study

The teachers in this study were recruited from a rural school district in the Southeastern United States. The interviews took place in an elementary school after the superintendent granted permission for the teachers to participate in the study. The primary researcher has been a teacher or administrator for 23 years, and this experience provided insight into the experiences reported by the teachers and facilitated interpretation of the data.

Study design.

Face-to-face, individual audio-taped interviews were conducted with two volunteer teachers. The researcher kept field notes, in-process notes, and reflexive journal entries to facilitate triangulation of data sources and enhance credibility. Member checks with the participants focusing on the interview transcriptions and data analysis strengthen credibility of the findings. A semi-structured interview protocol was designed to elicit the telling of teachers' stories about teaching and testing under the standardized requirements of NCLB and their experiences concerning the impact of these requirements on students. Verbatim transcription and

analysis of the interview content along with the other forms of qualitative data were conducted and documented in an audit trail of all research procedures.

Limitations.

Limitations to the study design center around the scope and nature of the information provided for analysis. The readers are cautioned to make their own judgments about the transferability of findings from the perspectives of these teachers. It should also be noted that the interpretation is based mainly on self-reports given by the teachers. The findings are informative only as an examination of these teachers' experiences as analyzed using qualitative research procedures.

Participants

The required criteria for participation in this study included being a core subject teacher in elementary grades 3 through 5 with teaching experience both before and after the implementation of NCLB. This insured involvement in the process pre and post NCLB. Both participants were Caucasian teachers from grade 3 through 5 with 13 years of experience each and who taught all core subjects to their students. Both participants were 37 years old and also had children of their own. The school in which they taught is a Title I school that did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the previous school year, and each teacher had a classroom with a majority of students from a low socio-economic background. The students in both classrooms, as reported by the teachers, also came from a variety of home and family types including single parent, a combination of biological and non-biological parents, or living with relatives from the extended family.

Procedures

The Institutional Review Board at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University gave approval for conducting this study in February, 2006. Participants were given informed consent forms, and the procedures and possible risks were discussed with them before they agreed to participate in the study. Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants. In the process of transcription and analysis, participants were assigned pseudonyms, and potentially identifying data were replaced with false names or with generic information to maintain confidentiality and the integrity of the data. Following transcription and single case analysis, the participants were each given the opportunity to read the interview transcript and the

analysis to verify the accuracy of both documents. The participants made no significant deletions, additions, or revisions.

Data analysis was a narratological approach utilizing the categorical-content perspective analysis of qualitative data recommended by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) to code the data and sort it according to themes. Descriptive narratives for each participant were developed with a focus on their unique experiences. Open readings of the coded data led to the identification of themes, and then broader categories, that defined the major content of the data emerging from the reading, as described by Lieblich et al.. These emerging categories revealed patterns in the two teachers' experiences, their perceptions of the changes in teaching methods, and their perceptions of the impact these changes have on their students.

Narrative Descriptions of the Participants

 Annie.

 Annie was a third grade teacher who enjoyed being able to incorporate hands on activities in her class and employed what she referred to as "arty" activities to help children apply skills. She was very concerned with "building her students up", preparing them for testing challenges, and preparing them to be productive citizens. She described experiencing a struggle in attempting to help her students achieve according to the standards set by NCLB. While Annie believed that the ideals and expectations were "good and necessary", she experienced frustration over the difficulty of helping all students achieve at the same level in the same length of time. She felt good about herself and what she was doing prior to the enactment of NCLB, but the stress has had a dominating effect since the enactment of the legislation.

 Annie said that she worries about her anxiety level increasing the stress felt by her students, the problems with which students must cope in their home situations and achievement of required passing percentages. She said that the "weight placed upon these test scores" is stressful and contributes to her personal feeling of failure as a teacher when a student does not achieve a passing score. Annie described administrative pressure to produce passing scores and the method of presentation of test data as "self-defeating" and as giving her the feeling that she is "just not doing enough" despite her best efforts, reflecting her increased stress and lowered self-esteem. Annie related that she experiences somatic symptoms of test anxiety herself (upset stomachs), although she said that her students exhibit less somatic symptoms, no discipline

problems, and more avoidance behaviors described as a "frequent need to get out of the situation, to either get their pencil sharpened or get a tissue, just something to kind of break the stress."

Annie reported no difficulty with differentiating instruction to meet student needs, but pacing guides and testing dates do not allow her time for differentiation to make achievement equally realistic for all her students. Time constraints have greatly reduced the extent to which she is able to utilize manipulatives and incorporate hands-on activities that increase student learning. Time management and the resulting frustrations were pervasive issues in Annie's discussion. Annie saw flexibility of time lines and testing dates as a possible solution to the pacing dilemma.

Annie did not feel that the overall goal of education has changed.

Annie – "I think the goal of education is to try to make our children… knowledgeable and successful and able to get out in the real world and function. …the goal is the same as it has always been, it is just the path that we are trying to get there."

Rebecca.

Rebecca was a 37 year-old Caucasian female in her fourteenth year of teaching. She preferred using hands-on methods to teach, but was frustrated because she felt the pressure of time restrictions in doing this to the extent that she believed her students would benefit. She was concerned with doing what benefited her students and helped them grow and achieve their potential. She conveyed a feeling of frustration due to a perceived unfairness of NCLB requirements to students and teachers. Rebecca attributed the testing requirements as being responsible for stresses and pressures felt. She considered the consequences of standardized testing to be a violation of her sense of fairness that caused her to experience value conflicts. Rebecca is hopeful for changes that will alleviate this conflict and the effect that test scores have on her self-esteem and the test anxiety of her students.

Among the things that Rebecca discussed as being unfair was the practice of judging teachers and schools as good or bad based upon test scores. Rebecca stated that she believed that there were too many considerations involved to be able to judge a school's quality solely on a year's test scores. She also said that she believed that teachers were being asked to accomplish an impossible task, the expectation of having students with different backgrounds and ability levels achieve mastery on the entire curriculum at the same time, and being judged as failures as

teachers because they could not accomplish "the impossible." As a result of all this, Rebecca said that she feels like a "statistic".

Rebecca also described practices that she believes are unfair. She said she feels forced to use standardized teaching and assessing almost exclusively. Rebecca associated an increase in discipline problems with testing. She connected this to the general lack of developmental readiness by which she believes students in elementary school are handicapped in a standardized testing environment. Rebecca called this a symptom of the "lost childhood" experienced by students under NCLB that has pushed requirements to younger ages.

Rebecca stated that she believed that the overall goal of education has changed since the implementation of NCLB and now is "… more aligned with who can be the best first". She explained that administrators want to have the best school, and each state wants to be the best. She said, "… it becomes to where we have lost sight of actual teaching and learning." Rebecca believed it is a deceptive practice to ignore individual student abilities and encourage parents to think that all students would be at the same level at the end of the year, and therefore, testing can also be misleading to parents.

<center>*Change in the Teachers' Experiences*</center>

Both teachers described their experiences in the classrooms as changing significantly since the enactment of NCLB. *Change in the Teachers' Experiences* represents the perceptions of the teachers related to teaching and testing under the standardized requirements of NCLB. This category contained the richest data and the largest number of themes. Each area discussed includes exact words from the teachers.

Stress and Pressures for Teachers

Stress and pressure was a prominent theme in both interviews with both teachers using a variety of synonyms for these concepts (see Figure 1). The pressure to pace instruction rapidly was described as a cause of stress and frustration.

Annie- "I just feel that we have a lot of pressure on us to cover many things."

Rebecca- "Sometimes we have to go on before all in the classroom are proficient…."

Both teachers made a concentrated effort to mask the stress and tension that they feel themselves to keep the students from picking up on their anxiety and, as Annie said, to prevent students from "feeding" on that. This is a legitimate concern for the teachers as documented in Hembree's 1988

meta-analysis showing evidence of a higher correlation between teacher anxiety and student test anxiety than any other two variables in his study.

The greatest concern described by both teachers was test scores. Rebecca related that she always cries on the day that test scores come back. Annie cried softly in the interview when talking about her self-esteem in relation to student performance and test scores. Both teachers experienced self-doubt and second-guessed themselves about whether or not they did everything they could have done to ensure their students' successes. They both reflected on the frustration that their best effort was not good enough to accomplish the task at hand, i.e., helping students with differing ability levels achieve success to the performance expectation level. Annie said, "When they don't make *the* [italics added] score, I feel like a failure."

Teaching Methods

Annie and Rebecca talked about not having time for what they called extras: doing hands-on activities, enhancement activities, and activities to reinforce the application of skills. These were considered extras due to the amount of time it would take to incorporate these activities as opposed to forging ahead with curriculum coverage. Both teachers noted that standardized teaching and standardized assessment have replaced other more product-based teaching and assessment for which both articulated a preference.

> Annie- " I do not feel that I have the time to do a whole lot of extra things to reinforce how to apply skills."
> Rebecca- "I feel like the more hands-on they do, the better they learn, although you do not have time for all that anymore."

Both teachers described concern that students are being asked to do more than they are developmentally ready to do. Annie noted that students are not always at a cognitive stage to learn the skills that are required by the curriculum. Rebecca noted that students at elementary age are not at an appropriate life point to handle the stress and pressure of high stakes testing. She stated that they have neither the physical endurance, nor the maturity level to deal with the stress caused by the high-stakes testing in an appropriate manner.

In an attempt to help students deal with high-stakes testing requirements, both teachers have focused their teaching on incorporating test-taking strategies. They have supplemented the language of practice, or teaching vocabulary, with the teaching of strategy vocabulary and test vocabulary. Both types of vocabulary were taught in a purposeful manner using games,

vocabulary notebooks, and visual cues to help students remember the vocabulary that they need to master to be successful on the standardized test (ST).

Lost Instructional Time

Annie and Rebecca described "pushing through" to cover the curriculum in time to have at least a month left to do intensive review before the ST at the end of the year. Time was spent teaching the students how to take the test. Both teachers discussed a trend toward a continued focus on assessment throughout the school year, taking away from instructional time. This focus on testing and assessment combined with the necessity for keeping a rapid pace to cover the entire curriculum have reportedly worked together to cause the teachers to feel a lost flexibility to reteach a concept. Both teachers stated that they no longer have the flexibility to differentiate as they should for students with differing ability levels because the rapid pace required to complete the curriculum will not allow extra time to be spent on differentiation.

Annie- "We really have a year's worth of teaching in less than that time frame."

Rebecca- "If we weren't so geared into standardized testing at the end of the year…I would grade kids on products and projects."

Self-esteem

Annie and Rebecca both expressed a high level of stress felt due to the comparison of the test scores of different teachers and stated that this stress had damaged their self-esteem. They also felt great pressure to have high test scores, regardless of the ability levels of the students in their classrooms. These differing ability levels reportedly had a great deal to do with the discomfort that the teachers felt over the comparison of scores.

Annie- "It is stressful, on the first faculty workday to sit in a meeting and have your scores flashed up in bar graphs….You start second guessing yourself."

Rebecca- "You start… second guessing yourself, if you did what you have been taught to do, what you have been trained to do. Did I do it well enough?"

The comparison of scores and differing ability levels of the students in their classes combined with varying success levels of the students in achieving proficiency on test scores have resulted in the teachers questioning their efforts and experiencing self-doubt about their teaching abilities. Annie noted that this negative impact of scores on her self-esteem began when she started teaching in a tested grade level. Both teachers noted that even when a student achieves a year's worth of growth, if that same student has not achieved a passing score on the ST, the

teacher feels like a failure. The teachers commented, "…you are just not doing enough", or "I must not be a very good … teacher." Such comments reflected their low self-esteem.

Educational Direction

Both Annie and Rebecca discussed how their own priorities in teaching have shifted from individual student mastery and understanding of concepts to covering the entire curriculum before time for the ST. This was another source of value conflict for the teachers over mastery versus coverage of materials that both teachers connected to NCLB. Both teachers discussed the focus on assessment, specifically standardized assessment under NCLB requirements.

Annie- "Before (NCLB) …the purpose was giving children a solid foundation in education. But now, … it narrows our focus down to really honing in on the skills that are being tested."

Rebecca- "It was not quite as stressful accountability-wise until NCLB …. we have so geared it to the standardized test that that is where we lean."

Both teachers described competition among states and among school systems as determining forces behind current policy. They perceived the intention behind NCLB legislation as good, but characterized the methodology dictated by policy for accomplishing the goal as wrong. Both related another value conflict over the utilization of test scores as determiners of proficiency. The teachers believed that student growth should be a bigger consideration than ST scores.

Empowerment Ideas

The theme *empowerment ideas* included discussion of ideas that the teachers believed would enable them to help students achieve educational goals and ideas that would alleviate the negative feelings that the current situation causes them to feel. Both teachers believed a value-added formula considering student growth would be a more appropriate measure of success both for students and for teachers. They discussed the need for flexibility in getting students with varied backgrounds and ability levels to the same standard level of achievement.

Annie- "It does not leave a lot of flexibility for children who have learning disabilities or emotional issues."

Change in Student-Experience

Change in Student-Experience represents the effects perceived by the teachers on the students in the post NCLB classroom. They discussed students shutting down during test-taking

time. They described students stopping in the middle of solving problems or marking answers without attempting to solve problems or read passages. Such shutting down could be indicative of cognitive interference (such as noted by Sarason in 1984) or as Hancock (2001) noted, it could be indicative of lost motivation as was shown to occur in highly evaluative classroom situations. Annie noted that students would choose random answers or begin working out a problem which they have exhibited the ability to work in a class activity and simply stop before they finish working the problem out and choose a multiple-choice answer.

Annie and Rebecca discussed the high degree of nervousness and tension that students exhibit around test-taking times, as was also shown by Sarason (1984) to be indicative of cognitive interference. Students were noted by the teachers as being fidgety, edgy, and showing signs of nervousness such as having shaky hands. It was noted that parents report their children being nervous around test-taking time, as well as the students reporting their nervousness to the teachers. Both teachers also expressed a concern that the students would pick up on the stress being experienced by the teacher and that this would have the adverse affect of increasing student stress.

Both teachers sited the lack of developmental readiness that elementary aged students have for fulfilling the testing requirements as a concern. Rebecca associated the edginess of the students with their lack of developmental readiness to handle high stress situations. Each teacher was concerned that the inability to incorporate hands-on and enhancement activities due to time constraints was more of an issue because of the developmental level of elementary students. The teachers believed that the students need this type of activity, although pressing ahead to cover curriculum and spending time on learning test-taking strategies and skills have replaced the use of hands-on activities to the degree that the teachers would like to incorporate them. Annie stated that she believed that the differing developmental levels of students are associated with negative affects for some students. As Annie put it, "We are supposed to meet everybody's individual needs, but yet we are having to go at a pace in order to cover everything that is required that is often times faster than some children can process…." Rebecca's comment was similar, "I feel like the more hands-on they do, the better they learn, although you do not have time for all that anymore."

Rebecca stated that she believed the students were not at a level of developmental readiness to be able to perform well in a testing situation under strict conditions for lengthy

periods of time. Rebecca blamed this lengthy time during which the students must behave according to strict testing conditions (i.e., not talking and not moving from their desks) with contributing to what she said was a lack of "stamina". She noted that as the time goes on, student attention "fizzles" or "wanes", and fatigue is evidenced in fidgeting and sighs in the classroom.

Discussion

From this study, it became evident that there was a common sense of stress and frustration for these two elementary teachers in tested grade levels that they perceived resulting from standardized testing requirements and the changes these requirements have made in teaching methodology. For the teachers participating in this study, that stress was a pervading issue. Both of these teachers described suffering symptoms of anxiety and losing confidence in themselves as teachers, as was predicted by the scholars (Grimmett et al., 1990; Jones et al., 2003; Schon, 1983). The teachers believed that they were doing everything they could do to help the students be successful on the ST, but they believed that their efforts were not good enough since they were unable to have all of their students achieve a proficient score on the ST.

According to Bandura (1995), motivation and action are results of beliefs rather than objective evidence. "Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (p. 2). "Perceived self-efficacy to exercise control over stressors plays a central role in anxiety arousal" (Bandura, 1991, as cited in Bandura, 1995, p. 8). Therefore, since the teachers believe themselves unable to achieve the desired outcome in their classrooms of having all students achieve the same proficiency minimums at the same time, by implication teacher anxiety would be expected to increase. Consequently, student test-anxiety would be expected to increase as indicated by the findings of Cizek and Burg (2006) and Hembree (1988).

The teachers involved in the study described testing preoccupation. They believed that the standardized testing requirements and timelines that must be met have forced them to switch priority from a mastery of concepts by individuals to coverage of the material by the group as predicted by the scholars (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 1996; Dorgan, 2004; Fagan, 1989; Schon, 1983). The ST results place accountability for coverage of everything that will be tested on both students and teachers. One teacher made the statement, "It is a race." Both teachers related that they are caught involuntarily in a competition among states and even among nations to "…be the

best first…" as one teacher put it. This is a source of great value conflict for the teachers. It is evident that the teachers believe that the focus on standardized testing and standardized requirements for the students to pass have resulted in sacrificing individualization in teaching rather than promoting the success of individual students. These beliefs appear contrary to the spirit of NCLB. It is also evident that the teachers perceive being caught under layers of top down pressure that does not stop with them, but rather ends with the students being at the highest center of pressure (see Figure 2).

It is also evident that the teachers have an overriding preoccupation with test scores as predicted by Jones et al.(2003). Ayers (1992) noted that it is necessary to empower teachers if successful students are the expected result of teaching efforts. Fagan (1989) referred to the disempowerment of both teachers and students that occurs when success is defined by standardized testing of curriculum.

Standardized testing has caused these teachers to alter teaching methods. The frequent use of hands-on methodology, as was once a common practice in the elementary grades, is now limited and replaced with the teaching of test-taking strategies and skills. The combination of the alteration of teaching methodology along with the necessity to maintain a rapid pace to cover the entire curriculum has created what the teachers agreed is a test-focused classroom. They also attributed much lost instructional time to the time spent teaching and practicing taking tests, in addition to the actual ST administration. As a part of the test preparation, test vocabulary and strategy vocabulary have been added to the curriculum vocabulary to supplement teaching the curriculum with necessary skills and words for success in standardized testing.

The teachers discussed symptoms shown by the students that are evidence of test anxiety. But, the majority of the teachers' energies spent to alleviate the test anxiety seem to be focused on the teaching of test-taking strategies and test-taking skills, rather than mastery of the curriculum. The life skills training recommended by scholars and teachers alike (Elliot, 1981; Fagan, 1989; Jehlin, 2006) seems to be unrecognizably submerged somewhere in the curriculum, which presumably serves the purpose of preparing the students with life skills and for higher education. However, the methodology through which students are deemed by the teachers to learn the best and best be able to practice these life skills (hands-on activities) has been sacrificed for teaching test-taking skills and strategies and time constraints of standardization.

Still, there was a theme common in both interviews that would shed some light on how the teachers describe the task becoming more possible: *empowerment ideas.* Both teachers expressed ideas that they believed would help them in working with their students to achieve success. Both teachers described a value-added growth formula as being a source of hope for the future. Along with this, both teachers expressed the idea that flexibility was missing, and yet necessary in helping students achieve success. The requirement for all students to achieve proficiency to the same minimum level within the same time frame, regardless of student backgrounds and ability levels is disempowering to teachers because, as noted by scholars, it does not allow them to make decisions based on professional knowledge (Barksdale-Ladd, 1994; Thomas, Barksdale-Ladd, & Jones, 1991). Providing teachers with this flexibility to help all students achieve mastery without the expectation that all the students could succeed under the same time schedule could alleviate much of the pressure and stress felt by the teachers, and consequently the students.

Conclusion

The teachers in this study describe the stresses and pressures under the current standardized testing requirements of NCLB as great and extensive in their effects on classroom experience. It is evident that empowering teachers through opportunities for both pre-service and in-service professional development can improve the success of novice and veteran teachers, students, schools (as indicated by Ayers, 1992), and ultimately the success of the NCLB legislation in leaving no child behind.

In this study the participants related similar experiences in the post NCLB elementary classroom. Their beliefs about the change in classroom experience, the change in teaching vocabulary, and the change in elementary student experience are based on their experiences pre and post NCLB. Understanding their perceptions and reactions to these requirements can facilitate understanding of the elementary experience and lead teachers to more empowerment in post NCLB classrooms, as noted by Kincheloe (1991) and Kincheloe and Pinar (1991). Further study can determine if other teachers in grades 3 through 5 share similar experiences and perspectives and show how other teachers perceive elementary students coping with test anxiety related to the standardized testing.

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Stress-related Language
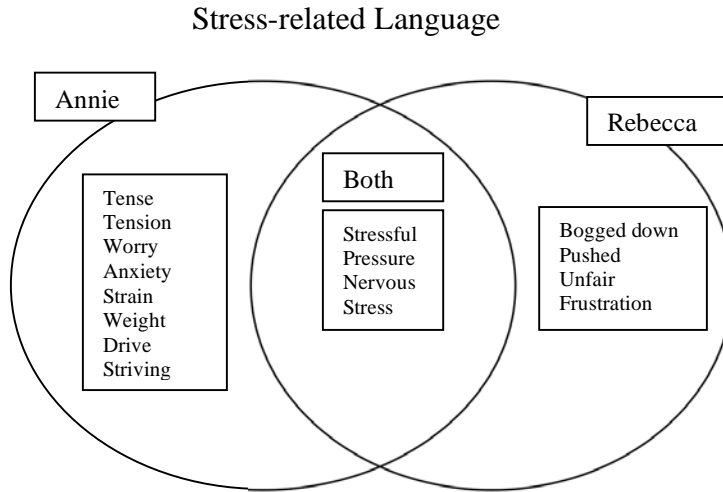
Figure 1. Stress-related Language used by the Participants

Pressure Levels

International stage

Federal government

State government

Local Education Agencies

Building administration

Teachers

Parents

Student
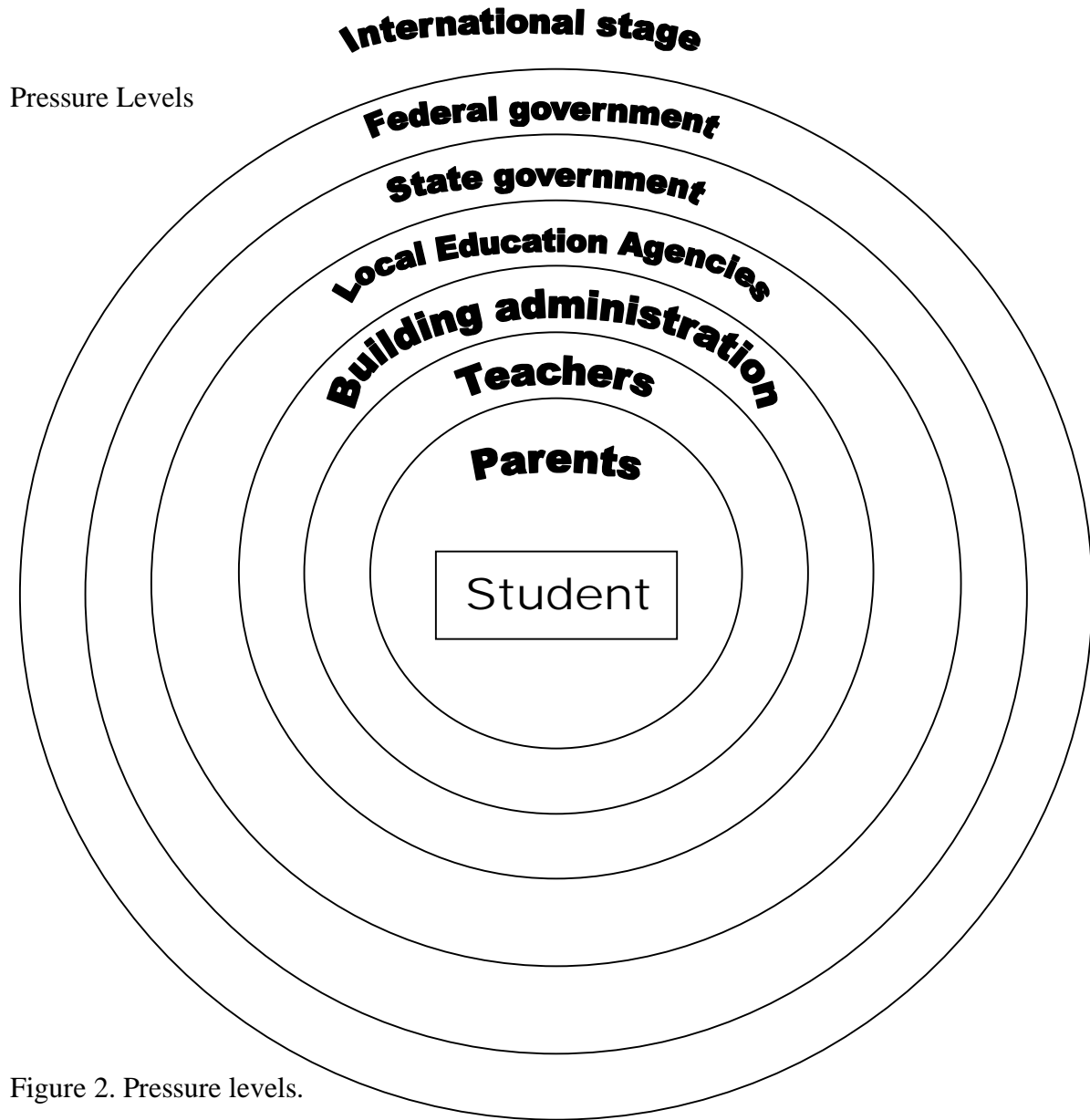
Figure 2. Pressure levels.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MAIN STUDY MANUSCRIPT

Introduction

The following chapter is a manuscript reporting the results of the main study. This manuscript was submitted for review to *American Educational Research Journal* for publication in a Fall, 2007, NCLB theme issue on the expected and unexpected consequences of the legislation.

Both the pilot study results and the main study results are included in a synthesis of the data in Chapter Six.

Running head: TEACHER EMPOWERMENT AND STUDENT TEST ANXIETY

Post NCLB Elementary Teachers' Perceptions

of Their Sense of Empowerment and Student Test Anxiety

Manuscript submitted November 30, 2006,

to the NCLB Theme Issue of *American Educational Research Journal*

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the manuscript dissertation for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In

Education Leadership and Policy Studies

This manuscript is not under consideration for publication with any other journal, nor has it been published elsewhere.

Abstract

The once elusive relationship between teacher empowerment and student test anxiety has become more evident since the passage of NCLB. Utilizing semi-structured interviews, teacher's perceptions of the classroom testing experience, its impact on their own anxiety levels, and the test anxiety of their students were explored. A narratological analysis revealed both positive and negative beliefs about NCLB. The majority of the teachers reported increased stress, pressure, frustration, and professional struggles that have had a negative impact on their self-confidence and sense of empowerment to help their students achieve success, and on student test anxiety. The reflections of these teachers indicate their need for improved teacher empowerment to reduce teacher stress and student test anxiety.

Scholars have noted the link between teacher anxiety and student test anxiety and the need for studying the dynamics of this link for years (King & Ollendick, 1989; McDonald, 2001; Ollendick & Ollendick, 1997; Sarason, Davidson, Lighthall, Waite, & Ruebush, 1960). Yet, research into the tie, especially since the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002), is lacking. Although researchers have acknowledged that teachers are the key to the success of educational reform and change, teachers have not often had a voice in the planning stages of legislation that they are expected to implement (Dana, 1995; Fullan, 1991, 1993; Galen, 2005; Harrell, Leavell, van Tassel & McKee, 2004; Honawar, 2006; Jackson, 2005; Marks & Louis, 1997; Sarason, 1990, 1996). Sunderman, Tracey, Kim and Orfield (2004) surveyed teachers in California and Virginia to determine what those teachers' opinions were about the success of the changes mandated by NCLB in improving the quality of instruction and student achievement. According to the survey results, the teachers believed that the required changes had the potential to improve some educational services despite concerns voiced by the teachers centered on the methodology for achieving that success. Teachers from the two groups surveyed concurred about what they believed was needed to empower teachers for bringing students to NCLB required levels of achievement: resources including but not limited to money, curriculum and instructional materials that facilitate the teaching of state standards, increased time for collaboration with colleagues, and smaller class size. Researchers can provide indicators regarding whether or not these needs, as well as other empowerment needs, are being met in classrooms under NCLB legislation, and whether or not empowerment factors are impacting teachers' stress levels and, consequently, student test anxiety.

Empowerment enables teachers to gain knowledge that builds their confidence, their sense of authority, and their enthusiasm for their profession (Lichtenstein, McLaughlin, & Knudsen, 1992). Barksdale-Ladd (1994) and Thomas, Barksdale-Ladd, and Jones (1991) defined empowerment as "confidence in personal knowledge and in the ability to make decisions and take actions based on personal knowledge" (as cited in Lichtenstein et al., p. 161). Marks and Louis (1997) showed that teacher empowerment has a significant impact on teachers' taking responsibility for student learning. Logerfo (2006) said that individual students' academic gains are directly related to a teacher's sense of responsibility for student learning. Hoy, Tarter, and Hoy (2006) cited academic optimism as key in teachers' personal efficacy. This essentially means that teachers must believe in their ability to obtain successful student performance.

Peterson (2000) noted the negative effect that stress has on optimism. He also said that for people to be persistent in trying to achieve difficult tasks, they "need to be sure that the difficulties can eventually be surmounted" (p. 51). While teacher empowerment is not the only condition necessary for student learning to take place, Marks and Louis said empowerment, which could be viewed as synonymous with optimism and efficacy, is essential. Sarason (1971) said that an increased sense of responsibility for learning also improves teacher morale. Houser (1990) said that teacher involvement in decision-making is a necessary component of teacher empowerment.

Effective practice for teachers, according to the literature, is identified with reflective practice (Richardson, 1990). According to Grimmett, MacKinnon, Erickson, and Riecken (1990), reflection not only helps in the effective implementation of research proven practices, but it can also improve the effectiveness of current practice by helping to choose between competing versions of good teaching practice. Schon (1983) referred to this as knowledge-in-action. Marks and Louis (1997) said that teachers sharing, collaborating, and reflecting result in an increased personal responsibility for student learning. By implication, optimism and efficacy would be expected to increase also. Through examining teachers' perceptions through their reflections, researchers can examine how teachers are thinking, feeling, and reacting to the NCLB policy, how it is affecting their practice, and their perceptions of how that practice is affecting their students. When teachers communicate their perceptions and frustrations, communication becomes a vehicle for change and improving practice (Richardson). According to Kincheloe (1991), the unique perspectives of teachers give them a special kind of educational knowledge: a practical knowledge and valuable knowledge extracted from experience. Teacher research allows patterns and insights to be extracted from experiences that give meaning to the events (James & Ebbutt, 1981; Wood, 1988). Through this cathartic process, referred to by Duke (1985) as debriefing, teachers can improve their teaching in response to student needs.

Helping teachers feel empowered can increase teachers' senses of responsibility for student learning, teacher efficacy, teacher motivation, and, consequently, student achievement (Harrell et al., 2004; Hoy et al., 2006; Logerfo, 2006; Marks & Louis, 1997; Peterson, 2000). As noted by Sarson et al. (1960) and Stipek (2002), students, especially elementary students with their dependent nature on the teacher, will reflect the motivation, empowerment, and performance of teachers.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions of the post NCLB elementary classroom, the perceived changes, and the implications for teachers' feelings of empowerment and beliefs about student test anxiety. The overall guiding question in this study was: How do elementary teachers perceive the classroom testing experience and its impact on their anxiety levels and the test anxiety of students? The goal was to better elucidate the link between teachers' senses of empowerment or the lack thereof and student test anxiety. The three research questions that were explored in this study were:

1. How has implementation of high stakes testing in elementary school changed the way teachers experience their roles in the classroom?

2. How has implementation of high stakes testing in elementary school changed teaching vocabulary?

3. How do elementary teachers describe their experiences with the implementation of high stakes testing that could have an impact on the test anxiety of students?

Methodology

Context of the Study

The teachers in this study were recruited from a rural school district in the Southeastern part of the United States. The participants came from four of the nine elementary schools in the selected school system. All four of the schools from which the participants came have exceptional children subgroups. One of the four also has an English as a Second Language (ESL) subgroup. Three of the four schools are Title I schools with a high percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunches. Three of the four schools made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) during the 2004-2005 school year. The school system serves approximately 9,000 students, and uses a combination of self-contained, resource, and inclusion services for exceptional children. The superintendent granted permission for the teachers to participate. The primary researcher has taught in elementary and middle school classrooms for 21 years and has been an elementary building administrator for two years. This experience helped to give insight into the experiences reported by the teachers and facilitated interpretation of the data.

Study design.

Face-to-face, individual audio-taped interviews were conducted with nine volunteer teachers. The researcher kept field notes of observations made in the setting that were not part of the interviews, in-process interview notes, and reflexive journal entries to facilitate triangulation of data sources and to enhance credibility. A semi-structured interview protocol consisting of questions designed to elicit the telling of stories by the teachers about teaching and testing under the standardized requirements of NCLB was used. Teachers' experiences concerning the impact on students of these requirements were also described. The researcher did verbatim transcription and analyzed the interview content along with the other forms of data collected. Member checks with the participants focusing on the interview transcriptions and data analysis were conducted to strengthen credibility of the findings.

Limitations.

Limitations to the study design center around the scope and nature of the information provided for analysis. The participants were all teachers in a rural area in the Southeast. The readers are cautioned to make their own judgments about the transferability of findings from the perspectives of these teachers. It should also be noted that the interpretation is based mainly on self-reports given by the teachers. The findings are informative only as an examination of these teachers' experiences as analyzed using qualitative research procedures.

Participants

The required criteria for participation in this study were that each participant be a core subject teacher in elementary grades 3 through 5 with teaching experience both before and after the implementation of NCLB to provide insight into the teaching and testing experience from the perspective of an elementary teacher involved in the process pre and post NCLB. It was anticipated that the volunteer sample would include participants with a range of 10 to 30 years teaching experience. Nine participants volunteered to participate in this study.

All nine participants had six or more years of teaching experience and had experience both before and after the implementation of NCLB. All were teachers in grades 3 through 5, and all but two were directly responsible for standardized test results at the end of the school year. One of these two provided instruction in tested subjects to students on another teacher's class roster, but was not directly held accountable for the results of a tested subject. The other of these two retired in December of the 2005-2006 school year. Seven of the nine had experience in

teaching more than one grade level. From those with experience in other grade levels, four have spent their careers in elementary education. The other three had some sixth grade teaching experience. Seven of the participants were female. Eight of the participants were Caucasian, and one was African-American. The class size for grades 3 through 5 in the state is restricted to a maximum of 24 students. Three of the four schools from which the participants came are Title I schools. The fourth school serves students from a more affluent part of the school system.

Procedures

The Institutional Review Board at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University gave approval for conducting this study in February, 2006. Participants were given informed consent forms, and the procedures and possible risks were discussed with them before they agreed to participate in the study. Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants. In the process of transcription and analysis, participants were assigned pseudonyms and potentially identifying data were replaced with false names or with generic information to maintain confidentiality for the participants and the integrity of the data. Following transcription and single case analysis of interview data, the participants were each given the opportunity to read the interview transcript and the single case analysis to verify their accuracy. Requested changes or notations were made according to the participants' specifications. All participants returned the data after the member check. No significant deletions, additions, or revisions of the typewritten data occurred.

Data analysis was a narratological approach utilizing the categorical-content perspective analysis of qualitative data expounded by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) to code the data and sort it according to themes. Similarities and differences in the perceptions and experiences of the nine interviewees were analyzed and interpreted. Descriptive narratives for each participant were developed with a focus on their unique experiences. Codes emerged through individual readings of the separate transcripts, notes, and journal entries. Codes across the experiences of the nine participants were revised, expanded, and refined through subsequent readings of the transcripts. Data was then organized into tables according to these codes and according to the research question to which the data applied. Open readings of the coded data then led to the identification of themes, and then broader categories, that defined the major content of the data emerging from the reading, as described by Lieblich et al.. These categories emerged; matched the division of data by the research questions; and revealed patterns in the

teachers' experiences, their perceptions of the changes in teaching methods, and their perceptions of the impact these changes have had on their students.

For the purposes of this study, *Change in the Teachers' Experiences* represents the perceptions of the teachers related to their experiences with teaching and testing under the standardized requirements of NCLB. This category contained the richest data and the largest number of themes. *Change in Teaching Vocabulary* represents the change in the language of practice used by teachers under the standardized requirements. *Change in the Students' Experiences* represents the effects perceived by the teachers on the students in the post NCLB classroom. Each of the three areas is discussed with exact words of participants.

<div align="center">*Change in the Teachers' Experiences*</div>

Teaching Experience

Across the interviews the two most prevalent ideas discussed concerning the teacher experience were that there has been a change in the teaching experience since NCLB and that the priority in teaching is different. Most participants were in agreement that striving to meet NCLB requirements has brought about a change in the way students are taught and in the way teachers experience teaching in the classroom. The most common difference noted across the interviews was the emphasis on providing one-on-one instruction, individualization, and differentiation for students. One participant commented,

> …all teachers have to teach all students more than they did before…we did let Johnny sit over in the corner and sleep rather than be a discipline problem. Now you have got to make Johnny focus on learning, so maybe it has made students and teachers realize that you can not have Johnnies in the corner asleep anymore.

This focus on the individual student has also affected how grouping for instruction is done within classrooms.

It was commonly related that there has been a change in priorities that has impacted the teaching of life skills and the use of hands-on activities, that the level at which skills are taught is constantly changing, and that assessment has been affected. Most participants felt that the focus on meeting proficiency requirements has had a negative impact on the teaching of life skills and the use of hands-on activities, replacing them with teaching test-taking strategies and skills. Most participants no longer felt that they have the freedom to deviate from the prescribed curriculum or the teaching of test-taking skills to incorporate the life skills or the hands-on activities.

However, some scholars have noted the value of including such activities (Good, Grumley, & Roy, 2003). Others have confirmed the elimination of these activities to be a pattern among elementary teachers under high stakes testing requirements (Moon, Brighton, & Callahan, 2003). Discussion of the change in assessment practices since NCLB was also common among the interviews. Most participants noted that prior to NCLB, assessment was largely done utilizing open-ended assessments and observational techniques. Since the implementation of NCLB, multiple-choice standardized assessment has become almost exclusive for several reasons noted by the participants. Grading the multiple-choice tests is less time consuming. Giving assessments in the multiple-choice format is required of most of the participants by administration, provides practice experiences for the students in the same format as the standardized test (ST), and at the same time provides an opportunity for a learning experience in test-taking strategies and skills.

All the participants were asked to describe their greatest concern in relation to education. The responses of all nine participants were directly connected to test scores. Concerns voiced by the participants included making proficiency, doubt about job competency, transference of pressure from teachers to students, accountability for students with exceptionalities, proficiency represented by test scores, showing student growth in test scores, the value of time focused on testing, teacher evaluation, and the accuracy of teacher evaluations based on test scores. Most participants stated concerns regarding their perception of being judged or evaluated on the basis of student test score data. This, they reported, resulted in pressure on the teachers that results in increased pressure on the students. There was concern over whether all the time spent on standardized assessment throughout the year, through both actual assessment and practice assessment, and the test-focus in teaching are worth the time spent. One participant also stated concern over having to shoulder responsibility for the test scores of exceptional children students who are never in her classroom, and therefore, she has never taught these students. The participants were also concerned about student growth as it contributes to the measure of proficiency. One participant vocalized the concern, "How do I look on paper?"

One participant viewed the changes in the teaching experience positively. The participant believed that the legislation has caused teachers to be "more responsible for each individual" and to improve on doing an "adequate" job. The participant credited tutoring and individualization in the regular classroom as being a direct result of the legislation. This participant said that vertical and horizontal communication among teachers had improved and that staff development had

taken a positive direction toward addressing the teachers' weaknesses in meeting the needs of individual students. The participant viewed the focus on the goals and objectives of the curriculum as a positive change that has opened avenues for incorporating science and social studies with math and reading, doing a better job of integrating the curricula of the core subjects, and providing variety in the way reading could be taught. Rather than limiting opportunities for life skills and hands-on instruction, this participant believed that the requirements had made using hands-on activities more fun because they can be presented to the students as a "challenge" that they have to master for the ST. The participant also believed that the students were learning skills they would need to be successful in life in the process of learning the curriculum and learning how to take the ST successfully. The participant was adamant that "…if the teachers are doing their jobs, they should not be exhibiting any stress, test anxieties." Scholars have noted the high correlation of teacher stress to student test anxiety (Cizek & Burg, 2006; Hembree, 1988). The scholars have also noted the importance of studying this relationship between the teacher and the student (King & Ollendick, 1989; Kohn, 2000; Sarason et al., 1960). The positive attitude of this teacher, the reported lack of teacher stress and student test anxiety reported by this participant, and the positive test results of this participant would seem to be qualitative evidence of a connection between a positive teacher attitude and approach, low student test anxiety, and high test performance. This participant also related a high level of administrative support, something that scholars have noted as being necessary in empowering teachers (Dana, 1995; Davis, 2000; Galen, 2005; Harrell et al., 2004; Logerfo, 2006; Marks & Louis, 1997; Seed, 2006; Wheelan & Kesselring, 2005; Zepeda & Ponticell, 1998).

One other participant viewed the changes as positive and also reported no significant problem with stress or student test anxiety. The participant commented that you cannot "reach every child…. by teaching the same way." Despite the legislated emphasis on subgroups, the participant said, "What you are seeing is a child." The participant's perspective was that the teacher is accountable for teaching each student, not as a member of a particular subgroup, but by addressing individual student needs; the subgroup categorization in test reporting then measures how well you are teaching those individual children. Frustrations that the participant reported included lack of parent involvement, the need for more teaching assistants, and a difference in student behavior and respect for teachers that were attributed to changing home and

family situations; the participant did not attribute these frustrations to the NCLB legislation and its impact.

Professional Struggle and Needs

Many of the participants described their professional struggle as resulting from lowered self-confidence. Many of the participants believed that factors beyond their control make meeting proficiency requirements difficult, if not impossible. These factors included problems with students' home lives, transient attendance cutting the amount of time teachers have to instruct individual students, students lacking basic skills or academic ability, and the increased responsibilities and requirements for teachers. One participant characterized it as feeling "inadequate." This characterization is consistent with the lack of empowerment noted by many of the participants because of resources and needs that are not provided to the teachers. Some scholars predicted this sense of a lack of empowerment would occur in a high stakes testing environment (Buswell, 1980; Fagan, 1989; Kincheloe, 1991; Young, 1971).

Other areas of professional struggle were time constraints and problems with individual students that are not controllable in the classroom. The participants related frustration over rapid pacing to cover curriculum before time for the ST. In relation to this time constraint were the inability to provide differentiated time for mastering an objective for students with differing needs, having to "fill in the gaps" when the grade level at which a skill is taught is changed, and students not having the prerequisite skills as background for learning a new skill. Frustrations over scheduling limitations within individual schools that do not facilitate providing students the level of individualized instruction they need to achieve success in mastering objectives and the difficulty of teaching more than one tested subject while operating under these time constraints were noted. Problems peculiar to individual students cited by the participants included home situations other than living with two birth parents, transient residence and attendance, varying levels of student ability, inability of some parents to help their children academically, test anxiety interfering with performance, and a lack of motivation to perform. A study by Hancock (2001) showed that a negative impact on student motivation to perform is a result of a highly evaluative classroom.

Finally, participants noted professional struggles due to frustration over perceived impossible tasks and the negative connotation of score comparisons and judgments based on score comparisons. The impossible tasks included a rapid pace and the requirement that is the

hallmark of NCLB: bringing all students to the same performance level within the same amount of time. Concern over differing student ability levels is directly related to the pacing concern. The participants also expressed frustration over the comparisons of teachers based on test scores that occur in faculty meetings, in news media, in school systems, and among parents. The participants believed that student abilities and related factors impact test scores in a way that typically is not made evident to stakeholders when teachers are compared. The participants believed that such comparisons are unfair when used as the sole method of judging the ability of teachers.

Again, one teacher proved to be the negative case to the reports of the eight other participants. This participant viewed the increased requirements as necessary to improving teaching and moving teachers to do a better job in meeting the needs of all students. The participant did, however, relate a personal struggle that was characterized as administrators who "can never be satisfied." With proficiency rates in the school ranging from 92% to 100% (this participant's reported student proficiency rate), the administrators still reportedly pressured teachers to show more growth. Still, the participant said this was "not a bad thing because you should never be satisfied with the status quo."

Needs identified by the participants were administrative support, resource materials, time, improved instructional methods, improved assessments, increased funding, more personnel in the classroom to provide individualized instruction, better scheduling, and vocational options for students lacking academic ability. Shann (1998), and Singh and Billingsley (1996) cited principal support as being very important to teacher job satisfaction. Some of these or related needs (improved assessments, increased funding, and teacher qualifications) were included in an NCLB reform plan of the National Education Association's annual convention in July, 2006 (Honawar, 2006). One other need common to this study was noted: in-service assistance to improve teaching methods.

Stress and Pressure

While the discussion of *stress and pressure* was common, the degree and causes varied among the participants. The preoccupation with test scores and being compared and judged on the basis of those test scores was noted. There were many different reasons for stress and pressure given by the participants. Increased responsibility because of paperwork and additional duties involved in tutoring students to meet individual students' needs was mentioned. The lack

of parental support was noted, as was pressure from administrators and the impact of the stress on teachers' personal lives. The participants noted time constraints, the difficulty of meeting the requirements, and the stress of the ST process and obtaining successful results. Teacher stress transferring to students was a concern, as noted earlier, which was validated by some scholars (Cizek & Burg, 2006; Hembree, 1988; King & Ollendick, 1989; Kohn, 2000; Sarason et al., 1960).

Stress and pressure were also noted as impacting teacher self-esteem. One participant characterized self-esteem as being connected to test scores and defined by test results. The participant said that teachers are subject to an "emotional roller coaster" that goes up when test results are good, and plummets when test results are not as good as expected. It is noteworthy in this discussion that none of the participants reported having "bad" test results as would be defined by not having a significant number of students passing with acceptable proficiency scores. The pressure came from having, or in some cases only fearing, test results that were less than those expected.

As previously mentioned, one participant considered it part of a teacher's responsibility not to allow personal stress into the classroom. This participant believed it was part of his job responsibility to make his students "… as comfortable about test taking as possible." The participant had confidence that he had prepared the students well and that they "…had worked hard all year long, covering the goals and objectives … (and) the test was not going to be hard." The participant related taking the role of a coach and a cheerleader in the test preparation process. The participant believed and coached his students that the ST was their time to do their "very best," a time that was looked forward to with anticipation rather than trepidation, and a time that was closely followed by celebrations and "fun" activities. The participant built the students up for the test in much the same way that a coach builds players up for a game, by giving them pep talks in which the participant reviewed strategies while building the excitement and anticipation among the students. This was a part of the teaching strategy that was used in maintaining a reported 100% proficiency rate on the ST.

Goal of Education

All the participants related the *goal of education* as being a traditional goal of preparing students to be productive citizens and life-long learners. There was some disagreement as to whether that goal is actively being pursued under NCLB. One of the participants reported

believing that the goal now was to make students "good test takers." Another participant believed that making the students better test takers was part of "teaching kids to be better."

Change in Teaching Vocabulary

Yinger (1987) referred to the language of practice for teaching. The researcher expected changes in teaching vocabulary to be a consequence of the test focus of the classrooms. All the participants confirmed spending time teaching students to take tests, teaching test taking strategies, and practicing test taking. Still, not all the participants believed that this made their classroom test-focused. One of the participants stated that this was incorporated into teaching the curriculum. However, all of the participants confirmed that this was a necessary part of having students achieve success on the ST. One of the participants believed that the test-focus was another positive consequence of NCLB. This participant said that the test-taking strategies and vocabulary were used and practiced all year long so that they became "ritual" and "habit" to the students, rather than just something used for the ST. This participant also believed that a benefit of the test-focus was that the students were "all ready to show off" because they were "well prepared" when it was time for the ST.

Some of the participants identified types of vocabulary that are used in teaching in addition to the curriculum vocabulary: strategy vocabulary, test-taking vocabulary, enrichment vocabulary, test vocabulary, questioning vocabulary, traditional vocabulary, expanded curriculum vocabulary, background vocabulary, and mnemonic devices. Some of these types of vocabulary were incorporated because of the ST, and some were not. Strategy vocabulary included strategies for successful reading and for successful test taking. Test-taking vocabulary, questioning vocabulary, and test vocabulary included types of words that would appear on the ST, but not typically appear in daily reading or in the course of a daily assignment apart from a test-focus. This included substitutions of words, such as substituting the word *passage* for the words *story* or *selection*, and qualifying words (for example: all, none, except, only, some, or most.) Traditional vocabulary included words that have formerly been used in teaching concepts with which parents of today's students would be more familiar. Background vocabulary included word origin and word usage information to help students better understand the curriculum vocabulary. Expanded curriculum vocabulary included other vocabulary that, according to the participant, naturally connected to the curriculum but was not necessarily a part of the tested curriculum. Mnemonic devices were described by two of the participants as being used to help

students retain information that would be a necessary part of the knowledge base for success in passing the ST. These results provide qualitative evidence of adjustments made to teaching vocabulary because of high-stakes testing.

<div align="center">*Change in the Students' Experiences*</div>

The participants related stories of students experiencing difficulty with test anxiety. The types of incidents reported included students crying; students feigning sickness to leave school; actual cases of illness including stomach aches, headaches, or nausea; a student taking medication that caused her to fall asleep during the test; students soiling their clothes; students who froze with anxiety and were unable to perform; students who "shut down" and "don't care any more"; students who are "uptight", "ancy", and "anxious"; students who are tense and easily "disturbed" or "agitated"; students who cannot sit still and cannot refrain from speaking out; and students "acting out". One participant estimated that as many as 75% of the students on the participants class role are adversely affected by test anxiety. Three of the participants reported their ESL students having test anxiety because of language concerns. One participant, however, reported that test anxiety is not a factor for the students. As previously mentioned, this participant considered it part of the teacher's job and responsibility to make the students comfortable with the test-taking process so that there would be no test anxiety.

Several of the participants voiced concern regarding pressure put on the students including concern over pushing the students to produce for the test, pushing the students ahead in the curriculum rather than emphasizing understanding, and pressure put on the students to obtain acceptable scores on the test. Two of the participants expressed concern regarding pressure the teachers feel being transferred to the students. As mentioned earlier, some scholars have noted this concern (Cizek & Burg, 2006; Hembree, 1988). Some of the participants with fifth grade teaching experience were concerned regarding pressure felt by the students to meet gateway requirements. Finally, the participants were concerned about a lack of motivation shown by students. Hancock (2001), as previously mentioned, found a lack of motivation to be a problem that can result from the highly evaluative nature of a classroom. Frymier, Shulman, and Houser (1996) showed that motivation, learning, and self-esteem correlated highly with learner empowerment, or in other words, the confidence of a learner in his or her ability to learn.

The participants also voiced concerns about the kind of instruction that students are receiving. One participant related fearing that students in the middle of the performance curve

are neglected because so much attention is given to bringing the lower performing students to a level of proficiency. Similarly, another participant expressed concern that students who are naturally high achievers are also neglected. Some scholars have substantiated this concern (Moon, Brighhton, & Callahan, 2003). Other participants said they believed that some students were not developmentally ready for the skills in the curriculum at the grade level in which they are required. Similarly, some participants believed that the ST is unfair to students with lower ability levels. The participants commonly believed that home life situations impact the students' abilities. One of the participants said that the test-focused nature of the classroom requires students to spend more time sitting in desks and being less physically active than elementary students were once able to be, which could result in the assignment of more attention deficit labels to students. Also noted was that student self-esteem has become directly connected to test scores. Other participants believed that students no longer learn application of skills because the focus is on passing the test. Review and drill is reported to be routine and necessary in test preparation. Kohn (2000) claimed that this type of drill before the test is an invalidation of the ST as a measure of what the students have mastered and evidence of "…how little we have to learn from the results of these tests" (p. 321). Finally, more than one of the participants talked about the "lost childhood" of students who must spend so much time preparing for the ST and so much less time "being kids." McCaslin, Burross and Good (2005) expressed similar concerns.

Contrarily, one participant believed the impact on students was entirely positive. This participant believed that the key to student performance is high teacher expectations. Some scholars support this notion (Gill & Reynolds, 1999; Kuklinski & Weinstein, 2001; Rubie-Davis, 2006). This participant also believed that as a result of NCLB, no student could any longer be allowed to "fall through the cracks." The participant viewed the test administration as an opportunity for the students to prove their progress, and the completion of the ST at the end of the school year as an opportunity for celebration and a time to reward the students for their efforts. Similarly, one participant credited NCLB with helping to address the inequities faced by students of different ethnicities. This would seem to be qualitative evidence to the contrary of Kohn's (2000) concern that the standardization process of the ST would be biased against minorities and positive evidence of the potential value of teacher empowerment.

Discussion

Analysis from the findings in this study indicated that there was a common acknowledgement among the participants of changes in the experience of teaching elementary school in a tested grade level that have happened since the implementation of NCLB. With these changes, for seven of the participants, have come stress, pressure, frustration, and professional struggles that have had a negative impact on their self-esteem and their sense of empowerment to help their students achieve success. Some scholars predicted this kind of erosion of self-confidence (Grimmett et al., 1990; Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003; Schon, 1983). Some scholars also predicted that teachers would experience a lack of empowerment in a high-stakes testing environment (Buswell, 1980; Fagan, 1989; Kincheloe, 1991; Young, 1971). Fagan (1989) said that if teachers were not empowered, students would also lose self-confidence and self-esteem. Contrarily, two of the participants have not experienced struggles that they considered attributable to NCLB requirements. Seven of the nine participants in the study reported concerns about student test anxiety. The other two participants reported no increase in student test anxiety. One of these two believed it to be a part of the teacher's job to prepare the students for the test in a way that would keep them from being anxious about the results. This positively optimistic academic approach would be expected to empower students to achieve (Hoy et al., 2006). Seven of the nine participants reported doubts and concerns about the ability of all their students to achieve success on the ST. Marks and Louis (1997) found that teacher empowerment is a major factor in whether or not teachers take personal responsibility for student learning. According to Logerfo (2006), a teacher's sense of responsibility affects student achievement. One of the other participants reported concerns about being held responsible for students that were on the teacher's class role but not in any of the teacher's classes. The other of the two reported confidence in personal teaching ability and had high percentages of students achieving passing scores on the ST. This would seem to support the positive results of academic optimism referred to by Hoy et al..

As reflected in the conversation of some of the participants in this study, and according to a survey of 1,000 National Education Association members, some teachers are experiencing a lack of confidence in their empowerment to meet accountability standards (Honawar, 2006). For some of the teachers participating in this study, a focus on test scores was the pervading issue that overshadowed and impacted the teaching experience. Some of the different non-curriculum

vocabulary types used in teaching that were reported by the study participants are evidence of a test and test-performance focus. However, the two participants who did not report increased stress attributable to NCLB and two of the other participants in the study who reported increased stress for themselves and their students did not feel that their classrooms were test-focused.

All of the study participants provided qualitative evidence of the strong connection between teacher anxiety and student test-anxiety noted by the scholars (Cizek & Burg, 2006; Hembree, 1988). Seven of the nine participants discussed both high stress levels for themselves and much evidence of student test anxiety. Most of these participants also noted an awareness of and concern about the transference of their anxiety to their students. One of the nine participants, who also believed in the positive consequences of NCLB legislation, noted moderate concerns with personal stress and only moderate, but not serious, concerns with student test anxiety. The ninth participant, who had a very favorable attitude toward the NCLB legislation, was very adamant about having no problems with stress or anxiety; neither did this participant see evidence that students had problems with test-anxiety.

Those participants that expressed concern over student test-anxiety also discussed problems with student motivation. Lack of student motivation is a concern that Hancock (2001) showed was linked to highly evaluative classrooms. Frymier et al. (1996) indicated that motivation, learning, and self-esteem are related to learner empowerment. Therefore, it would be reasonable to theorize that teacher empowerment could also be indirectly related to learner empowerment; therefore, improving teacher empowerment could be expected to improve learner empowerment, motivation, self-esteem, self-directed learning (Ginsberg, 2005) and learning outcomes (McCombs, 2003; Sternberg, 2004). Empowering teachers to take risks in teaching by differentiating and removing time constraints and performance restrictions imposed through standardized testing requirements could empower and motivate students to learn and achieve outcomes that are meaningful to individuals' futures and collectively beneficial to society through effective and equitable education of all students. A model depicting these relationships is presented in figure 1. The lack of teacher stress and student test anxiety reported by one participant, the moderate stress and moderate student test-anxiety reported by one participant, and the higher stress and student test anxiety reported by the other seven participants provide indicators of the connection between teacher empowerment, stress and student test anxiety in the

post NCLB classroom. Those participants reporting higher personal stress and student test-anxiety concurred that factors out of teacher control contribute to both.

Conclusion

The reports of the participants provide qualitative descriptors of how these teachers' beliefs and perceptions have been influenced by NCLB requirements. For the majority of the participants, stress had increased. For most of the participants in this study for whom stress had increased, the increase was attributed to NCLB requirements. The reports of the participants also provide insight into how teacher anxiety, academic optimism, teacher efficacy, and teacher empowerment influence student test-anxiety, and consequently student achievement.

While there was a difference in whether the experiences reported by the participants involved increased stress or not, all the participants concurred that there were many changes in their classroom experiences that were attributable to NCLB. Understanding what the participants believed about their experiences and the differences in how they reacted to the changes that resulted from NCLB implementation can improve understanding of what teachers need to facilitate a belief in their own efficacy and in their empowerment to help all students reach achievement requirements. Further research with teachers that consider themselves strong or lacking in empowerment, and how that influences teachers' beliefs and attitudes could further understanding of ways to reduce student test anxiety and, thereby, improve student achievement. Further research could be done to explore whether or not the embodiment of teacher empowerment differentially influences the test anxiety, behaviors, and outcomes of students with and without learning disabilities or limited academic ability. Further study could also be valuable in investigating the influence of teacher efficacy and empowerment on student performance for ESL students.

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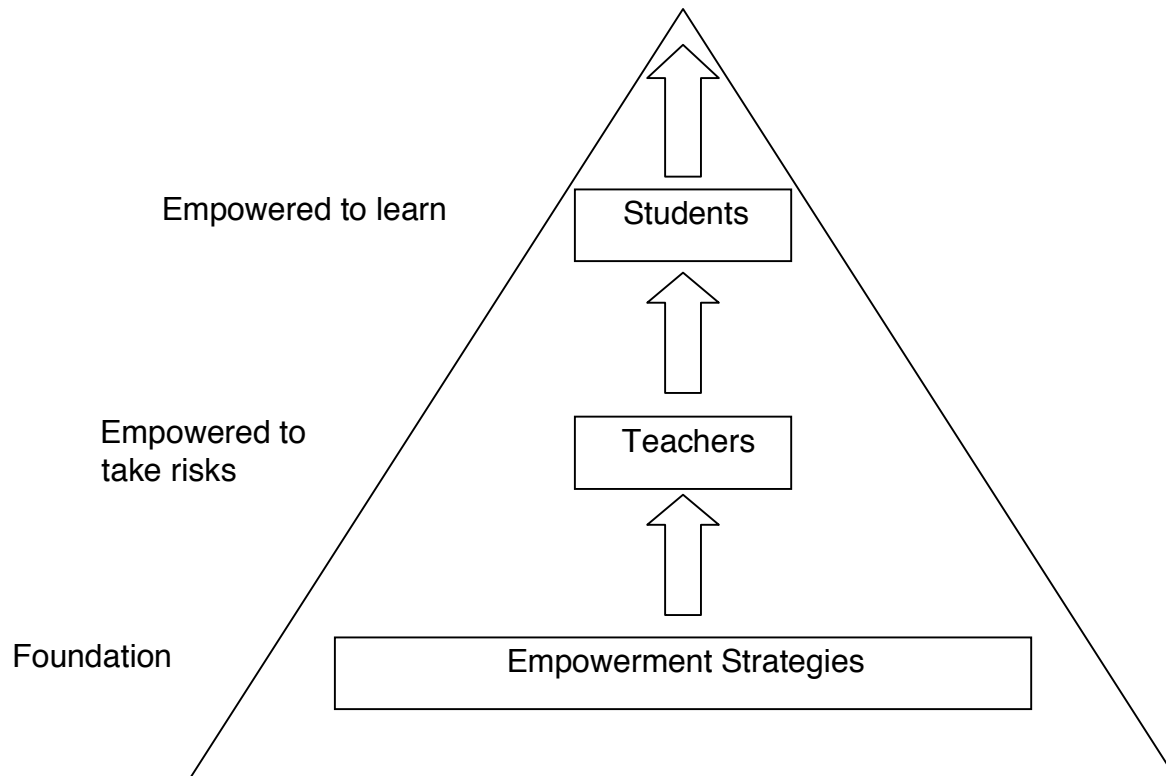Empowerment and Anxiety Reduction Pyramid

Figure 1. Empowerment and anxiety reduction pyramid. Empowering teachers to empower students.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusions

The purpose of the pilot study and main study was to examine teachers' perceptions of the post NCLB elementary classroom, the perceived changes, and the implications for teachers' feelings of empowerment and student test anxiety. Using a narratological approach, the stories of purposefully selected, elementary core subject teachers in tested grade levels were analyzed. This chapter presents overall conclusions from the study, implications for future research, and the researcher's thoughts about the process of writing the manuscript format of a dissertation.

Synthesis of Pilot and Formal Study Conclusions

Data Collection and Analysis

From the narrative data collected through face-to-face interviews with teachers, the writing of field notes, interview process notes, and reflective journal entries from both the pilot study and the main dissertation study, three clear themes emerged that fit the division of the data by the research questions: change in the teachers' experiences, change in teaching vocabulary, and change in the students' experiences. These themes emerged through the process of categorical-content perspective analysis expounded by Lieblich et al. (1998) for coding data and sorting it into themes. Through this process of multiple open readings of the coded data, similarities and differences in the perceptions and experiences of the eleven interviewees from both studies emerged, were analyzed, and interpreted. Patterns were revealed in the teachers' experiences, including both positive and negative perceptions of the changes in teaching methods, and their perceptions of the impact these changes have had on their students.

Participants

Participants from the pilot study and main study came from four of nine elementary schools in a rural school district in the Southeastern United States and were core subject teachers who were either directly or indirectly responsible for ST results at the end of the school year that are a requirement of both state regulations and federal NCLB regulations. Eight of the eleven participants from both studies work in Title I schools with a high percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunches. Three of the four schools from which the participants came had achieved AYP the previous school year. All of the participants served students within their classes who also received special education services. Two of the participants were male. One participant was an African-American and the rest were Caucasian. All eleven participants

from both studies had six or mores years of teaching experience, and had taught both before and after the implementation of NCLB regulations.

Results and Conclusions

All participants from both studies concurred that the teaching experience had undergone a change since the implementation of NCLB. Nine of the participants across the two studies indicated that these changes involved increased stress, pressure, frustration, and professional struggles that have negatively impacted their self-esteem, their senses of empowerment to help their students achieve success and meet accountability standards, and their perceptions of student test-anxiety. These participants related a love-hate feeling about teaching under the NCLB requirements. They reported loving to teach and work with the students, but hating the climate change caused by the stress and pressure that have resulted from NCLB requirements. Contrarily, two of the participants from the formal dissertation study did not report increased stress that they considered attributable to NCLB and considered the impact on their students to be positive overall with no perceived increase in student test-anxiety. Data from the two studies provided qualitative evidence of the strong connection between teacher anxiety and student test-anxiety. Those participants who voiced concern over student test-anxiety also discussed problems with student motivation. From these findings it is reasonable to theorize that teacher empowerment could also be indirectly related to learner empowerment, and that improving teacher empowerment could be expected to improve learner empowerment, motivation, self-esteem, self-directed learning and learning outcomes. All the participants provided information on the changes in teaching vocabulary. Some of the different non-curriculum vocabulary types identified by these participants provided evidence of a test and test-performance focus in their classrooms; however, two of the participants did not consider their classrooms to be test-focused.

The reports of the participants from the studies provided qualitative descriptors of how these teachers' beliefs and perceptions have been influenced by the implementation of NCLB requirements. The majority of the teachers participating in the two studies attributed their increased stress to NCLB requirements. Those participants reporting higher personal stress and student test-anxiety concurred that factors over which teachers have little or no control contribute to both. The data from the studies provided qualitative insight into the connection between teacher stress and student test-anxiety, and were highlighted by the presence of or lack of academic optimism that is considered essential to both teacher and learner empowerment. The

reports of the participants provided insight into how teacher anxiety, academic optimism, teacher efficacy, and teacher empowerment influence student test-anxiety, and consequently, student achievement.

The reader is cautioned to remember that the transferability of these findings is dependent upon the similarity of the specific circumstances in which a teacher works. Questions can be posed as to the transferability of findings as teachers were selected from one rural area in the South East. Questions may also be raised about the nature of the self-reports given by the teachers. The findings are valuable and informative, nonetheless, as an examination of teachers' experiences as analyzed by qualitative research procedures.

Implications for Future Study

In this time of high-stakes accountability, exploration of every avenue for empowering teachers and improving student performance is essential. Empowering teachers to take risks in teaching by differentiating and removing time constraints and performance restrictions imposed through ST requirements could empower students, and increase motivation for teachers and students. Further research with teachers that consider themselves strong or lacking in empowerment, and how that influences teachers' beliefs and attitudes could further understanding of ways to reduce student test anxiety and, thereby, improve student achievement. Further research could be done to explore whether or not the embodiment of teacher empowerment differentially influences the test anxiety, behaviors, and outcomes of students with and without learning disabilities or limited academic ability. Further study could be valuable in investigating the influence of teacher efficacy and empowerment on student performance for ESL students. Finally, study into the level of academic optimism of teachers who perceive themselves as either empowered to differentiate from curriculum pacing for students with differing ability levels or take the personal risk of differentiating pacing for these students despite pacing guidelines, and the resulting impact on student test-anxiety and performance could be valuable in providing insight into means by which teachers perceive the NCLB goal of leaving no child behind as being attainable. Such study could give needed voice and ownership to the teachers in the process of developing policy for which they are held accountable, and help to restore that sense of control which they now perceive as lacking.

Experience with the Manuscript Dissertation Process

Developing the manuscripts to submit for publication and to include as Chapters Four and Five of the dissertation has been an evolutionary process. Single case analyses of the data collected on each participant were written through the use of the categorical-content perspective analysis suggested by Lieblich et al. (1998) for coding data and sorting it into themes. Member checks of the individual transcripts and single case analyses were done to strengthen the credibility of the narrative analysis. Each of the individual participants approved the transcript and analysis of their data with no significant additions, corrections, or deletions of information. Once this process was completed, the cross-case analysis of the study was written. The same process was followed in pilot study and the formal dissertation study. Peer debriefing was also used in the process of writing the analyses from both studies to strengthen the credibility of the process.

The search for appropriate journals for possible manuscript submission took place in the planning stages of the proposal. Initially, *The Teacher Educators' Journal* and *Educational Researcher* were selected for possible manuscript submission. The journals were examined and articles from both journals were read to help in the decision process and to provide guidance in the actual writing of the manuscripts in a format that would be appropriate for submission to those journals. Continued reading of the related literature was part of this manuscript preparation process and current information from the literature was included in each manuscript. Manuscripts were written according to submission guidelines for the publications. Drafts of the manuscripts were sent or delivered to each dissertation committee member and their suggestions were incorporated in the final manuscripts. Revision of the manuscripts was another evolving process that only ended when final suggestions were made by committee members and incorporated accordingly. This process will hopefully resume with revision suggested by the peer reviewers for each journal. If a manuscript is rejected, another suitable journal for publication submission will be sought and the process will continue until a suitable medium for publication of the manuscripts is found.

The first manuscript was completed and submitted for publication consideration to *The Teacher Educators' Journal* as planned on October 11, 2006. On December 19, 2006, this manuscript was accepted for publication. Requested revisions were submitted on December 30, 2006. Writing of the second manuscript for *Educational Researcher* progressed as planned

continuing from work that was begun on writing the manuscript during the summer of 2006 when analysis of the study was completed. In mid-November, 2006, I happened upon a call for papers from *American Educational Research Journal* asking for submission of papers "…examining the intended and/or unintended consequences of NCLB, as well as underlying issues that have been resolved or complicated by the policy" (Hollingsworth, 2006). The deadline for submissions was December 1, 2006. After consulting with my advisor and committee chair, the decision was made to complete the manuscript as appropriate to submit for publication consideration in the Fall, 2007, NCLB Theme Issue. The second manuscript was submitted on November 30, 2006.

The entire process of writing, revising and preparing manuscripts for submission was a great learning process in preparation for future publication opportunities. In reflection, choosing the manuscript dissertation format was not the easiest method for dissertation completion. It has been a long and involved process. However, the learning opportunities, combined with the opportunity for wide dissemination of the knowledge gained through the research study made this process one of great worth and desirability, especially for one who hopes to continue research and writing in the higher education arena.

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APPENDIX A

Script for Face-toFace or Telephone Meeting Initial Conversation

My name is Elizabeth Heath. I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Virginia Tech. I am conducting research to gather data on how elementary teachers perceive the classroom testing experience and its impact on their anxiety levels and the test anxiety of their students. I am seeking volunteers to interview who have teaching experience before and after NCLB who would like to participate in this research study.

Politicians acknowledge the importance of the teacher's voice in informing educational policy decisions. But the teacher's voice has been conspicuously absent from the research used to make decisions. The purpose and intent of my research study is to give voice to the elementary teacher to create an awareness of the NCLB elementary testing experience that can be used by teachers and politicians to inform and improve practice and to inform decisions involving policy.

Would you be willing to participate in a one-on-one audiotaped interview on this topic? You have the opportunity to participate as a co-researcher in the process. An initial interview will be scheduled at your convenience. After I have transcribed the interview and written a single case narrative analysis on the transcription data, I will send you copy of each so that you can read them to verify them. You can check to make sure that the transcription is what you wanted to say that the narrative is true to your experiences and perceptions. If you desire that changes to the transcript or the narrative describing your interview be made, or if you desire to add to that which has been said, we will schedule additional time for this purpose. This verification process is important to value of the study in ensuring that your voice is heard as you would have it to be.

It may be possible for someone who has knowledge of the school system to deduce the identity of an interviewee. However, every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality. Pseudonyms will be used for interviewees in all documents, and no one will have access to the tapes or transcriptions of interviews except my advisor and myself. I will be the only one who knows the identity of individual participants.

APPENDIX B

Script for Email to Accompany Solicitation flyer

Dear (Principal's name),

It will soon be time for me to begin conducting the research for my dissertation study. I am seeking volunteers who are teachers of core subjects in grades three through five who have teaching experience both before and after the implementation of No Child Left Behind (2002). Attached you will find a solicitation flyer for the study. Can you help me? Could you please print out the flyer and place copies in the mailboxes of the teachers in your school that fit the criteria for the study?

Thank you for your help!

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Heath

APPENDIX C
Solicitation Flyer

Test Anxiety

Would you like the opportunity to share your classroom experiences with high stakes testing?

If you are a core academic subject teacher in grades 3,4 or 5 and have experience teaching before and after the enactment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), you have the opportunity to participate in a research study designed to give voice to your perceptions of the changes in your classroom since NCLB.

The purpose of the study is to examine teachers' perceptions of the post NCLB elementary classroom, the perceived changes and the implications for teachers' feelings of empowerment and student test anxiety.

I am a doctoral student at Virginia Tech actively seeking volunteers to participate in this research study. Volunteers will be asked to participate in a one-on-one, face-to-face, audiotaped interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. Participants also have the option to request additional interview time if desired.

If interested, please email me at heathe@(identifying information deleted).us (work) or elheath@vt.edu (school); or, you may call me at work or at home.

Thank you!
Elizabeth Heath, Assistant Principal
Unidentified Elementary School

APPENDIX D
Informed Consent for participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERISTY

**Informed Consent for Participants
in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects**

Title of Project: Teacher Perceptions of Post No Child Left Behind Elementary
                       Teacher and Student Test Anxiety

Investigators: <u>Elizabeth Heath</u>

Advisor: Dr. Penny Burge

I. Purpose of this Research/Project

The purpose of the proposed study is to examine teachers' perceptions of the post No Child Left Behind (NCLB) elementary classroom, the perceived changes, and the implications for teachers' feelings of empowerment and student test anxiety.

II. Procedures

The researcher will conduct one-on-one interviews with elementary school teachers from grades 3,4, and 5. As the participant you will be interviewed one or more times and the initial interview will last approximately 60-90-minutes. All of the data collected in the interview process will be utilized for research purposes. The information collected in the interview will allow the researcher to investigate the post NCLB elementary classroom and how teachers perceive the changes as impacting test anxiety. The interview will be audio-recorded_____(initial) and transcribed. Interviews will take place in a location that is conducive to focused conversation on your school campus that is acceptable to you, as the participant, and to the interviewer.

After you review the informed consent form, you will be given the opportunity to ask questions regarding its meaning. If you desire, a second interview time can be scheduled so that you can provide more reflections of your own experiences concerning your experiences. The researcher will provide you with a copy of the informed consent form and the researcher will retain a copy. You will have the opportunity to read the transcription and analysis of the interview or interviews to clarify, accept, or reject the results.

III. Risks

There should be minimal risks to you from participating in this study. The researcher will ask you to describe your experiences with the high stakes testing focus in classrooms and how it affects test anxiety and will monitor your reactions for any signs of discomfort related to the

discussion. You will have the right to stop the interview or line of questioning at any point without penalty.

IV. Benefits

The possible benefits of participating in this study may include the opportunity to reflect upon your own experiences and/or to clarify and define specific stories. No promise or guarantee of benefits is made to encourage participation. Educators may benefit from the information gathered as a result of the study to assist them in effective classroom practice and meeting performance standards while minimizing classroom factors contributing to test anxiety.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality. Only the researcher will know the identity of each participant. Pseudonyms will be used and every effort will be made not to reveal any identifying characteristics in this study.

Tapes of interviews, transcription of interviews, interview notes and reflexive journal entries will be stored in a secure location. The researcher will transcribe the interviews. Only the researcher and her advisor will have access to the tapes and transcription of interviews. The audiotapes will be destroyed once the research has been completed and results disseminated. It should be noted that despite every effort to preserve confidentiality, it may be compromised. While all possible care will be taken to protect the identity of the interviewees, it may be possible for someone with knowledge of the organization to deduce an interviewee's identity.

The researcher will be compelled to break confidentiality if child abuse is known or strongly suspected or if the participant is considered to be a threat to himself or herself, or others.

VI. Compensation

As a participant, you will receive no compensation for participating in this study.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

As a participant, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You are free to refuse to answer any questions. There may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that you, as the participant, should not continue to be involved in the study.

VIII. Approval of Research

IRB Approval Date and Expiration Date:

Approval Date: February 6, 2006

Expiration Date: February 5, 2007

IX. Subject's Permission

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I confirm that I am currently an elementary teacher in grades 3-5. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

_____   _____

Subject Signature   Date

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

Elizabeth Heath   elheath@vt.edu   (276)755-4825

Faculty Advisor E-mail/Telephone:

Dr. Penny Burge   burge@vt.edu   (540)231-9730

Departmental Reviewer/Department Head E-mail/Telephone:

Dr. Jan Nespor   nespor@vt.edu   (540)231-8327

Chair, IRB E-mail/Telephone:

Dr. David M. Moore   moored@vt.edu   (540)231-4991

Office of Research and Compliance
Research & Graduate Studies

Subjects must be given a complete copy (or duplicate original) of the signed Informed Consent.

APPENDIX E

Cover Letter to Accompany Transcript and Narrative Analysis for Member Check

Dear (Participant's Name),

Here are the transcript and analysis narrative from your interview. Please read through the transcript and my analysis narrative. If there are changes that you wish to make or comments you wish to add, you may write on the transcript and analysis to make notes. Please contact me if you want to set a time to get together to discuss these changes or to record the additional comments you wish to add, or you may simply attach other pages with the notes. You can email me at elheath@vt.edu, or you can call me at (276) 733-4230. If there are no changes that you wish to make to the transcript or the analysis narrative, you may initial the front pages and mail them back to me in the enclosed self-addressed and stamped envelope. Please contact me or return the transcript and analysis narrative within a week of your receipt of these documents to facilitate the progress of the study.

Thank you again for your participation in this study. I value highly your contribution to the body of knowledge concerning test anxiety and teacher empowerment.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Heath
Doctoral Candidate, VA Tech
41 Clayton Place
Cana, Virginia 24317
Home Phone: (276) 755-4825
Cell Phone: (276) 733-4230

APPENDIX F
IRB Approval Notification Letter

Virginia Tech
VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board

Dr. David M. Moore
IRB (Human Subjects) Chair
Assistant Vice President for Research Compliance
1880 Pratt Drive, Suite 2006(0497), Blacksburg, VA 24061
Office: 540/231-4991; FAX: 540/231-0959
email: moored@vt.edu

DATE: February 6, 2006

MEMORANDUM

TO: Penny L. Burge ELPS
            Elizabeth Heath

FROM: David Moore

SUBJECT: **IRB Expedited Approval:** "Teacher Perceptions of Post No Child Left Behind
            (2002) Elementary School Culture and Its Impact on Test Anxiety" IRB # 05-743

This memo is regarding the above-mentioned protocol. The proposed research is eligible for
expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR
56.110. As Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval to the
study for a period of 12 months, effective February 6, 2006.

Virginia Tech has an approved Federal Wide Assurance (FWA00000572, exp. 7/20/07) on file
with OHRP, and its IRB Registration Number is IRB00000667.

cc: File
    Department Reviewer: Jan K. Nespor

VITA

I am currently in my twenty-fourth year in public education. My teaching experience has included working with elementary and middle school aged students in rural and urban public school systems. In my career I have worked as a teacher in self-contained, resource, and inclusion settings, and I have served two years as an elementary school assistant principal. It has been my privilege to work with students of minority and ESL backgrounds and with SPH, LD, ED, EMD, OHI, ADHD, ADD and students with comorbid disorders. I hold endorsement in special, elementary, and middle school education and K-12 Public School Administration in both Virginia and North Carolina. During my tenure as a teacher and administrator, I have experience with diagnostic and curriculum-based assessment, teaching methods and strategies, behavior supports strategies, and social skills development. High expectations for special education students has been my rule, and I have had success in helping these students meet standardized testing requirements under Literacy Passport Test, SOL testing, and North Carolina End-of Grade testing.